

Kim Ward
University of Exeter

***Transforming Neighbourhoods: An Exploration of the Neighbourhood
Management Process in Ilfracombe, Devon.***

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Abstract

The neighbourhood became one of the key sites for urban policy development during the previous New Labour government, and Neighbourhood Management Pathfinders were amongst their final strategies to combat “*the most difficult problems faced by deprived neighbourhoods*” (SEU 2000:5). This thesis explores the process of neighbourhood management in the coastal town of Ilfracombe, Devon. Ilfracombe features the characteristics of decline found in a number of coastal towns across the country, and suffers from high levels of deprivation (House of Commons Report 2006). Consequently, the neighbourhood management pathfinder ‘Transform’ was deployed in Ilfracombe in an attempt to address high deprivation. This thesis uses empirical findings collected through interviews and focus groups to examine the process of ‘Transform’, from its conception to its practical operation. It specifically considers the ‘voices’ of residents whose opinions and experiences, as targets of neighbourhood intervention are not always sufficiently documented within policy narratives. Consequently, the thesis unravels the process of neighbourhood management through findings generated by qualitative research ‘on the ground’. These are then examined through the lens of governmentality, allowing the methods, practice and outcomes of government, to be unpacked through a presentation of my empirical findings (Foucault 1991). These examinations take a particular interest in notions of community engagement and participation, partnership working, and the process of social exclusion. Here, partnership is demonstrated to be a tentative and fragile process underlined by local histories and differing temporal frameworks for action. But, this research also demonstrates that joint working can be improved through neighbourhood management which widens routes of communication to officers ‘on the ground’. However, what this thesis hopes to demonstrate most strongly is the continuing depth of problems felt by residents in Ilfracombe and that the process of ‘inclusion’ through paid work and ‘active’ citizenship, underlined in Labour’s neighbourhood renewal strategies, is not tackling some of the main problems of ‘deprived’ neighbourhoods, as experienced by the residents themselves.

“When we came into office, we inherited a country where hundreds of neighbourhoods were scarred by unemployment, educational failure and crime. They had become progressively more cut off from the prosperity and opportunities that most of us take for granted. Communities were breaking down. Public services were failing. People had started to lose hope. That’s why I asked the Social Exclusion Unit to work on developing a new and integrated approach to reversing this decline.”

(Tony Blair SEU 2001:5)

“In a monoculture, in particular in seaside areas and coastal areas, they [the white working class] don’t have the energy- they haven’t come from a culture where they’ve got to work, they think there’s a more limited range of things they can aspire to. You have to open their minds that they can go to the city that they can go abroad. You can’t turn around a school without turning around a community”

Liz Sidwell, Schools Commissioner (Vasagar 2011)

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