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Rethinking home

Engaging transient and new
communities in Big Local

Written by Graeme Fancourt and Richard Usher
Supported by Helen Garforth and Marilyn Taylor

Local Trust

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Photos

Cover, Glen Stoker.

Page 6, Benjamin Nwaneampeh

Page 13, Zute Lightfoot

Page 17, Andrew Aitchison



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Introduction

Just Ideas worked with Local Trust and a range of Big Local areas between January and March 2019 on this research into the experience of, and potential for, Big Local areas to engage with 'new' or transient groups or communities in their areas. The research responds to a need expressed to Local Trust by Big Local areas, and in national research such as *The Future for Communities: Perspectives on Power* (2018). The IPPR¹, Baring Foundation², and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation³ have identified transience and 'churn' as major challenges to community development, placing pressures on social cohesion.

Defining 'new' and 'transient':

Communities that are 'new' or 'transient' refer to an extremely diverse breadth of people, and often the same factors influence both types of community. Whilst some people are in a position to choose a transient lifestyle (such as students), or choose to move into a new area (because they can afford to buy into the local housing), many of the people we met in Big Local areas did not have that level of choice, as we explore in section 4. Often people were transient because of factors outside of their control and influence: insecure housing and finances, seasonal work, migration, dispersal and decanting

due to gentrification or regeneration, or being raised within travelling communities. Transient and new communities are defined by their experience of moving or staying in one place, rather than by their intention, as such freedom to choose is often out of their control. Transient communities, then, can simply be said to be people and groups who move in and out of particular areas, whereas new communities are those who move in and stay within a particular place. Such new communities might exist because of a new housing estate, because they have been (re-) housed from elsewhere, or as part of an ex-offender, homelessness, or

^[1] Tim Finch and Phoebe Griffith, <http://www.ippr.org/juncture/settling-the-migration-debate>, October 2014
Alice Sachrajda and Phoebe Griffith, https://www.ippr.org/files/publications/pdf/shared-ground_Oct2014.pdf, October 2014
Phoebe Griffith and Julia Halej, https://www.ippr.org/files/publications/pdf/trajectory-and-transience_Nov2015.pdf, November 2015

^[2] Marilyn Taylor & Mandy Wilson, <https://baringfoundation.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/Changing-communities.pdf>, The Baring Foundation, June 2015

^[3] Mary Hickman, Helen Crowley and Nick Mai, <https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/immigration-and-social-cohesion-uk>, July 2008

refugee scheme. While the length of time a person or community has been resident in a particular area is important, perceptions of newness do not necessarily reflect length of residence. We of course need to be aware that the label 'transient' covers a variety of different populations, and that the 'settled' community is unlikely to be a homogenous group.

The research questions

Five questions and a hypothesis were identified to deepen our understanding of this issue. The hypothesis suggests that methods that can successfully engage transient and new communities may be broadly the same as standard community engagement and development activities (as used and experienced in Big Local areas). Alongside exploring this hypothesis, we asked these five, overarching research questions:

1. What do Big Local partnerships know about transient/new groups in their area and how do they find out?
2. How do partnerships engage with transient/new groups?
3. What does good engagement of transient/new communities look like, and does that differ from engagement with other communities?
4. What is the potential to try new and different models of engagement?
5. Are there quick ways to engage new communities?

Our approach:

We reviewed current literature and research that explore these issues. This helped shape the questions we used to engage people we interviewed and worked with in the Big Local areas. In conversation with Local Trust, three Big Local areas were selected for fieldwork visits, based on the type and level of transient and new communities present in those places, as well as on the Big Local partnerships' availability to participate in the research. This was a short, scoping study with an emphasis on building the capacity of the study areas, so each area had both a visit and a follow-up workshop to explore its relationship with new and or transient communities. We also spoke with Big Local reps or workers from eleven other Big Local areas with experience of transient or new communities. We analysed the interviews and discussions with partnerships for common and uncommon themes, and then engaged more widely in literature on this subject. The following report draws on all these conversations and explorations.

Findings

What we found in relation to how new and transient communities are perceived

We heard from the areas that the research engaged with that new and transient communities are perceived locally both as a positive (a potential new resource to engage with; bringing energy; benefitting the local economy) and in more negative or challenging ways. We heard examples of 'transient' or 'other' communities being seen to cause problems for the settled/ existing community as they move through or take up residence—increased litter, anti-social behaviour, school pupil turnover, pressures on parking and other services were all mentioned as coming from houses of multiple occupation. We heard that these communities were difficult to engage with and less interested in working with the wider or 'settled' community. It was reported in one of the study areas that particularly Eastern European populations are *'very community minded, but very much focused on their own community, and too busy holding down jobs'*.

More widely, transience may be seen as a challenge for communities in reconciling the effects of globalisation (the movement of people) with an intangible sense of loss of identity, often with the former being blamed for the latter. These factors are made all the more intense in a climate of austerity and poverty, often with people given platforms on which to demonise 'the poor' and 'the migrant'. International transient communities, or those perceived

as 'the other', all too easily become the manifestation of a context in which local industry, economy, and stability has been lost. Moreover, where an area is struggling with poverty and lack of resources, and that area is somewhere needy new communities are moved to, we heard people talk of feeling their area was becoming a 'dumping ground'.

Experience of transient and new communities in study areas

Our fieldwork focused on partnerships in three Big Local areas: central urban, coastal and post-industrial. Two of them are urban estates, and one is part of a coastal town. Each of the areas is in a different part of the country. This section summarises these areas' experience of engaging with new and transient communities, as well as providing some background about each area.

The central urban area

One of the areas is in the centre of a town and is made up of two housing estates separated by a busy dual carriageway. The two estates share a small parade of shops. One part of the area is a relatively settled estate with a significant Eastern European population. The partnership finds it challenging to engage with the population of this area—for example, although the Polish community is perceived as 'community minded', this also manifests as being mainly within the Polish community itself. There is also

a large student population, sometimes perceived by the wider settled community as a 'problem'—due to multi-occupancy residences and anti-social behaviour.

Transience in the area was often related to 'success': when people buy housing (some as first-time buyers) because of the lower prices in the area, before then moving on when they can afford to live elsewhere. In addition, several people associated with the Big Local have been supported to set up initiatives and businesses which have taken off, and they have moved out of the area or become too busy to engage on a regular basis.

The partnership runs a regular 'Big Social' event with various activities and food, which brings a broad cross-section of people together and enables them to feed in new ideas and priorities for the area (such as improvements and greater use of park areas). The partnership sees local students as an asset and is looking at new ways to engage them in Big Local. Having a local base in the estate has been a positive change, giving the partnership and others in the Big Local community a place in which to gather, and from which to reach out.

The coastal area

This Big Local area is in the heart of a coastal town. The area has a great deal in common with other coastal communities in experiencing a high amount of employment that is seasonal and connected with tourism (and mostly low-paid roles). Housing-rent levels are also low, and so the area is seen as an 'arrival pad' for new migrants, who may then move on once established. There is also a large number of multiple-occupancy houses. Although university students are not a large part of the local population, some have engaged with Big Local-supported

activities, such as painting a mural in the Seaside Community Hub—which also provides a physical base for activities and enables passers-by to see what is going on.

There is a range of communities identified as new or transient: Eastern European communities are mostly Polish, Ukrainian and Latvian, alongside Russian and other longer-standing migrant communities (with some flux), such as Portuguese and Chinese populations. As is common and natural in areas of high transience, there are over 30 languages spoken in the primary school in the area.

Language is a barrier to adults to involvement in Big Local activities—though English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) courses are provided from the Seaside Community Hub. Children of new/transient communities tend to join in with Big Local-supported play activities in the local park, which has proved a good way to then engage their parents. The partnership offers community chest funding of up to £3,000 to community groups—with applications for funding coming from a range of different communities. The partnership is aware that, in common with most Big Local areas, it uses a traditional board and executive structure which may make it more challenging for new people to engage. It is keen to explore how to overcome that challenge.

The post-industrial area

This Big Local area is in a post-industrial town. It was originally developed to accommodate the new industries growing along the banks of the river, and is made up of a mix of smaller terraced houses and some larger properties. The area has a very strong identity distinct from the town, although only a mile and a half from the town centre. It has a high street with

independent shops, and a twice-weekly market. Big Local benefits from having a physical identity in the area—a shop front facing both the high street and the market place.

There are East European and Roma traveller communities who come to the area seasonally, and asylum seekers from various part of the world, with, currently, a high number from African nations. It is also home to a high number of ex-offenders, and first-time buyers who purchase on a low-price, new-build estate. The high number of private landlords in this area, offering cheap housing through HMOs, adds to churn in the area. There is a great deal that these diverse communities have in common—low income, health issues, loneliness and lack of personal support.

The partnership is aware that it does not reflect the diversity of the area, but sees opportunity in the successful, large social events (such as a recent pancake party), which draw participation from a diverse range of communities, as a means of building the relationships that will result in a change of representation. There are also challenges for the future in building a community where young people see their

future: we heard that 60% of young people in the area do not see their future there.

Values, approaches and structures that make a difference to engaging with transient communities

This section summarises what we heard in interviews and through work in the focus areas about what facilitates and encourages engagement with transient communities:

Making Big Local visible and accessible

- Making **events and activities attractive and freely accessible (or affordable)** enables access to Big Local. This is described in two of the case studies above. Another Big Local gave a further example – see box below.
- Having a **hub/community centre that is 'home' to many**, as we saw in all three study areas, helps to maintain the profile of the Big Local and awareness in the minds of local people. Access to advice or other services provided in a hub may draw people in and be a potential basis for wider engagement.



- **ESOL classes** meet the immediate need of helping to overcome language barriers and may enable connections with a specific group of people. For example, at one Big Local area, the English classes are a part of the women's diaspora group which builds relationships, trust, and confidence between women of different nationalities. The positive engagement comes when ESOL classes move from the transactional (people getting a service from Big Local) to the relational and developmental (people moving on to being engaged in other ways, longer-term, for the benefit of both the individuals and the Big Local community).
- **Community arts and using social media**—this can take many forms. In a Big Local area with a large refugee community they are piloting an Instagram project where: *'We're asking what people like and what they miss from where they were before... allowing [people] to connect with each other—it's a rolling portrait, to document the people who leave as well.'*
- **Children's activities and play** in park areas leads to contact with their wider families. We saw evidence of this in the coastal-study area, and heard in another coastal area that *'kids are more likely to come to events, as parents are reluctant and language is a barrier'*. This was also evident in another Big Local area, where a day of children's workshops on carving pumpkins led to an all-age, evening procession, with music and impromptu singing from the Roma community.

Building relationships and partnerships

The approaches summarised below are all about 'getting out': putting energy into relationships with people from communities not connected with Big Local, and seeking to form partnerships with groups from other communities and with groups that work with other communities. This is exemplified in the way one Big Local area engages with the Roma traveller community on the council-provided site, providing a signposting handbook; children's workers and health and education officers; fast-track access to GP and dental services; and help with tax and identity documents. Other examples include:

- **Engaging with good housing associations/landlords** as a means of understanding who 'new' communities are and potentially working with them. This happens in one of the study areas with a particular housing association that shares office space with the Big Local partnership.
- **Engaging with faith communities** and being a connection point between faith communities is important, as we heard from two areas. However, there is an uncertainty in the partnerships as to how to engage well with and between faith communities, and a fear of excluding some communities by engaging with others, or by using spaces seen as 'belonging' to a particular faith.⁴
- **Making the most of the business community** can increase reach. One Big Local has invested in ESOL classes and has had success recently in widening the communities from which people

^[4] This is echoed in the Local Trust/IVAR report: Marilyn Taylor and Leila Baker, <https://www.ivar.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/The-Future-For-Communities-Perspectives-on-power.pdf>, pp. 27-30

attend, which it put down to engaging with and advertising through local businesses run by people of different nationalities. People coming to ESOL classes are now becoming volunteers in other local initiatives. One area was seeing local business as an opportunity for wider engagement, as many are run by migrant community members and '*businesses tend to stay put*' in an area that is perceived as improving. When businesses understand the benefits that Big Local are bringing to an area, making it more attractive, they see the link with increased footfall and can become strong allies.

- **Partnerships with other community and social groups** can connect local networks. This can be seen in a Big Local that partners with a project working with migrant communities, and another working with the Roma community in the area.
- **Coming together around common issues**, be that something internal to the area (such as dog poo) or a global challenge such as climate change, can be a powerful tool for creating alliances and joint working across perceived boundaries.

Challenging stereotypes and barriers

Some partnerships have focused on making sure they have knowledge of what is happening in their area (e.g. occupancy of housing) so as to challenge views that may not be based on reality:

- **Myth busting**, such as two Big Local partnerships who work with their local authorities in a way that 'tackles the rumour mill'. One of them does this by publishing the reality of who lives in local housing stock (see vignette in the 'What works' box).
- **Investing in networking roles** with workers and people holding positions on the partnership can help get behind perceptions and give more time to getting to know what makes people tick, what might prevent engagement, and how to share that understanding. As was pointed out in one of the study areas: '*We just need to understand where people are coming from – realise that everyone has a barrier – it's realising why they've got that barrier that's important.*'

What works: challenging stereotypes and assumptions

One of the challenges of a high degree of transience in an area of privately rented and local-authority/housing- association housing is the belief, from non/less-transient communities, that transient communities have more and easier access to the housing stock. One Big Local, driven by one of its core values to look out for one another, was concerned about the impact this would have on community development. It worked with the local authority to collate and then communicate the statistics to demonstrate exactly who was living in the local-authority and housing-association housing. This has proved that transient communities are in the minority in that housing stock. The approach has been so successful in challenging myths and narratives that the Big Local partnership now repeats it annually.

Being responsive

These points all relate to having the ability to respond positively, to create opportunities to engage or meet the needs of new and transient communities. This may require either skills that are represented within the partnership itself, or sparky and resilient workers with community-development skills:

- **Moving quickly** to lead on 'instant' community events that draw people together (e.g., pancake parties or an Instagram gallery)
- **Moving slowly** to build on events, with specific projects designed to create deeper relationships between people of different communities
- **Working separately and specifically with new and transient groups**, as can be seen in the vignette below, as well as in another area where the partnership has been developed to intentionally reflect the diversity of the local area

What works: being responsive

One Big Local has worked in partnership with its Locally Trusted Organisation (LTO), to explore how to improve the integration of the Roma community with the other communities of the area. While the area is in a town well used to transience, the Roma community is still relatively private, and experiences discrimination from some in the area. The work towards integration began by responding to the Roma community's need for a place to meet, and made the community hub available exclusively to them on a Tuesday evening. They were given the space to use the venue as they wanted, and the local community worker began to build relationships and trust with people in the Roma community.

One of the other pressing needs that had been identified was to help the Roma community think about healthier eating options and practices. With this in mind, Big Local started a separate, healthy-eating club for the Big Local area, to take place in the community hub immediately before the Roma community used the space. This enabled the club to be visible, without being perceived as patronising or authoritarian, and relationships began to be formed. The Roma community accepted the offer of a member of staff running the healthy-eating club during their slot. The club was successful, and the crossover between the two groups was so significant that the two groups have now merged, with members of the Roma community meeting weekly with people from other communities from the Big Local area.

Living the partnership's values

Partnerships commonly identify diversity as a value they want to champion in their area through Big Local. Engaging with transient communities is part of 'living' this value:

- **Outward-looking values** that are reflected in structures, behaviours, and practices of the partnership, such as 'looking out for one another'.
- **Adapting partnership structures and meetings** to make them more easily accessible to a more representative

group of people from the local area—and realising that being open to everyone is not enough on its own. For example, during the fieldwork in one study area, a member of the partnership suggested that they might try having an 'un-meeting'—one that adopts more open styles of discussion, or moves around, or has less formal constraints of a traditional board meeting. Another study area's 'Big Social' is an example of where parallel, less formal structures engage a wider range of residents than the partnership meetings themselves.

What works: partnership structures and meetings

Accessing the Big Local partnership has its own barriers if a person is transient. Often, these are classic, voluntary-organisation structures, with a democratically elected board and formal meetings. One Big Local Partnership has opted for as flat a structure as is possible, with a chair that is regularly changing and whose role it is to ensure everyone has an equal voice. Furthermore, any person who turns up at the meeting has the right to speak and be heard, and the only factor that would exclude someone is their own behaviour. It is believed to be a successful way of taking account of the high level of transience in the area, and of empowering people who have a culture of being 'done to'.

'We try to be organic in our approach, rather than copying the behaviour of more traditional, official, middle-class voluntary groups. Here, if you live in the area, and you want to come along, you won't be different to anyone else. The role of chair moves between people (a transient chair!) whose role it is to make space for everyone to have an equal voice and share responsibility. The only thing that inhibits people engaging is their own behaviour. It's a structure that fits where we are, especially with the high level of transience in this area.'

Exploring the research questions

In this section we summarise what we have found out in relation to each of the core research questions.

What do Big Local areas know about transient/new groups in their area and how do they find out?

There are varying levels of knowledge across the Big Local areas, which are dependent on:

- the partnership's (board or management group) make-up, attitude, energy, creativity and understanding of purpose and role;
- any employed workers: the scope of their roles, how proactive these individuals are and their networking abilities;
- the level of churn in the area: the higher the churn, the more difficult it is to engage and get to know new communities;
- the use of local data (including Local Insight) to find out about who is in the area, and also to challenge assumptions about who lives in the area, and how.

How do partnerships engage with transient/new groups?

The level of engagement appears to be dependent upon:

- the structure of the partnership: how open it is to widening participation, how

easy it is to access this structure and be heard, and what implicit cultural norms are being communicated through these bureaucratic structures;

- the nature of the meetings: are they formal and for members only, or open to all?
- the processes by which events and projects are identified: is the board/worker designing something they themselves would attend, or something to engage a broader audience; or are they thinking through how to target people not engaging already?
- whether they have a shared space—either a hub or another community space—that all can see as 'home' and a base for activities?
- and, perhaps most importantly, on the history of transience in that area. For places whose historic identity is based on transience, engagement appears to be more natural and with less opposition than in areas with less of a history of transience. It is worth noting, however, that while communities with a history of transience clearly have enough people to form an alliance of those willing to engage transient groups, there is still local resistance to such engagement. Economic factors may have more weight than an historic, transient identity.

What does good engagement of transient/new communities look like, and does that differ from engagement with other communities?

Community engagement and development are different in areas with transience. The aim is not necessarily to help form a new, settled community, a community of 'here', but rather to help form a community of 'now', enabling the various communities of different levels of transience to engage with one another. This way of thinking about transience may be appropriate in looking to transient communities as assets rather than challenges, and may for some Big Local areas require a mindset shift and culture change.

It is relatively straightforward to organise a broad community event that gives visibility to different groups in the community, but it takes a particular mindset and skill to move from events to more specific projects that enable deeper relationships. **Groups who have been successful in engaging transient/new communities have taken risks and had a willingness to fail and learn.** Those who were more successful at this kind of engagement were less concerned with the numbers attending their events, and more concerned about the difference they were making. Big events may look impressive, and are certainly a good place to start, but it is in the focussed and small projects that deeper inter-community relationships are built. The following principles draw on what we heard and learnt:

- Start small
- Start slow
- Be connected (with non-Big Local groups,

including faith communities)

- Be relational (with members of the local area)
- Be aware of your drivers/motivations (especially of the role nostalgia can play)
- Be willing to fail and learn
- Be willing to listen and adapt
- Be creative

What is the potential to try new and different models of engagement?

More than just potential, there is a real need for new models of community engagement to be developed. The nature of transient and new communities today is different to those encountered first-hand within living memory. This calls for a careful understanding of what is driving the different kinds of communities to be transient, or seek a new place in which to settle, before then asking what 'community' might look like in such a setting, and how such a 'community' might be developed. This is explored in more detail in the next section.

Are there quick ways to engage new communities?

Big events, welcome packs posted through doors clearly signposting local services, translation of literature into relevant languages, and social media engagement are all necessary in connecting with new communities. However, they are only effective when backed up by a values-driven, participative attempt to be a broker between various communities to help them see



one another as equally resident. The answer, therefore, if we are talking about meaningful, mutually beneficial, longer-term engagement, is probably no.

Most aspects of engagement and community development activities will be useful for Big Local areas working with transient and new communities. However, our evidence suggests that, on their own, such methods are not sufficient. If partnerships consider community development and engagement as being about creating settlers out of transient communities—i.e., engagement leading to people staying and getting involved—this might be seen to deepen the sense of difference and even division between those who ‘belong’ in an area, and those who do not. There are increasing numbers of transient communities in the twenty-first century who are less able to settle

because of forces beyond their influence. Successful community development in areas experiencing transience might focus on creating a community of ‘now’ as much as creating a community of ‘here’. This is not to say that locality is unimportant, but that when people are unable to put down roots, in places where others may be strongly rooted, it might be more important to facilitate and create links: relationships that connect those who are physically rooted in the place, and those who are not and may never be. Community development that includes growing the confidence, capability to contribute, and sense of identity of individuals within communities will enable people who move on to take that with them, and sometimes to maintain relationships, continuing to interact with and benefit the communities they have ‘left’.

Emerging questions from the research

Purpose of engagement: Big Local areas seek to engage with transient and new communities, considering perceptions of transient communities as both a positive (asset) and negative (challenge, problem). There is, implied in the research questions, and in the inclusive remit of Big Local, an assumption that to engage with new and transient communities is 'a good thing'. This raises some significant questions. When is transience a problem? And when is it a community problem? What is the point of transient communities engaging with the settled population? Do they want or need an identity with place, and is local place the best thing to focus on when working with transient communities? In one of the study areas we heard discussions about whether engagement is to ameliorate the impact of newness or transience, or whether through engagement newness/transience is reduced. Is it about seeing transient communities as an asset/something to value on a short-term basis, or is it that good engagement equals less transience—i.e., the community of 'now'? In another area, the significant transient population of students was a potential asset, bringing energy, ideas and resources, although only temporarily.

Taylor and Wilson (2015) outline the ways external **funding** can enable local groups to work more creatively in areas of transience, and how resourcing can address many of the issues that arise in such places. Such funding ranges from micro-grants to small community groups, to larger grants that encourage links to be made between established local groups and newer, transient communities.⁵ In addition, while Big Local areas are working on ways of engaging new and

transient communities creatively, they could also be using their community voice to challenge policies and practices that lead to issues emerging from transience. This could include highlighting the benefits of additional resources being attached to settlement of people in an area.

There is a question of how **language** can shape as well as reflect the way people think of others. For example, speaking of 'the local community' rather than 'local communities' draws distinctions between transient, new, and less- or non-transient. Might it also reveal an assumption that there is a homogenous, settled community to whom the place belongs, and that the purpose of community development is to enable people to settle?

Social media appears to be a key way in which transient and new groups connect with where they have moved from; and some groups are beginning use that creatively. How much more could this be used by Big Local groups, not only as a means of engagement with new and transient communities, but also to continue to build relationships with people who move on?

Engaging with faith communities can be an important step in engaging transient communities from other parts of the world. How might Big Local partnerships be resourced in order to be more confident in engaging with faith communities, and even to be brokers of relationships between the different faith groups?

New communities are often communities with **greater economic freedoms**, who have chosen to live or move through a particular place. Might new communities also provide different skills and outlooks that can be of benefit in engaging transient communities in the same locality?

^[5] <https://baringfoundation.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/Changing-communities.pdf>, pp. 14-17

Transience, new communities and community development

The focus of place-based community development is often the long-term development of a specific area. An element of this is that place-based community development seeks to enable the integration of those people and communities who have more recently arrived in an area to settle alongside those who are already resident. This is undoubtedly a proper and good aim of community development, but it creates challenges for place-based development where there are high levels of transience.

The model is not easily adapted to engage with communities who are seen to be passing through; and such groups can often be seen as a problem by a model whose aim is to enable people to settle. In such circumstances, transient groups and people can be seen as unsettled and unsettling. They are often too difficult to engage as they are not 'here' for long enough, and so beyond the limits of place-based engagement and community-development activities. This challenge was articulated by a number of the Big Local areas we spoke to—including examples where people have been temporarily moved into houses on an estate preparing for a large-scale redevelopment project, with others moving away as other areas are redeveloped.

The issue of choice: At the heart of a place-based community development that seeks to enable people and communities to settle, it is possible to observe an

assumption that people have a choice in where they live. Brower's (1996) description of 'choicefulness' is discussed in *Public Policy in the Community* (Taylor 2002): the notion that people feel they have a choice about where they live and that their neighbourhood would be chosen by others. Set against this is the powerlessness felt by people in areas where they do not have the choice of moving out and feel limited in cultivating community. In some of the areas, we looked at people who chose to move in to that area because it was cheap or for seasonal jobs, or chose to leave once they were successful. This may be a factor in creating tension and resentment between the communities where others do not feel able to choose. In one area we heard that 'people who remain can't escape, are left behind, and it is no wonder that there is tension between those that are stuck and those that come and go.'

A central aspect of transience and choicefulness is how such **choice is based on either security or freedom**.⁶ For those with enough economic freedom, living in a place is often the result of a choice that balances on a see-saw between the security of laying down roots on one side, and the freedom to change and move on the other. 'Settled' people and communities are thought to have chosen roots and stability, and 'transient' people and communities are thought to have chosen to make the most of the possibilities presented by a globalised world. This is sometimes the experience of people on Big Local partnerships whom we met, who left the Big Local area to live in a different part of the same town or city on this basis. However, we have observed that, for the resident communities of Big Local areas, such a choice often feels more limited, or even non-existent (for example as the result of a collapse in local house values or a perceived lack of opportunity). This has a significant impact on the see-saw model between security and freedom, as well as creating a tension for place-based community development to grapple with.

Choice is severely limited, or removed completely, by many political, economic, or social forces out of people's influence, whether that is related to job loss, Universal Credit, or the need to seek refuge from one's country. Such a loss of choice tips the see-saw balance between security and freedom too heavily in a particular direction. Those who may be perceived as having chosen security and rootedness, are actually 'stuck'. Those who could be seen as choosing freedom to move, are actually in free-fall. Both of these extremes were commonplace in the Big Local areas we visited. For example, one of the study

areas is a location into and out of which refugees are regularly bused, and in which some people speak of feeling trapped. In another Big Local area, 'a large part of transience is born out of no one wants to live here, with awful living conditions under unregulated landlords. The aspiration is to leave, and this is a shared experience of all kinds of people in this area.'

These differences are being exploited by various political groups, and a good example of this can be seen in David Goodhart's book *The Road to Somewhere* (2017). The book assumes choicefulness and suggests the 'settled majority' of the UK is often ignored in favour of the 'globalised elite' which lives anywhere. He paints a picture of two different tribes, the settled 'Somerwheres' and nomadic 'Anywheres'. The research we have carried out suggests this is not necessarily accurate and can be used to manipulate a kind of 'otherness'. With a slight refocus, place-based community development has the potential to be a significant counter to this growing politicisation of otherness, and Big Local groups can be key to enabling its delivery.

High levels of churn present different issues and fast-changing populations should not be treated merely as another new community. The lower level of choicefulness, over where and how long people remain in one location in areas where local communities are often stuck rather than settled, is a specific challenge. Parallel to a roots-based approach, **a relationships-based approach that enables transient and less/non-transient people and communities to develop local relationships that can be sustained**, once the local presence is broken by further moves, might be a way forward. In this approach, large events

^[5] This is based on Zygmunt Bauman's work in *Community: Seeking Safety in an Insecure World*, (2000), and *Identity: Conversations with Benedetto Vecchi*, (2004). Bauman assumes a degree of choicefulness in suggesting communities and identities are based on the balance between security and freedom.

and niche projects are intelligently and creatively planned to encourage people to develop relationships. Social media may then become an important tool, and communities caught in high levels of churn can establish, maintain and develop the kinds of relationships that contribute to community development.

This is not to detract from the ethical issues raised by housing stock increasingly owned by private landlords, the placement of

people with high needs without adequate support, and a rise in houses of multiple occupancy (HMOs). However, helping different communities in a local area to share their stories of lack of choice, but also of hope, may be a good foundation on which to build collaborations and campaigns to engage people in positions of significant power to change this situation for the better.



Concluding reflections and learning

This section outlines some reflections that may be useful to consider in supporting Big Local areas with their efforts to engage transient and new communities.

Exploring inhibitors and enablers for engaging transient communities within Local Trust and Big Local groups:

- Despite the focus of Big Local as a programme encouraging of risk-taking and learning from experience, or even 'failure', many local partnerships struggle with the idea of taking risks with money they see themselves as custodians of.
- Big Local groups need help to formulate a 'good enough' plan to begin engagement and find 'enough' people to form a group of the willing to engage locally
- Groups need to share more ways of relaxing or removing traditional partnership structures which can be difficult to get into for transient groups, without losing an appropriate level of accountability.
- Some Big Local groups struggle to see beyond themselves being custodians of an amount of money largely to fund pre-existing groups. How can they be encouraged to be more aware of the benefit of using that money to stimulate relationships, and as a vehicle for lasting culture change?

Building a culture of seeing all parts of the community as assets:

Moving towards a determination to see whole-community development of the 'here' (new less/non-transient communities) and the 'now' (transient communities), and a 'growth' mindset that is willing to fail/learn. We have identified a number of ways Big Local areas can work towards this in the things they do as part of their engagement activities:

- Communication
 - Clear, easy, instant, responsive, translated signposting
 - Effective social media—we heard requests for support and training in how to make the most of this in engagement work
 - Translation: translating language can be helpful; translating events and projects based on understanding of different communities is essential
- Connections
 - Deliberate networking and connecting with different groups, taking time, investing in relationships

- Making the most of events for networking
- Ensuring the partnership/board meetings and structures are accessible—are there thought-through and clear pathways for people to participate more deeply in the life of the Big Local?
- Connecting with different local faith communities, and taking time to learn about differences between the locally-represented faith groups
- Supporting links and opportunities to engage outside of the Big Local area as appropriate—linking people with city-wide groups, for example.
- Events
 - Giving visibility to different groups
 - Helping people see and be seen
 - Sharing food together
 - Encouraging multi-generational events
 - Partnering with other connected groups, e.g., schools
 - Checking whether events are taking place at the right time of year/month/week/day
- Projects
 - Niche projects that enable people from different groups to engage in shared experiences—cooking, gardening, exercise, litter-picking
- Partnerships and governance structures
 - Exploring alternative partnership structures that encourage participation in areas of churn
 - Seeking grants for businesses. While transient residents may often move on, the businesses they established are often constant and important for those communities. Grants to fund such businesses and to enable them to be community-development focussed, would be of great benefit.

Engaging transient and new communities in Big Local

Presenting the findings of research carried out in three different types of places – central urban, coastal and post-industrial – this report explores how Big Local areas engage with new and transient groups and communities. The communities include people who are recent immigrants, are transient due to housing tenure or those who are passing through because they are following seasonal work or are part of a gypsy or traveller community. It describes how choices around values, approaches and structures can make a difference to successful engagement by Big Local areas.

About Just Ideas

Just Ideas is an independent social consultancy. We believe in supporting people to realise their power and voice. We value connecting people so they can create positive change locally and globally.

Just Ideas supports communities, charities, public sector organisations and businesses working towards social and environmental justice.

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About Local Trust

Local Trust was established in 2012 to deliver Big Local, a unique programme that puts residents across the country in control of decisions about their own lives and neighbourhoods. Funded by a £200m endowment from the Big Lottery Fund – the largest ever single commitment of lottery funds – Big Local provides in excess of £1m of long-term funding over 10-15 years to each of 150 local communities, many of which face major social and economic challenges but have missed out on statutory and lottery funding in the past. www.localtrust.org.uk

Local Trust

CAN Mezzanine | 7-14 Great Dover Street | London SE1 4YR | General enquiries 020 3588 0565
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