Research Institute for Health and Social Change

"It keeps you active …..

sometimes it's hard":

Accounts of Community

Involvement

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INTRODUCTION: THE COMMUNITY ACTIVISTS' PROJECT

In 2005, community psychologists from Manchester Metropolitan University worked with a small group of activists mostly from North Manchester communities, to plan and carry out a research project exploring the experiences of community activists in urban areas. In addition to this report, a short film was edited from accounts people gave[1].

This report provides a detailed description of the "Community activists' project" and the communities where the participants on the project work. It also contains some reflections on possible practical implications of the information collected through the interviews.

The first chapter of the report describes the areas of Manchester where the participants on the project live and undertake their activities. It also gives a vision of the city. The city and it's areas are described in terms of deprivation. The chapter includes some comparisons between the different areas considered or between those areas and the city as a whole. The broader UK context is also used for comparison.

The following chapter includes an introduction to the "Community activists' project" and the participants. It also provides a description of the procedures used to carry on the project and the participants' accounts of their motivations, experiences of community work and their views of their communities. We added to those accounts some reflections on the general aspects of activism and some hypothesis on their relationships and linkages.

The last chapter suggests possible ways of encouraging a positive and active attitude towards community, based on participants' accounts.

At the end of the report there are bibliographic references and appendices. Appendices 1 and 2 report the two main versions of the interview. Appendix 3 contains the chart that was used for organising and summarising information collected through the interviews. Appendices 4 and 5 contain charts used for summarising the data from Collyhurst, Hulme and Newton Heath.

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[1] Further copies of the report and the DVD/Video are available from d.p.brown@mmu.ac.uk

Appendix 6 also contains the personal account of the principal community psychologist involved, Simona Raschini, a postgraduate intern at MMU from Italy.

CHAPTER 1
AN INTRODUCTION TO THE AREAS:
COLLYHURST, HULME, NEWTON HEATH

The participants in the "Community activists' project" live in various areas of Manchester. Most of them are members of a community settled in Newton Heath but two interviewees live in Collyhurst area and Anne is active in Hulme. A description of the characteristics of those areas may lead to a better understanding of the context of the activists' work.

In order to reach a more complete overview, we are going to examine the main aspects of those areas of Manchester. The principal sources of the data will be the "Index of Multiple Deprivation 2004" (SDRC, 2004) and the "Quality of Life Survey 2004" (Raiswell, 2004). The Index of Multiple Deprivation 2004 is a document edited by the Social Disadvantage Research Centre of the Department of Social Policy and Social Research of the University of Oxford. It takes into consideration national data of deprivation and examines various aspects of it. This document will give an objective account of Collyhurst, Hulme and Newton Heath in terms of deprivation. The Quality of Life Survey 2004 was administered to the residents of those areas in November - December 2004. The data contained the responses of 3,408 people living in different wards in Manchester. In order to evaluate the quality of life, it considers residents' opinions about their neighbourhood as well as their employment, health and wellbeing conditions. Because it is a self report survey, the data collected related more to people's perceptions rather than objective indices of wellbeing. This information gives a picture of the residents' perception of their living conditions.

Two different perspectives are available through the use of those two sources of data. One underlines objective deprivation and the other the subjective perception of the residents. Comparing the two different views may show points of contradiction and of agreement in terms of the categories of data considered, and may consequently highlight interesting issues.

Before going on, we should clarify that we are going to talk about the deprivation found in Collyhurst and Newton Heath in the same paragraph because both sources of data considered them to be parts of the same district.

1. 1 General information about the areas

1.1.1 Collyhurst

The name Collyhurst comes from the rural origins of the area. It means "wooded hill". After being a rural area for the first 8 centuries of the past millennium, in 1885 Collyhurst was incorporated into Manchester. During the mid-19th century the discovery of a coal mine in the hill granted the area an expanding and growing population. The houses for workers were built around the mine and Collyhurst became crowded. A chemical works started to develop in the same locality and it became a polluted area characterized by a low level of quality of life and life expectancy. During the 19th century, different kinds of farmers settled alongside the River Tib and the area became heavily industrialized. The resident population gradually and consistently declined during the post-Second World War years. The industrial sector crisis in the country affected Manchester greatly and in particular, the strongly industrialised areas of the North of the city. The spread of unemployment brought other relevant problems in those areas. The existing conditions in Collyhurst are tied to the conversion process the city has been involved in since the decline of the industrial sector. The transformation of the industrialised areas to favour a new and different development has been hard. Although Manchester has been engaged in this slow process for the past few decades, Collyhurst, like other areas in Northern Manchester, is still characterized by a high level of deprivation.

1.1.2 Hulme

The name comes from a Danish word meaning area surrounded by marsh. This is tied to the fact that the area is bordered by rivers. After being used as agricultural land for a number of centuries, Hulme was strongly affected during the industrial revolution and industrial sector development. The concentration of factories in Hulme favoured the expansion of the area with the increase of houses for workers. During the first half of the 19th century Hulme became over-crowded. The presence of factories, the consequent pollution and the quick urbanization process affected the living conditions. These got so difficult that in 1844 the Manchester Borough Council prohibited the construction of new houses in the area. Hulme was an example of the side effect of uncontrolled industrialization. After the Second World War, the crisis of the industrial sector in Manchester also affected Hulme. The area became characterized by a high level of unemployment and deprivation. In the post war years, slum clearance gave way to redevelopment which, itself, before long deteriorated. Since 1990, Hulme has been the subject of a further regeneration intervention with the construction of a shopping complex, medical centre and mixed housing. Hulme is close to the university area and its position determined the direction of the conversion process after the industrial crisis. Hulme is becoming a place for students to live and seek entertainment.
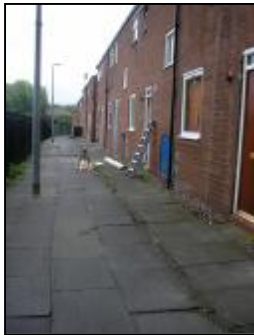
1.1.3 Newton Heath

The meaning of the name comes from old English, meaning: "the new town on the Heath". The area is bordered by brooks and rivers. Newton Heath was incorporated in the city of Manchester in 1890. The advent of the industrial revolution brought the area the

development of first a textile and then a soap industry. Other industry included manufacturing rope, engineering and glass making. Like in other areas of Manchester, the high concentration of industries and factories caused the fast building of low cost houses for workers in Newton Heath and led to confused urban development. During the 19th century the population quickly increased and the living conditions worsened.

During the same century Newton Heath saw the birth of Manchester United Football Club. The team was born from an initiative of a group of workers who started to play football on a local pitch. In the beginning, the team was known as "Newton Heath Football Club". However, after its admission to the Football League in 1902, the name was changed to "Manchester United Football Club".

Again, the crisis in the industrial sector caused the decline of the area and deprivation in Newton Heath. The concentration of factories had already produced deprivation in health and housing conditions. Those were exacerbated by the spread of unemployment as well as by the increase in poverty levels and crime that characterized the area after the industrial crisis. Newton Heath is still one of the more deprived areas in not only Manchester but also in relation to the national situation.

1.2 Manchester district's deprivation

Collyhurst, Hulme and Newton Heath are areas of Manchester. A brief introduction about the city may help to get a better understanding of them.

The "Index of Multiple Deprivation 2004" shows that Manchester is one of the most deprived districts in England. The position of Manchester in the deprivation's classification of the country depends on the aspect of deprivation that is considered. Different classifications underline different ways to consider the data. One of them underlines the general level of deprivation across the district (Average of Super Output Area ranks). Another one takes account of the presence of extreme conditions of deprivation in the district (Average of Super Output Area scores). A third one evidences the spread of high level of

deprivation on the district (Extent). The fourth way of presenting the results identifies the hot spots of deprivation within a district (Local concentration). Finally, the number of people experiencing income and employment deprivation in a district is showed in two distinct classifications. The comparison of Manchester with other districts in England shows that the city is highly deprived. It is at the highest positions of all classifications considered by the Index of Multiple Deprivation 2004 (between the second and the forth position). Manchester is one of the four most deprived districts of the country.

In order to assess the level of deprivation, the indices take into account seven domains. The income deprivation index is a measure of population experiencing low income in a region. The employment deprivation index assesses enforced exclusion from the world of work. There are then indices to measure health deprivation and disability as well as education, skills and training deprivation. The environmental and housing conditions are included in the evaluation through three other domains: barriers to housing and services domain, the living environment deprivation domain and the crime domain. The domains have different impacts on the definition of the general index of deprivation. The income and employment indices have the highest impacts. Those are followed by the measures of deprivation in terms of health conditions and educational level. The last three indices have the lowest impact for determining the general level of deprivation of the district.

Twenty one of the most deprived small areas (SOA[2]) in Manchester concentrate in the North and centre of the city. Those SOAs fall into the top 100 most deprived in England. Newton Heath and Collyhurst are included in Northern Manchester. They are actually part of the ward that the Index of Multiple Deprivation calls Miles Platting and Newton Heath. This ward is next to Ancoats and Clayton, Cheetham and Harpurhey wards. The latter one has the highest level of deprivation in the country in relation to different domains.

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[2] SOA: Super Output Area. The SOAs are small areas characterized by deprivation. The national survey takes into consideration the conditions of those small areas. The SOA is the smaller geographical unit considered by the Index of Multiple Deprivation 2004 in its evaluation. The ward is the area including various SOAs. The district includes various wards.

Hulme is placed in a different area of Manchester. The Hulme ward is next to the City Centre, Ardwick and Moss Side Wards. Hulme used to have high levels of deprivation and has been the subject of a regeneration process during the last 15 years.

The data contextualizes the following information about Newton Heath, Collyhurst and Hulme. It also enables the understanding that life in one of the worst areas of Manchester involves dealing with highly deprived conditions compared with the national situation.

1.3 Deprivation in Collyhurst and Newton Heath

Collyhurst and Newton Heath are in an area strongly characterized by the association of employment, income and health deprivation. The association between those aspects is probably natural as they tend to reinforce to each other. The close relation between unemployment and low income is obvious and the link between these conditions and unhealthy living styles has been demonstrated in social science literature for a long time. The Department of Public Health Sciences of the University of Edinburgh writes "*The link between deprivation and health has been clearly demonstrated in a number of studies, with population living in deprived areas exhibiting levels of mortality, particularly below the age of 65...*" (Cairstairs,1995). Again, the connections between particular causes of death and socio economic factors, as well as the effects of specific aspects of deprivation on people's health, have been determined. Some studies show that environmental deprivation favours the development of cardiovascular disease (Sundquist, et al, 1999; Finkelstein, et al., 2005). Others underline the gender difference in relation to the effects of deprived conditions on people's health. Deprivation increases the general susceptibility to poor health, as well as increases gender related health problems (Benach, et al., 2001).

The national indices show that the ward including Collyhurst and Newton Heath has 8 of the 50 most employment-deprived SOAs in Manchester (one of them is the third worse of the city). The data collected through the City Council's Quality of Life Survey 2004, also shows a high level of unemployment. In fact, it shows that about 50% of the consulted residents are not working at all. At the same

time, the percentage of residents who are looking for a job is low (2.9% of the sample). Other data may help to explain the above percentages: 21.3% of the sample is constituted by residents who are "wholly retired from the working world". This percentage is high if compared with the city as a whole.

Five of the 8 SOAs strongly affected by unemployment fall also into the worst 50 income deprived SOAs in Manchester. Again, 3 of those are in the top 1% of the most deprived SOAs in England.

Unemployment and poverty seem to have amplified negative effects on the health conditions of the residents. In fact, the second most health deprived SOA in the city falls into the wards of Collyhurst and Newton Heath. Another 7 SOAs in this area also demonstrated poor conditions for health. All of them are in the top 1% of most deprived areas of England.

The local Primary Care Trust produces documents that report on the health deprivation affecting North Manchester. They show the difference in life expectancy between residents of this region and Manchester's population as well as between the residents of Northern Manchester and English population. An average woman living in North Manchester can expect to live 10 years less than an average woman in England or Wales. The life expectancy of men living in the same area is 8 years shorter than the average length expected for men in England or Wales.

The data collected with the Quality of Life Survey 2004 give a different picture to the one described above. The survey asks the participants to evaluate their general health conditions during the year previous to the interview. From all the consulted residents 16.8% defines their health as "not good". The health state of the rest of the sample seems characterized by mainly positive assessments. Furthermore, 40.7% of the participants consider their health as "very good". The comparison between the national indices of health deprivation and the residents' perception of their health state shows a gap: residents seem to tend to perceive their health condition as "good" or "quite good" while national indices point to the presence of SOAs highly characterized by a low level of health. The comparison between the Quality of Life Survey 2004 data on the ward of Collyhurst and Newton Heath and those on the city as a whole shows a paradox

as the data seems to highlight that the perceived state of health of the people living in this ward is better than the average health conditions in the city. People living in this area do not seem to be aware of the health deprivation affecting the area where they live and their lives.

Collyhurst and Newton Heath are also characterized by high levels of deprivation on education, skills and training when compared to the rest of the city as well as with the country. Eight SOAs in the area of Collyhurst and Newton Heath are among the most deprived in the city and 3 of those fall into the top 1% of most deprived of England. Looking at the young residents of the ward may help to get a more complete picture. Some local Primary Care Trust documents give useful information about the young population living in Northern Manchester. The area is characterized by an average younger age of population compared with to that of the city as a whole. The young population of North Manchester seems to be affected by high levels of unemployment (particularly amongst 16 and 19 year olds). At the same time, if we take into consideration the data gathered in the Quality of Life Survey 2004, we will see that the percentage of participants who say that they attend school is really low. Local young people do not seem to be involved in school education or in work. Furthermore, the area is characterized by a high percentage of teenage pregnancies compared to the rest of the city.

The area including Newton Heath and Collyhurst is affected by a high level of crime. In fact, data relating to crimes show that 4 of the worst 50 SOAs in Manchester are in this area and 3 of those are also among the worst in England. The presence of a high level of crime influences the residents' feeling of safety. The residents' perception of crime issues affecting their neighbourhood contains contradictions. The Quality of Life Survey 2004' data shows that the majority of the sample considers their local area to be quite safe. At the same time, some aspects are perceived as very unsafe. For instance, walking in their neighbourhood after dark is considered unsafe by most of the residents consulted. In particular, 38.2% of them describe this situation as very unsafe, and 37.9% as slightly unsafe. Some of the issues of the area perceived as more problematic are connected to criminal and antisocial behaviours. For example, for half of the sample, vandalism is reported to be one of the main

problems in this area. Also, the presence of drunken people in the street is another of the main problems in the area for the residents.

The Index of Multiple Deprivation 2004 explores the domain of environmental deprivation through a series of sub-indices that take into account housing conditions, pollution levels and road safety. The document does not find a peak of environmental deprivation in the ward of Collyhurst and Newton Heath. The Quality of Life Survey 2004 does not consider all the aspects explored by the national report of deprivation. However, it investigates different characteristics of the environment that may influence the residents' wellbeing. The data collected shows that the majority of the participants in the survey are satisfied with the housing conditions (84%). Road safety seems to be affected by the presence of speeding cars and off road-motor cycles. Those are *perceived* as issues relating to the area by relevant percentages of the sample. At the same time, there seems to be a general satisfaction with safety to cross the street.

For a wide majority of the residents consulted (61.7%), the presence of rubbish and litter in the street ruins the environment. This turns out to be the main problem for the participants in the survey. At the same time, the residents that express satisfaction with the cleanliness of the neighbourhood (41.2%) are more numerous than those who claim to be dissatisfied with it (24.9%). The survey takes also into consideration the residents' perception of their opportunities to participate in the decisions affecting their area. The results prove to be interesting. The percentage of participants who find it possible to be involved in decision processes is higher than that of people who do not. At the same time, when the opinions of the residents on the influence of their involvement on decisions are investigated, the survey shows different answers. The number of those who think that residents' involvement may influence the decision-making procedure is lower than those who do not think it does. This means that some of the residents consider possible participation but lack confidence in its effectiveness to have any influence.

The examination of the last domain used by the national survey to evaluate the deprivation completes the picture of the area. The domain that relates to barriers to housing and services focuses on those internal and external

environmental conditions of houses that create difficulties in the everyday lives of the residents (for example over-crowded houses, roads and services or shops, etc.). Studies that show an association between ease of access to services and people's health underline the relevance of this domain. Those studies highlight that the lack of access to services affects, in particular, people's physical health (Eibner and Sturm, 2005). The Index of Multiple Deprivation 2004 shows the presence of two SOAs with a high level of barriers to housing and services in the area. The Quality of Life Survey 2004 shows that the majority of the residents consulted find it easy to access the services of their areas (76.8%). Only 5.8% describes it as difficult. Once again, there seems to be a difference between the picture drawn by the objective indices of deprivation and the subjective perceptions of the residents. The explanation of this difference may in part lie in the participants' interpretations of the questions. The aspect actually measured by this question of the Quality of Life Survey 2004 depends on the meaning given to the expression "access to the services" by the participants. The question may consequently measure a different aspect to that captured by the objective indices.

The Quality of Life Survey 2004 includes a question that invites the participants to express their general satisfaction with their neighbourhood. For the majority of the residents consulted, their neighbourhood is in general satisfying (62.8%).

Finally, we find interesting the answers to the questions that relate to the happiness of the participants in the survey with their general condition. In an economically poor area, characterized by lack of employment, high level of crime, low level of education and health conditions, people seem to be happy. To the question "Taking everything in account, would you say you are…" the majority of the sample reply to be happy (64%: "very happy" + "quite happy") and 13.1% give the opposite answers ("not very happy" + "not very happy at all"). Furthermore, while as many as 17.9% of the sample seems to be "very happy", only the 2.2% of them seem to be "not very happy at all".

1.4 Deprivation in Hulme

Hulme's history is characterized by a high level of deprivation followed by a regeneration process. The area has been regenerated during the last 15 years. The Index of Multiple Deprivation 2004 shows that the existing Hulme is still affected by peaks of deprivation relating to some of the domains considered in the survey. At the same time, the still highly problematic SOAs in Hulme seem to be circumscribed and less numerous than in other wards of the city (such as the above described ward of Newton Heath and Collyhurst). This could mean that the regeneration process has been having an effect, leading to favouring improvements and the decrease of deprivation in the area.

Comparing Hulme with other areas of the city, we can see that in this area the deprivation assumes different characteristics. One particular SOA in Hulme is characterized by extremely high levels of deprivation in various domains. This is one of the aspects that differentiate Hulme from the ward including Collyhurst and Newton Heath. In Collyhurst and Newton Heath, the deprivation seems to be more widespread and affects a higher number of SOAs than in Hulme. Each SOA is different from the others in terms of the extent of deprivation across different dimensions. In Hulme, there seems to be an island of deprivation. This same small area is characterized by peaks of deprivation in the main domains taken into consideration by the national survey. This particular SOA is affected by income, unemployment, health deprivation and a high level of crime. For each of those aspects, the gravity of deprivation is so high that the SOA is among the most deprived ones of Manchester.

In order to reach a better understanding of the deprivation in Hulme, we are going to explore each aspect considered by the Index of Multiple Deprivation 2004. It highlights that there is a SOA greatly income deprived in Hulme, as mentioned above.

The national report shows that 2 SOAs in Hulme are among the 50 most employment deprived SOAs in Manchester. One of them is the multi-deprived SOA considered above. The data gathered through the Quality of Life Survey 2004 shows that a wide majority of the sample is constituted by employed residents: 51% of the residents consulted are in full time employment. The

general Hulme situation relating to unemployment seems to be less problematic than in other areas of the city. For instance, the percentage of full time workers in the ward of Collyhurst and Newton Heath (37%) is lower than that of Hulme. The level of employment in Hulme also appears to be generally and relatively high compared to the rest of the city. In fact, 63.5% of Hulme's residents consulted through the survey have a job (full or part time) when the average percentage of employed people in Manchester is 51%. Thus deprivation only affects particular SOAs in Hulme.

The Index of Multiple deprivation shows the presence of 2 SOAs in Hulme that are very deprived on the domain that relates to health conditions and disability. One of those is the SOA affected by various forms of deprivation that we already mentioned above. Peaks of unhealthy conditions in Hulme appear to be less widespread than in the ward of Collyhurst and Newton Heath. This difference is not reflected in the residents' perception of their health state. In fact, the data collected through the Quality of Life Survey 2004 highlights that the percentages relating to the residents' evaluation of their health are similar in the 2 wards considered. Furthermore, the Hulme residents who reported unhealthy conditions during the previous year to the survey (18.9%), are more numerous than the participants giving the same evaluation in Collyhurst and Newton Heath (16.8%). Again, the residents of those two areas report a better health state than the average state reported by the population of city. In fact, the average percentage of Manchester's residents who described their health condition as "not good" is 20% higher than the percentages relating to the same answers from people living in the two considered areas. The objective indices detect aspects of people's health that seem to only partially influence their perception of their health. On the one hand, the Index of Multiple Deprivation 2004 highlights a high level of health deprivation in some areas. On the other hand, residents of those areas seem to give quite positive evaluations of their health state.

Also, the situation in Hulme appears to be better than that in the area of Collyhurst and Newton Heath in relation to educational deprivation. The Index of Multiple Deprivation 2004 does not show any peaks of educational deprivation in Hulme. This finding is supported by the data collected through the Quality of

Life Survey 2004. The percentage of Hulme residents who reported being full time students at school is higher than the average percentage of Manchester's residents.

There are more problems in relation to crime in the Hulme domain. Four SOAs in Hulme fall among the worst 50 SOAs in Manchester for crime level. We have already underlined the general deprivation affecting one of those SOAs. There is still a high level of crime in some areas of Hulme and its high deprivation past probably influences the residents' feelings of safety. The data gathered through the Quality of Life Survey 2004 show that the area is generally considered safe by the consulted residents. At the same time, only 4.3% of the participants, rate it as "very safe". The residents consulted seem to still be scared of walking alone in the neighbourhood after dark. In fact, 76.1% of them would feel unsafe in this situation. Furthermore, it is considered <u>very</u> unsafe by 34.5% of the sample. The participants in the survey consider some issues connected to the crime domain particularly problematic. A relevant part of the sample considers the presence of drunken people in the street as well as vandal behaviour as significant problems in the area. For 66.2% of the sample, antisocial behaviour has been a stable concern during the previous year to the survey. The percentage of consulted residents who report improvements on issues tied to antisocial behaviour is lower than those reporting it as getting worse.

The Index of Multiple Deprivation 2004 does not show any evidence of environmental deprivation in Hulme. This finding seems to be supported by the residents' answers to the Quality of Life Survey 2004. At the same time, the residents' perception of their area seems to be characterized by contradictions. The majority of the participants report their satisfaction with the housing and neighbourhood conditions. However, the residents consulted report problems on road's safety and cleanliness of the environment. The presence of speeding cars affects road safety as it is considered as a problem by 44% of the sample. Furthermore, 38.8% of the residents consulted express dissatisfaction with the level of safety to cross the street.

The presence of rubbish and litter in the street is, again, one of the main problems for the participants in the survey. However, a minority of them report dissatisfaction with the cleanliness of the streets.

The Index of Multiple Deprivation 2004 shows the presence of barriers to access to houses and services in two SOAs in Hulme. The other source of data highlights that the residents perception held that access to services is easy.

In order to complete the picture of local residents' views of their neighbourhood, we are going to explore the level of neighbourhood involvement that residents perceive they have. 40.2% of the residents consulted find it is possible to be involved in the local decision making processes. However the percentage of people who express their confidence in the effective decision making of the residents is lower. In fact, only 34.2% of the sample say that the residents' participation can actually influence the decision making procedures. In contrast, 28.9% of the consulted residents consider there is insufficient presence of space for local people to be involved in decision making processes, and 37.4% of them have no confidence in the effectiveness of the residents' participation as an influence on decisions. The data highlight the presence of residents who find it possible to be involved in local decision processes but at the same time are unconvinced of the effective power of this participation in both areas (Hulme and the area including Collyhurst and Newton Heath).

Also, the answers of the residents consulted to the question about their happiness might be interesting. The residents' view of their general condition and happiness seems to be mixed. Only 7.2% of the residents stated they were "not very happy" and nobody indicated they were "not very happy at all". Comparing the aforementioned percentages of the happiness of Hulme's residents with those taken from the area of Collyhurst and Newton Heath, we can see the similarity of the answers given by the residents of the two areas. The comparison between, on one side, the areas of Collyhurst Newton Heath and Hulme and, on the other side, the average opinion of Manchester's sample of residents shows interesting differences. These emerge from the percentages relating to particular options of answer. In fact, the percentages of people very happy in Hulme (18.8%) and in the area of Collyhurst and Newton Heath

(17.9%) are higher than of Manchester (14%). This comparison of Collyhurst and Newton Heath with the city as a whole does not show differences in relation to the extreme opposite option of answers. In fact, the percentages of unhappy residents in Collyhurst and Newton Heath are similar to those of the residents of Manchester (not very happy = 10%; not very happy at all = 2%). Instead, there seems to be a reduced percentage of unhappy people in Hulme compared to the city as a whole.

Comparing the data relating the different areas and the different perspectives given by the two sources of information, we can undertake some reflections. The residents' perceptions of their areas do not always seem to be realistic. Sometimes, residents seem not to be aware of the deprived conditions in which they live and the effect it has on their lives. This lack of awareness may come from a lack of experience of different conditions, which in turn may limit expectations and aspirations of the residents. After living for a long time in such areas, residents do not seem to notice the signs and symptoms of deprivation existing in their areas and as a result they do not aim for better conditions of life. The national indices say that residents of those deprived areas die 10 years earlier than people living in other parts of the country, although the residents report that their health is quite good. A high level of crime affects their neighbourhood but they say they are happy about it. They seem to be used to those conditions and to consider them normal. This attitude towards their reality probably influences the residents' attitudes towards changing it. The involvement in the area's administrative decisions is consequently perceived as impossible to achieve or useless in terms of their influence.

CHAPTER 2
THE "COMMUNITY ACTIVISTS PROJECT"

2.1 Aims and goals

The "Community activists' project" arose from the concerns of activists to get their work acknowledged, and from the interests of researchers and teachers from Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU). The project developed through discussions between researchers and activists. It attempts to give a direct voice to people who do community work without the need of official representatives who are different from activists, and often do not live in the community. From an academic point of view, the project is a chance to learn about participation from the protagonists of community engagement.

The main goals of the project are the collection of activists' accounts and the production of an educational video on activism through the use of filmed interviews of people involved in community activities. The final film will be shown for teaching purposes during lessons, workshops or conferences.

2.2 The interview

This project was carried out between Angela Stewart, an activist in Newton Heath, Carolyn Kagan, lecturer at MMU and Simona Raschini, a work placement postgraduate student in MMU[3].

Firstly, the principal topics of the interview were defined. Our team agreed that the interview was going to explore people's motivations at the grass roots of involvement in community work, and their personal experiences from this involvement, as well as their opinion about the areas in which they live.

We used a semi structured interview characterized by a flexible text that left the possibility of adding or deleting some questions if needed during the project. The interview was modified as the project progressed in order to improve the coverage of topics which had not been anticipated at the beginning of the project. Also the text of the interview was adapted to emphasise the specific experiences of some of the interviewed activists.

The interview explored the reasons for people to get involved with community work as well as studying the reasons for them to continue to participate. It then considered the loss of motivation and explored why sometimes activists might stop their involvement or why they might consider their work a waste of time.

The personal experience of being an activist was examined by looking at the positive and negative aspects of involvement in community work. Also, the sources of satisfaction and frustration, as well as the experience of collaboration with other community activists, authorities, professionals and people who are not active were examined.

In order to explore the view of those interviewed, the interview asked their opinions about the services, authorities and neighbours in their community. It also took into consideration the relationship between them and the activists. Furthermore, the interviewers tried to understand how people with different roles might help the activists in their work.

2.3 The participants

Nine activists were interviewed. They have different ages, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, personal experiences and economic and social background. Their ages range from 30 to 90 years; both male and female, straight, lesbian and gay; single, married and separated. Some of them were born in England and have always been there, some others come from other countries (Australia, Italy, Ireland). Some participants have middle class backgrounds, others have backgrounds characterised by poverty. They are a mix of employed, unemployed people and pensioners.

Each of them has a personal way of interpreting community work. They do different kind of activities, playing different roles. Some of them are members of local residents' associations. Others try to take care of their neighbourhood individually, outside of any associations. Others again transformed their interest in community work in a more formal way, becoming local councillors.

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[3] Simona was a graduate from University of Bologna, Italy, and undertook this project during a nine-month community psychology placement at MMU.

The activists also have different personalities. Although the common denominator seems to be the interest in people and environment around them and the engagement in community work.

2.3.1 Daniela[4]

Daniela is a middle-aged woman. She lives in Newton Heath. Daniela is a mother and grandmother. She has always been interested in the people of the community as well as engaging in some of the activities in her neighbourhood. In 2003 she got involved in one of the "Tenants' and Residents' Association" of Newton Heath and undertook a more formal commitment in her community.

2.3.2 Stanley

Stanley is nearly 90 years old. He lives in Newton Heath in one of the flats managed by a local housing association. He came from a very large family (he was one of thirteen children). The economic condition of his family was probably influenced by the number of the children. However Stanley received an education and studied. He is unmarried. He has always been interested in people and their issues. He was councillor in Newton Heath and, despite leaving this role, has still engaged himself in community work.

2.3.3 Harry and Doris

Harry and Doris are two senior citizens who live in Newton Heath. They are in their 80's and both of them have a middle class family background. Doris's family was numerous and it is for this reason that she, her brothers and sisters, were brought up looking after one another. Harry's family seems to be characterized by a tradition of social involvement. Doris, after becoming widowed, met Harry in Newton Heath about 20 years ago. Harry, unlike Doris, had children from his first marriage. After marrying, they went to live together in the house where are presently living. Doris started doing community work in Newton Heath when she moved to the area. She used to take care of her older neighbours. Harry started to be directly involved after meeting Doris. Together they take care of the environment around their flat. Furthermore, after Harry

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[4] Pseudonyms are used throughout the report.

stopped working they helped to set up an "Over Sixty Club" with another couple. This is a club where the seniors of the area can enjoy meeting other similarly aged people. Harry is the president of the club and Doris deals with the practical organisation of activities. They organise dancing afternoons, little parties, group holidays and bingo. The club activities take place every Wednesday afternoon and the club is completely funded by its members. The money comes from the bingo, and the selling of beverages and food is used to fund other activities.

2.3.4 Jessica

Jessica is a middle aged woman and lives in Newton Heath. She is single. Jessica has no job other than being involved in her community's activities and has been involved in the "Tenants' and Residents' Association" for a short time. She deals with the gardens of the community and their care. Furthermore, she is one of the community guardians of Newton Heath.

2.3.5 Carlo

Carlo is about 40 years old and lives in Collyhurst. He is gay and lives with his partner, John. He is Italian but has been in England for a couple of years. He comes from a well-off family involved in policy. He reached a high level of education in well considered Italian schools. After moving to England, he lived in London, then in Salford and finally moved to Collyhurst in 1999. After moving to England, he got involved in community work. He has been a member of two different residents' associations. He now plays this role in his local Tenants' and Residents' Association, and at the same time is chairman of the local "Home Watch Association" as well as being engaged with the setting up of the "Green Field Project". Furthermore he has a job.

2.3.6 John

John is in his thirties and lives in Collyhurst. He is gay and Carlo is his partner. He is from Liverpool but has been living in Manchester for the last 7 years. He first lived in Salford and 4 years ago moved to Collyhurst. He got involved in community work after meeting Carlo. However, he has always been interested

in local issues. He is a member of the local Tenants' and Residents' Association as well as being one of the Collyhurst's home watchers and a community guardian. He has been involved also in the "Green Field Project".

2.3.7 Sara

Sara is 30 years old and lives in Newton Heath. She comes from Australia where was born and grew up. Before coming to Manchester, she lived in Malawi and then in Bolton. She has past voluntary work experience as she was a volunteer of an association which deals with ecological and other worldwide issues. As a volunteer Sara was also involved in the organisation of the Commonwealth Games. She is currently studying drama. She has been engaged in Newton Heath community activities for short time. After meeting Jessica, she got involved in the garden work and now she is a member of the local "Tenants' and Residents' Association" and one is of the local community guardians.

2.3.8 Anne

Anne is 60 years old and lives in Hulme. She is a councillor in this area. She was married but is now divorced. She is a mother and grandmother. She is a lesbian. Anne comes from Ireland where she grew up. She is an orphan and was brought up in an orphanage by nuns. Anne has a lot of community work experience and, during the interview, mentioned some of them. Her first formal engagement in community work was in Salford in 1962, along with a couple of other residents she help to set up a residents association. In 1967 Anne moved to London where she got involved with a housing campaign. Between 1968 and 1969 she had community work experiences in America. For the first 9 months she dealt with children and families of a Chicago community and then spent another 9 months in a small community in the Mid-West. In 1969, when she was 30, she went back to the college in London. During the college course Anne got involved in the anti-deportation campaign. After college she became a social worker and dealt with women who were victims of domestic violence. After being a simple activist in the Hulme community, she became a councillor and has been undertaking this role for the last 10 years. Also, as an activist, she is dealing with young homeless people and more generally with youth issues.

2.3.9 Roles of the participants

Some of the participants are member of associations located in the areas where they live. These include:

Tenants' and Residents' Associations

As we mentioned above, in all the areas taken into consideration there are local tenants' residents' associations. Those generally include residents who are spokespersons for other resident's issues, needs and problems. Their members try to report the community's issues to the local authorities and to the police, as required

Community Guardians' Association

The members of local Community Guardians' Associations are engaged in the care of the environment and in the safety of their communities. The members of this association usually have direct access to the local police phone line so that they can quickly report abuses and crimes.

2.4. Procedures

Carolyn, Angela and I[5] played different roles in the carrying out of the project. Carolyn introduced Angela and me to each other. She participated in the development of the project and supervised its actuation. As supervisor, she was a source of support and practical advice.

While Angela led the interviews, my responsibility was the filming of the interviews and the collection of the materials. Together, we wrote the interview questions, interpreted the collected materials and arranged edition of the film. We helped each other in every phase of the project. I gave Angela my advice on the leading of the interview and in turn Angela provided me with suggestions about the filming.

In the majority of the cases, Angela contacted the local community activists inviting them to be interviewed. In some cases Angela did not previously know

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[5] Simona. I am responsible for the first draft of the report. I am writing this section in the 'first person' in order to emphasise my personal involvement in the project.

the people who we were going to interview. Those people were contacted through other community activists. The majority of the interviews took place in Angela's house, the rest were undertaken in the homes of the interviewees. A standard way to manage the interview was not decided at the beginning. However, it became more and more organised after one or two interviews. I used to meet Angela 30 minutes in advance so that we had time to talk about the person who was going to be interviewed and the questions. Also, we could compare notes about the previous interview. When the activist arrived, we introduced each other, then while I was preparing the camera, Angela gave the participant all the information about the project. The information sheet was shown and confidentiality was discussed[6]. When everything was ready, we started the interview.

We usually had a break during the interview. During the first few interviews we used to have it after the "motivation" set of questions. Then sometimes we needed to adapt the break to people and the situation. There were some interviews without a break and others with more than one.

After finishing the interview, we used have a chat and watch the completed video with the interviewee. From the beginning Angela and I found that watching the film of the interview with the participant provided important feed back. After a few interviews, we realised that, when the camera was off, some people tended to be more relaxed and to talk more freely about their experiences. We decided to ask for the participant's permission for recording the after-interview chat. The chat sometimes gave the chance of deepening some aspect of the interview. It often represented the space for the participant to reflect about theirs and other people's experiences. Before we left, some of the activists asked to have a copy of the interview. In those cases I and Angela promised to satisfy the request.

2.4.1 Processing the interviews

Each interview was transcribed and the film copied into separated tapes.

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[6] All activists agreed to be shown on the film. Anonymity was guaranteed within the written report.

The interview transcripts were read over and over again and main points were summarized into charts, which were then used to identify linkages and connections across the interviews. (See Appendices 3-5)

2.4.2 Processing the film

The interview transcripts were used to select the more interesting pieces of each interview.

The interview videos were processed through the programme "Editing pinnacle studio 9" by a technician and me. First of all, the previously selected interview pieces were cut. We thought of a logical thread for the film and then chose the pieces that we wanted to use for narrating the story. Angela contributed to the decisions made about the extracts to be used for the film.

2.5 Results

2.5.1 Motivations

The interviews explored the reasons for involvement in community work as well as the motivations at the base of the maintaining this commitment. The first aspect seems to have its roots in the past experiences of the activists. It is probably tied to their childhood and their upbringing. However, meeting with particular people or life situations often signalled the starting point of community engagement. Life situations had an important role and might push the transformation of peoples' interests into active commitment.

The research suggested the reasons that people got involved in community work in the first place were different from those underlying their continuing engagement. Community work experiences affected the motivations. They sometimes reinforced the personal motivations and other times weakened them. Changes in motivation influenced involvement in community work. Increases and decreases of the level of commitment seemed to be linked to the starting investment of people as well as their community work experiences. Satisfactions and frustrations coming from the activities undertaken affected activists' enthusiasm.

Reasons for the people's involvement in community work

The exploration of this aspect was challenging. At the start we expected the identification of reasons to be involved in community activism to be difficult for the activists to articulate. Because of this, we decided to not ask directly why they started to be engaged in community work. Instead, we preferred to ask some questions about life experiences possibly linked to an interest in community. This section of the interview included questions about family and religious background, as well as interest in their neighbourhoods prior to becoming activists. The section considered also the values underpinning the participants' approach to their social commitment. The interviewees were also invited to reflect about the differences between active and non-active people. The activists did, indeed, find it difficult.

In 5 cases, activists said that their family encouraged them to get interested in people and the environment around them. For some of them, the parents were a behavioural model because of their positive attitudes toward neighbours. For others, the roots of their personal interest in the environment lay in the culture of their country of origin.

> *"…Living in Australia gives you the sense of how big a place can be and there are a lot of green areas"… "in Australia you learn how to recycle, you learn to compost, you start learning to take care of the environment, because environment is very precious, and we have also grown up with the green house effect, and the damage done to the environment, so this…, like, influences how I was brought up,…" (Sara)*

In most of the cases, the activists noted that their family upbringing encouraged their community commitment.

> *"…It's something to do with the way you have been brought up, and I was brought up there; you look after what is around you and not just what is inside you…"(Carlo)*

> *"…We were brought up to look after one another and so"… "I used to think, well, if they (old people in the community) were my parents, I'd like to see there was somebody near my parents…"(Doris)*

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Anne had a complicated life story. In her case, there was not just one key element to explain her social commitment and it is more likely it had its roots in her own personal experiences. At the same time, Anne grew up in an orphanage, this was her first strong experience of being a member of a community and we can hypothesise that it influenced her community engagement as well as her life.

> She said: *"…my family experience was growing up with 74 other girls in a convent…"*

In the majority of the cases, activists did not consider religion relevant for their community engagement. Four of the interviewees found a link between their religious view and their community experience. Two of those considered religion relevant in terms of faith. Those same people added that, even if religion was important for their community involvement, non-religious people might also be active.

> *"Harry: I don't think religion is relevant in community work, everybody is the same in my eyes, I just help everybody…*
> *Angela: does your religious belief help you?*
> *Harry: it does, it helps me…"(Harry)*

In the other two cases, religion influenced them in terms of a general vision of the world. Sara suggested that her appreciative attitude towards the world was encouraged by the religious values from her upbringing.

> *"…Religion is relevant mostly in doing great works, making differences in people lives,"… "The things you were brought up actually to appreciate and to care, because becoming destructive doesn't help, and if someone is destructive that makes a place miserable…."(Sara)*

In the case of Anne, there was a link between religious background and political belief.

> *"I think that, essentially, what I've got from religion was policy… I would say that the very Christianity, the best of the very Christianity is also the best of socialism".*

All the participants have always been interested in people and the environment around them. This interest started before they got directly involved in community activities.

The values underpinning the participants' approaches to community work seemed to come from their upbringing and the way in which they grew up. Some of the activists considered respect and "helping people" as central to their lives. For others, tolerance, openness toward other people, justice and fairness were more important values. Sara underlined the value of "doing something for making a difference". Trust was the main value expressed by Stanley.

> *"…The main value is the people who trust you …I think, anyway, you have got to get them to confide in you and you need to confide in them, they have to trust you and you never ever step in begin lying …"(Stanley)*
> the

The majority of the participants found it difficult to give opinions about differences between active and non-active people. The main difference stated was that non active people were passive and not interested in others:

> *"I think that everybody could be activist, really, but there is a lack of interest … I think they are not interested in life at all, they just sit in their house doing nothing…" (Harry)*

Anne put this down to the role and spread of materialistic values. In her view, materialism distracted people from the real values of life. People were more interested in things than in other people, so they did not socialize between themselves.

> *"…(materialism) doesn't give time to be with each other…" (Anne)*

Daniela, however, put this the lack of interest down to a lack of self-confidence:

> *"…if they'd got more confidence to begin with … I meant, it's about…I think it's about confidence if you have got the confidence to challenge, it's an all right morning…" (Daniela)*

It was possible to hypothesise some linkages between these answers. There seemed to be a natural connection between deprivation, lack of confidence

about the ability to make a change and lack of interest in community issues. When people living in social deprivation do not see the possibility of changing their situation, they maybe unable to make any effort to improve their conditions. Passivity – even hopelessness – may be the result.

The interest in community seemed to be the main element of activist motivation for their community involvement and it seemed to be rooted in their upbringing. This element of motivation needs now to be contextualised. In order to do this, we will take into consideration other information about the activists coming from other sections of the interview. We found that even if the participants have always been interested in people and environment around them, they decided to get involved in community work at a specific moment of their life. The involvement in community work was not a direct consequence of their interest in community and there probably were other important elements that got them to decide to start being active. One of them might be their life situations. At a certain moment of their life, each activist met a situation that pushed them to get involved in community activities. Those life situations were different for different activists. For some of them, it was the meeting of a person already active, and in other cases it was the need to do something about changing intolerable living conditions. In order to start being active, the life situations that pushed people into becoming involved, were as important as the presence of values underlying their interest in the community. People disinterested in their neighbourhood could not get involved in community activities. However, this interest, although necessary was not sufficient. People who had this kind of interest might not become active if there had not been a specific situation that triggered their involvement.

Reasons for continuing to be involved in community work.

The level of commitment in community work shown by the activists varies and sometimes they may also reach the decision to stop their involvement. Changes in the level of engagement were caused in part by changes to their motivation. In the interviews we explored the sources of enthusiasm and acknowledgement that might increase and reinforce their motivation. The importance of economic recompense and acknowledgements coming from local authorities or the other

people living in the community were explored. The loss of motivation was also considered.

An interesting picture emerged from the answers about recognition. In general, the activists did not seem to be really interested in acknowledgement. Some of them replied that they did not expect any kind of recognition, and that they did the work because they wanted to do it.

"I don't want to be recognised by the community because it's just a satisfaction, at the end of the day, if you get things done" (Daniela)

"…I don't want any recompense." (Stanley)

"I don't mean it should be recognised because … it's not different to going out and just cutting the grass, it's still help in the area…" (John)

Carlo stressed that community work should be done more, and that acknowledgement should not be considered a reason for becoming involved. In his view, the community should be recognised by the local authorities. If this happened, there would be no the need for residents' associations.

"…it should be done, because, I'm only a voice and I'm speaking the voice of many, so you have to recognise the community, not my work. I'm doing nothing… It's what it's supposed to happen, but it's not happening so… you know, I'm not making…I'm not giving you something that you are not entitled to, I'm giving you something that you are entitled to … so my work should be recognised? No…the community should be recognised, there shouldn't be a reason to have the tenants' association, there shouldn't be a reason to have people that have to speak up … to achieve what you supposed to have anyhow, because you are not achieving any favours…"(Carlo)

Sara gave a completely different view about the role of acknowledgement on community work. She thinks that it should definitely be recognised:

"I think, it ought to be recognised"…"you take your time"… "it's nice to see a recognition for what you have done"… "it's important sometimes to

see a little reimbursement" … "you have not done it (work) for yourself you have done it for other people…"

Others considered different kinds of acknowledgement. Most agreed the local authorities should definitely recognise the work of the activists.

"I think it should be recognised by the authorities…" (Daniela)

"They (the authorities) should recognise, very much, because we are the people that are living here, they only sit behind desks, they are not here …" (Jessica)

The majority also agreed that they did not want to be paid for their work. For some of them, that would imply control by the source of funds. If an institution gave funds, it would probably want a say in how they are used.

"…Paying not, because" … "they can dictate what I do, what I say…" (Jessica)

For Anne, community work should not be paid on principle. In her view, community work was voluntary work. If it was paid then it would lose this characteristic.

"…I think that when they talk about financial recompense they are not talking about voluntary any more…" (Anne)

Other activists guessed that a reimbursement might be useful (for instance Sara) since sometimes taking care of the neighbourhood environment involved spending her own money and consequently, having this money reimbursed would be considered appropriate.

The majority of activists considered that people living in their community should help them more, rather than recognise their work, although others did think recognition by the community would be important.

"I think it should be recognised by the community itself…" (Jessica)

Finally, Anne argued that the skills learned doing community work should be acknowledged. While people did community work, they acquired skills and

knowledge. For Anne, those should be recognised with a certificate of qualification.

"…I think there is something about the skills that the people develop when they do the voluntary work, they should have some qualification…" (Anne)

Most of the interviewees did not think that community work was a waste of time. However, some of them did say that they sometimes considered their engagement in neighbourhood activities as a waste of time. This happened when they invested a lot in their activities without anyone's support. It was the lack of support from other people in the community and the local authorities that seemed to cause the feeling that they were wasting their time. When activists felt alone in their work they thought that their work maybe was useless.

For most of the interviewees, frustrations and lack of support and encouragement were the main reasons for stopping being active.

"…I mean, I could say"… "I want a nice area so if I want a nice area I've got to work"…"but you get so tired!..." (Jessica)

"I think they are lazy and alone, mostly alone…[isolated]"(Harry)

"…Doing something individually requires support and encouragement and, when there isn't access to those"…"you feel unwanted and that you are not been appreciated…" (Sara)

We will see later that active people might meet difficulties and conflicts and may get work-related stress and frustration. It may be that when those negative experiences were not balanced by satisfaction gained from positive experiences, active people might get tired and decide to stop their work.

We asked if local services might help active people to continue their work. An improvement of the services' interest in activist's work seemed to be important, for the participants. In fact they answered that services should listen and support active people. Sara added that they should also involve community activists in their activities. In this way, community workers might improve their awareness about how the system works.

For Anne, in her area, the presence of a culture of volunteers is more helpful for active people rather than local services. She added that although the existing Government is now encouraging community participation at a local level, it is still not widespread.

"…There is a good culture of volunteer in Hulme. I think that there are a lot of people in Hulme that have stuff to give that they still haven't been reached they don't know how go out and rich themselves"… "I think that people are essentially good, people who are essentially generous."(Anne)

"… I mean, what the Government is saying is that they want community participation at every level of local government"... "I don't think it's happening effectively in any part of Manchester"(Anne)

The maintenance of community commitment was influenced by people's community work experiences. For this reason, it might be worth to contextualising the answers of this section. In order to do this, we will take into account some of the earlier information about personal experiences of community work.

Some aspects of community work experiences played an important role in the decision to either stop or carry on community activities. Satisfaction and positive feelings were key factors in keeping people involved. Some of the activists realised that they became more aware of community issues and authorities' decision processes. Others said that the fact that they could see the results of their work helped them to carry on their activities. These kind of experiences helped them to feel that their work was useful. People realised that their work was improving other people's lives and this increased their self confidence.

Moreover, involvement with community work resulted in the need to face difficulties and conflicts that often came up, not only with local authorities but also other activists. Those experiences caused stress and frustrations. Such feelings may lead to a loss of interest, tiredness and a feeling of having had enough of the community. Disinvestment might have also been facilitated by the

impression that the work done was not appreciated, or even that there was little space for activists' private lives.

These issues will be examined in the next paragraph with other aspects of the community work experience.

2.5.2 The experience of community work

The activists' experiences of community work represented the heart of the project. We found that this aspect was tied to all other aspects investigated. The previous paragraphs drew attention to the links between motivation for involvement and community work experiences. Those results are also linked to the activists' views of their communities. In fact, the activists' experiences influenced and were influenced by their vision of their neighbours, as well as the local authorities and services. Community work experience encompassed negative and positive aspects of being active. Also, the collaboration with other activists and local professionals was considered an important part of community activity.

The interview explored the participants' experience of activism. It investigated life changes that took place after the involvement in community activities as well as the subjective impression of this engagement. Experiences of collaboration with others, including active and non active people of the community as well as local authority's representatives and professionals, were explored. Potential difficulties and conflicts arising during collaborations were examined along with how obstacles to collaboration were overcome.

Most of the activists recognised that their engagement in community work implied some change in their life. The improvements coming from activists' commitment in their community, as well as the side effects of this involvement were underlined.

For Sara, the main advantages of involvement were the opportunities to meet other people with similar interests and the will to be more aware of the community issues.

"...I have become more aware of walking down the street and then seeing that there is litter and that there aren't enough bins for litter"...

"that there is a lot of work that needs to be done locally"… "the councillors should be more responsive of local people and of what they need and what they want…" (Sara)

"Since becoming community guardian and attending the meetings, I actually approached other community guardians and I've discussed with them about what they are doing…" (Sara)

For Harry and Stanley, community work filled their lives.

"It (community work) keeps you active, active all the time"… "to be active, you know, to help people, or things like that…it's good, it keeps you going, keeps you young…" (Harry)

"Doing community work has been an absolutely joy for me, I mean it filled my life, you know what I mean "filling", I had a wonderful life, I know a lot of people, I'm quite respected wherever I go…" (Stanley)

In other cases, community work seemed to take too much of people's life.

"It (community work) became Saturday, Sunday…seven days a week, 24 hours to day job, I just couldn't focus on… anything "… "all the time on the phone, e-mails, meetings, all kind of things …conferences …and…challenging, going here going there"… "I've lost contact with most of the friends I had…" (Daniela)

For Anne, doing community work started being difficult after she became a Councillor. The difficulty was the change of other activists' attitude towards her.

"…For example, people that I was working with in Hulme 15 years ago, I still meet with them around tables and they call me councillor and I say: Why are you calling me councillor if you have been calling me Anne longer than I've been a councillor? and I get a bit angry about that…" (Anne)

Carlo and John replied that community work did not change their lives. Their experiences were interesting because doing community work seemed to be really natural to them. The activities they undertook fit perfectly in their lives.

"I feel better with myself after doing things, but apart from that…not changes" (John)

For the majority of the interviewees, community work was a source of positive feelings. Also, those who reported some difficulties, also underlined positive emotional experiences of their community involvement. Some of the activists replied that community work gave them joy and the feeling of being useful.

"It (community work) makes you feel good, if you can help somebody"… "you feel bad when you try to help somebody and"… "you have not be able to help them, or they might have not been able to take advantages"… "and that's when you get disappointed" (Stanley)

"It (community work) gives me joy, because it makes people happy, if I can make people happy, that's what gives me joy" (Harry)

"Angela: how do you feel about your work in the community…?
Anne: definitely feeling of being useful. Sometimes, a really high level of belongingness".(Anne)

People seemed to also reach a sense of empowerment from their community work experience. For some of them, through community activities, they became more aware of issues in their communities as well as the way in which the "system" works. Other interviewees acquired a position in their communities and felt the opportunity to have voice. Others again underlined the increase of self confidence and self esteem coming from their involvement.

"the feelings I get from being a community guardian is that I have a position. This is a role that you start taking on, you are responsible, you are…just we do things, you know, you really, you start seeing things, how you can improve them and then it gives you sense of self worth, it gives you confidence, it gives you …like, you are becoming a leader and you are making this changes slowly, but you are also thinking about how those changes are gonna affect other people for the better"… "when you take on such a role as the one of community guardian, your knowledge starts expanding and you start seeing things in a way which you have never seen before and if you are able to collaborate, pass and express

your views and opinions to the councillor, then you start feeling that there is something happening and that would keep on happening for the future." (Sara)

"at the least it (community work) gives you the chance, you know … to feel your voice to be heard…and don't feel so lonely…" (Daniela)

Some of the interviewees experienced frustration, and disappointment. Those negative emotions seemed to come from the lack of people's appreciation of the activists' work as well as from not reaching the goal after hard work.

"sometimes"… "I just think - I don't do it anymore- because…sometimes people don't appreciate it…" (Doris)

"I get angry and frustrated when we try to do something"… "I get nothing…" (John)

Community work involves the collaboration between people. The activists have to work with other active people and local authorities and professionals. They also have to relate to non active people of their communities. Collaboration experiences influence the activists' perceptions of their involvement and the subjective impression of it. Some of the interviewees found it particularly easy to work with other people and saw it as similar to having to work with others throughout life.

(working with others activists) "very easy. Actually we have got a group we never"… "had an argument, with total…you know, we sit together and we agree" (Harry)

"Angela: how easy is it to work with others?
Carlo: the same way that I use to live life, there is not difference … it's just"… "you may be accepted you may not, you may achieve something, you may not; it depends on how you speak to people, how you approach them. Sometimes it is not as easy as …but you have to…" (Carlo)

Some of the participants defined collaboration with other people as hard. For them, in the work with other activists, difficulties arose when conflicts of opinions emerged. Community workers might have different opinions about the

way of solving an issue, as well as making decisions and their priorities. They might even disagree on the issues that had to be addressed. This kind of situation required a negotiation that sometimes was difficult.

"Sometimes it's hard. You want to do something and they want to do something else…" (John).

"Different ideas about how to solve a problem"… "I would think in one way and somebody else would have another different background"… "another way, and then we have an argument…" (Stanley)

"…issues always need to be addressed but they need to be prioritised and organised…" (Jessica)

For some of the interviewees, difficulties within the activists' team might be caused by pressures of personality and lack of appreciation. The personality of a member was sometimes perceived to be dominant.

"Sometimes there can be a pressure of personalities…" (Sara)

In the collaboration with local authorities and professionals, difficulties and conflicts seemed to be due to the lack of interest in the community among representatives and other employed workers.

The majority of the participants complained about the attitude of representatives and professionals towards them and their work. When the activists had to work with local councillors, their main activities seemed to be challenging them as well as to trying to be heard.

(Working with the councillor) *"it's very hard because the councillor is an institution …so over the public man …you know…all the job with public man…"(Daniela)*

Carlo seemed to have relational skills and a technique to approach those professionals. He talked of how to get their attention and to be listened by them.

"I approach them like a friend, I allow them in a false sense of security and then I strike"… "I don't attack them because"… "if I start to speak to you in a very aggressive manner, you would be defensive, but if I'm very

friendly and approachable you are not gonna be defensive, you are not gonna expect to me to attack you… why?!"

"When I ask a question I do not accept a run around answer. If I ask you a question I want to straight an answer"… "I challenge when they start giving me around around answers and I have to sit for half an hour listening…" (Carlo)

Also for Anne (who is a councillor), there seemed to be problems in the relationship with other professionals. She had been an activist for a long time prior to being elected as a councillor, and she knew the issues of the community workers. This influenced her relationship with other official representatives who had a different attitude towards the activists.

"I guess the conflict comes mostly at the point where I absolutely believe that what people are asking for is a right and that it could be delivered with a little flexibility and I get into conflict, not as much with workers on the ground, but with the policy makers and signer officers"(Sara)

Most of the activists shared the idea that communication is the key to overcome difficulties. Difficulties and conflicts arising during collaboration might be solved if people talked and listened to each other. An open attitude towards other people's ideas was also considered as important. Some of the interviewees recognised that conflicts might arise from the lack of information about other collaborators' points of view and opinions.

(How might difficulties and conflicts be overcome?) "By sitting down, talking about and discussing" (Harry)

"They could be overcome if people would listen to each other"… "by listening and then discussing…" (Jessica)

"Just talking with the person that you have in front of you"… "he would not have the right information, so …" (Carlo)

Sometimes, the activists related with non - active people from the community. Whilst they respected their choice not to be involved in community activities at

times the activists became irritated by neighbours who did not participate, even though they could.

"No issue around; if they don't want to get involved they will, they"… "don't want to get involved so, it's their right…" (John)

"You know, they can do things and while you are doing them, they won't do them"… "they make you do what they won't…" (Doris)

Sara pointed out that non active people lost the advantages of involvement in community activities.

"For those who don't get involved in the community, it would be that they have not time or have not interest. From my perspective, I feel that they are losing a lot. First, they miss"… "skills that can be acquired, good things, such as learning how to plant, look after the garden"… "knowing that they can make the differences…" (Sara)

In other cases, negative feelings came from the lack of respect of some non - active neighbours towards the activists' work. In particular their assertion that community involvement was a waste of time.

"I get mostly annoyed with people who have very bad attitude towards other people involved, who see you for instance going around picking litter and they ask you "why do you do that?". That's one of the most annoying things because it shows that first they don't really care and second they can't stand you for doing good, when in fact they are the ones who are really missing out and actually don't have a life"(Sara)

For some of the participants, non - active people, who consider community work as a waste of time, were simply ignorant.

"People who pass by you and tell you "you are wasting your time" they are just proving that they are stupid…you waste your time what?!" (Carlo).

Sometimes, through their activities, activists believed more people could get involved.

"At the end of the day, I go back and say - that's the answer to the problem you have-…" (Stanley).

"…We (the activists) are trying to get things done. If we can get them done, quickly more people will get involved…" (Jessica)

It was the neighbours, themselves, who at times became the focus of activists' work. 'Bad neighbours' were problematic, and overcoming conflicts with them was considered hard work.

"You can't sit and discuss with them ('bad neighbours') because they have got very different views…" (Harry)

Sara thought that overcoming those conflicts would require the change of a strongly rooted attitude and that it would take a lot of energy and time.

"…(conflict) has gotta do with attitude. It takes a lot of time, effort and courage"… "to change and give a way to individuals who haven't been brought up with this sort of values for the community…" (Sara)

For Jessica, involving non - active people would favour a more respectful attitude towards the community. She underlined that if people participated in some activities they would be more careful to not damage the community.

"…it's like with the garden and the children (she is talking about the involvement of the local children in the care of the gardens). *They look after their gardens and respect them, because they worked on them …so they are not going to be vandalizing them…" (Jessica)*

From the above discussion, we can see that some participants concentrated on the positive aspects of their involvement in community work and others focused on the negative side. For some, the negative life changes coming from their involvement as well as the difficulties and conflicts met were over-riding. Others prioritised the advantages of their involvement. They tended also to describe the collaboration with other people as unproblematic. While, for the first group of interviewees, community work seemed to be a source of stress, the other group found it enjoyable and satisfying. However, all were able to see the other side. The activists who at the beginning concentrated on the negative aspects,

could draw on some positive aspects of their community work experience and vice versa; those who were at first focused on the positive side, then explored the negative one. Thus for each participant, community work involved both positive and negative aspects. It was interesting that in some cases the positive memories seemed to be more available and in others the negative were more easily remembered. In two cases, the positive and the negative aspects of community work appeared to be well balanced.

 For Carlo and John, their experience in community involvement was more neutral. They do not describe it as extremely frustrating nor as exciting. Furthermore, community engagement appeared to be just one of the aspects of their life, and fitted in with their other commitments. Their experiences were different from those of other interviewees who seemed to invest a great deal in their communities, and for whom community engagement dominated their lives. This high level of investment stands them in danger of difficulties coping with frustrating experiences, as well as a high risk of burn out.

We studied the factors that might affect the style of the interviewees and the focus of their experiences. We found out that the following factors might be relevant:

1. Gender. When we compared the men's experiences with the women's accounts we realised that women tended to report more of the negative aspects of their community involvement whilst men focussed more on the positive implications of their involvement.

2. Length of the involvement period. The activists who have been involved for a long time tended to underline the negative side of their community work experience, whereas those participants new to this kind of activity seemed to be more enthusiastic and inclined to highlight the advantages of their involvement.

3. Personality characteristics. It is possible that individual differences between participants led to some reporting negatives and some positive experiences. Personality influences people's view of the world as well as their community experience. However, whilst overall world view may have framed experience of activism, it is premature to assert this aspect too strongly. Consequently, the activists' tendency to focus on the

positive or negative side of their involvement might be the result of their more generic approach to the world.

4. Level of personal investment. Personal investment might be defined in terms of energies, time and resources spent by the activists in their community. As we already discussed above, the ways in which people experienced frustration might be influenced by their efforts. Also, the level of stress coming from disappointing experiences might be affected by the level of investment. If the community activities became the mainstay of people's lives, negative experiences would become hard to bear. Initial efforts might affect also the course of the involvement. A constant high level of stress may lead to the decision to withdraw from community work.

5. Relationships with other community workers. Collaboration with other activists created both advantages and disadvantages. On the one hand, teamwork was a source of support and feeling of belonging and thus an advantage. It helped the members to define their identity as activists. Community workers might feel represented by the team as well as perceiving that their individual voice would have more chance of being heard.

On the other hand, however, collaboration implies socialising and working with others and this was sometimes difficult. Obstacles and conflicts that arose within the activists' group were perceived differently from those met through contact with local authorities and professionals. Local authorities were perceived often as the source of the community problems, and they also represented the object of the activists' challenges and complaints. The expectations towards community workers' teams were different. There was an assumption that members of a team would share their interests in the community and that the team would be the place to combine individual efforts in order to reach common goals. Having group support would help the activists to compensate their unsuccessful experiences as well as to feel less isolated in their commitment. These very expectations did, in some cases, appear to amplify the feeling of loneliness when conflicts arose within the groups.

6. Satisfactory experiences. Satisfactory experiences helped the maintenance of activists' involvement in community work. The sources of satisfaction differed for different activists. Positive feelings came from the achievement of goals as well as from the realisation of the community's improvements achieved through the activists' involvement. Also, the acknowledgement of the activist's work was a source of gratification and encouragement.

7. Feeling of empowerment. Community work gave the activists a certain feeling of high power in their community. This arose from their gaining awareness of local issues and of the ways in which the professionals deal with them. At times this involvement in community activities led to feelings of having a say in the authorities' decision process. Activists were able to see that their work affected their communities and the life of the other residents. This perception of the value and utility of the work undertaken helped to keep the people involved in community activities.

2.5.3 Activists' views of their communities

The last section of the interview explored the activists' views of their areas, including their experiences of professionals and services as well as other residents. Most of the interviewees recognised the pressures affecting the other residents in their communities. These occurred even when neighbours were described as friendly and had good relations with the participants.

Carlo and John, who lived in Collyhurst, remarked on the presence of local unemployment and lack of education.

"They (other residents) are nice, friendly people, who have similar pressures to all the others"… "a lot of unemployment, and basically being families…" (John)

"…Lack of education, not as in knowledge but as in family ties and family units, you know, they seem to be very close needed families but extremely dysfunctional families, at the same time…" (Carlo).

Those participants who lived in Newton Heath described the residents of this area as needy, deprived, depressed, and alcoholic people. Sara added that they had a tendency to conform to each other and were afraid of changes in their life. For her, those attitudes contributed to their psychological states.

"I think that the main pressure they (other residents) have is conforming" … "the pressure of being all the same"… "nobody is taking any risks because they are afraid"… "I think that pressure comes from one another and it comes from a lack of understanding of what else can be done"… "it comes from just the way you are and the way you have just always been and you never really explored anything else at all" (Sara)

For Jessica, the lack of support and rehabilitation for those re-entering community life after a spell in prison, for example, contributed to local pressure.

"But I found the strong thing, I found this lack of"… "the reintroducing in…oh what is it called, you know when somebody commits a crime and stuff and after put back in the community…[rehabilitation].." (Jessica).

Doris and Harry gave a different account from those of the other activists. They concentrated on the pressures on their peers in their community. They stressed that the main pressure for Newton Heath's seniors was the lack of safety in the area. The main pressure seemed to lie in the behaviour of young people who did not respect older residents.

"I think it's just the generation, you know…maybe the way in which generations are, I think they (seniors who attend the Over sixty club) get afraid of going out"… "That's why we finish the "over sixty" at 4 o clock so nobody goes home in the dark…" (Harry)

Anne said that the Hulme population included a diverse range of people. There were people who have always lived in Hulme and also new residents. Among the new residents, there were students and people coming from overseas. Anne concentrated on the pressures of the long term Hulme residents. She noted that amongst them there were those who still had a lack of education and aspirations. For her, all too often parents had no aspirations for their children.

"There are people in Hulme who've always lived in Hulme 2 or 3 generations and who are still poor, who do not see that their grandchildren or their children could make it to go to University"… " they just can't see it, they can't even consider it" (Anne)

The majority of the activists were not entirely satisfied with the services provided in their areas.

"They do a job"… "I wouldn't say a reasonable job, I'm just saying they do a job, I think they are overpaid for it, but they do a job…" (Carlo)

"…There have been some improvements…" (Jessica)

"In general local services are doing the best they can but I also believe that they could do a lot better…" (Sara)

Whilst there was some recognition that services have improved, they were also considered not to satisfy the residents' needs. Daniela for instance, complained of officers' lack of interest in the local activists and residents. She suggested that services should engage with activists to reach a better understanding of the local needs and consequently to improve their work.

"…They all should be around the table and start to engage with tenants (members of the residents' association)…" (Daniela)

Stanley's account stood out as different. He claimed to be fully satisfied with the services, and considered that his past experience as councillor in Newton Heath gave him a better understanding of the services' work and their responsibilities.

Anne's opinion of the services in Hulme stemmed from her experience as a councillor, listening to complaints coming from the members of the residents' associations. She separated the satisfying services from those which were the object of residents' complaints.

"I would say that in terms of the local services officer"… "I've not heard any complaints from tenants in Hulme"… "about the behaviour from the housing officer, and that's amazing"… "I have had complaints from people about benefit officers. There are great people working in the

benefit office but, people in Hulme who have benefit are a lot of. Trying to understand all those things"… "is really difficult"… "the other place that I get a lot of complaints about is one of the doctor surgeries. People can't get an appointment and nobody answers the phone…" (Anne)

Most of the activists considered that services could be improved. For Harry and Stanley, this change depended on the local representatives, who have the responsibility to plan the services' work and to control its quality.

"There are people in the city council who plan"… "what to do with this, what to do with that, what to do with the other, anything"… "any booking stuff…" (Stanley)

"When I was supervisor"… "they (workers under his control) did the job, because they had to do the job properly"… "now it's the same for the councillors. If they (local councillors) did the job properly, they would get more done"… "they don't do any job…" (Harry)

For Sara, looking at the way in which other countries deal with these problems would be useful in order to improve the services.

"…actually to start looking at other countries and what they are doing in terms of environment would help them expanding what they know, and expanding on things that they don't know…" (Sara)

Jessica, too, underlined the role of the residents. For her, if those people were more responsible and respectful towards their community, the work of the services would be easier and they would work better. Anne's account was similar. She suggested that each person should fulfill their own responsibility towards the community.

I'm really trying to not get into the culture of blaming because I don't think it helps the neighbourhood"… "you don't see your own responsibility in the community"… "I feel quite strong"… "you have responsibility in making it different, and I strongly feel that we all have the responsibility to make things different"… "at the level that we can…" (Anne)

We also asked the interviewees for their views on the role of the services in activists' work. The kind of help that activists would like to receive from local services was the main point of reflection. Most of the interviewees expressed their need to develop trust, be recognised by services as well as to be listened by professionals. More generally the need for communication emerged from their accounts.

> *"They need to listen more, listen to our views and also give us their views" (John)*

> *"Listen to them (activists)"… "they still don't really trust them (the activists)" (Jessica)*

> *"One way (to help activists) would be to get down from their highness because there are things that they (services) have not perceived for so long that they don't see a different way to do them and won't listen to people" (Daniela)*

The broader picture of the services emerging, was one of collaboration that did or did not work. Some of the activists stressed the role of local residents in the facilitation of the professionals' work. Others highlighted that improvement of services' ability to collaborate with the activists would be useful for both of the groups. This collaboration might help the activists' work as well as the services. During the interview several participants negotiated with the interviewer the meaning of 'professionals'. Most agreed to discuss public sector, local authority workers as 'professionals'.

Only for Stanley were professionals the medical workers and doctors who took care of his health and safety. He expressed his satisfaction with the attention given to him by those professionals.

> *"Professionals, you mean doctors…"… "all they are very good"… "they look after you"… "your safety…" (Stanley).*

The other participants complained about professionals' lack of knowledge and interest in the community and in the needs of their residents, as well as to their reluctance to listen to the activists. This reluctance was thought to be attributed to the ineffectiveness of their work. Authorities' representatives seemed not to

understand the issues of local people and consequently were unable to solve their problems. There seemed to be a gap between the activists' perception of their community's issues and those of local authorities. In order to develop a deeper understanding of the community, some of the participants suggested that authorities' representatives should spend time staying in the community.

"A lot of time they seem to have more problems than what the local residents have…" (John)

"Whenever, I was engaged with all of them, I was telling them how to do their job because they just were lacking some kind of"… "knowledge, behaviour…" (Daniela)

"I found the professionals a little bit "never minded"… "they just were always doing the same things…" (Sara)

For Carlo, bureaucracy obstructed professionals' work.

"They (professionals) listen, or pretend to, they give the answers that you require but it takes an extreme amount of time …and there are other issues why they do it"… "they have got their agenda, they have rules, five hundreds, and regulations"… "so most of the time is just wasted in little loops" (Carlo)

For most of the interviewees, local professionals lacked respect for the residents. The lack of respect seemed to be expressed in various ways. Some of the participants remarked on the attitude of contempt held by the professionals towards people of the community, which invited contempt in return.

Angela: "how do the professionals treat the residents?"
Daniela: "With contempt obviously"… "I personally anyway treat them with same contempt…" (Daniela)

"Harry: they (professionals) treat people all right but they say they are gonna do things and that they never do"

Doris: they don't follow you at all…"(Harry and Doris)

Carlo pointed out that professional behaviour may be justified as understandable response to the attitudes expressed by some community members.

"…The councillor is not very helpful"… "they (the councillor and other professionals) shouldn't do it, but respond to an attitude that they receive constantly, from majority of the tenants (members of the residents' association) and unfortunately the minority pays the price…" (Carlo)

Even if Anne's perspective was different from the other activists' point of view because of her official role, she seemed to underline that the community official representatives often did lose sight of activists and residents. She also drew attention to the demands on officials due to their roles, rather than community needs.

2.5.4 Policy and community work

The last part of the interview investigated the interviewees' opinions about the relationship between policy and community involvement. This included consideration of power and the role of Government in community development. There was disagreement about the extent to which community work is political.

"I don't think it (community work) is political because you are just keeping your area clean and tidy"… "So bringing in politics into everything is not the point." (John)

"…but everything is political, life is political"… "all revolves about politics, unfortunately, I can't distinguish one thing from the other"… "Your simple basic human right is linked to politics" (Carlo)

"I think that it's absolutely political"… "it's not about party politics, it's political…and it's not with the small p but is with the big P"… "I think that community work is absolutely political because it's always about challenging the status quo, it's always about having in hands the life of other people, it's always about making poverty history"… "it's absolutely political and more than it's ever been because our lives are political. Every one's life is political whether you believe it or not, you not…how much money somebody gets in the benefit check next week has been

decided by politicians, you know, it's the political platform that dictate the quality of our life quite often…" (Anne)

Other interviewees concentrated on their more direct experiences of policy and talked about their everyday attempts of empowerment in their relation with the local authorities.

Stanley, who had been councillor, suggested that local policy might help activists but it was not considered as essential for their involvement in the community.

For Jessica, community work might more often imply a sort of "political attitude" rather than a proper policy. "To be nice", to reach out to other people was considered an aspect of this political attitude.

"To be diplomatic and"… "nice and smiling when you want something"… "in some way is political" (Jessica)

Daniela suggested that community work might become political when activists get involved in local policy. Furthermore, she noted that the Newton Heath team of activists seemed to only include women and consequently, was inherently a feminist issue. For Sara's, however, community involvement might be something to do with policy if it influenced activists' political beliefs.

"I think the work becomes political when"… "it changes your direction or your attitudes"… "or your politics, that what would have an effect on you and that you haven't considered before…" (Sara)

CHAPTER 3
CONCLUSIONS

3.1 Conclusions

When community work takes place in areas characterized by deprivation and problems, it may assume additional values and impact. The first positive impact is in the improvement of the area. The activists' work aims to enhance the environment and to increase the safety of the area. The achievement of those changes probably affects the wellbeing of not only the activists but also the other residents. All the locals would enjoy their community if it was tidy with attractive green spaces and if the streets were clean and safe.

An increased awareness of the value of the activists' work may encourage residents to get involved in their community. This would involve having more people participating in the activities and possibly increasing the effectiveness of activists' work. Also, their involvement may help locals to find interest in something positive and to develop greater awareness of the deprivation in their areas. In this case, community work would have implications for the life of those residents. Many residents' perceptions of their areas seems to be characterized by a low level of awareness of the material deprivation conditions in which they live. In fact, the comparison between objective data on deprivation and residents' perception of it shows that the residents seem not to be aware of the levels of deprivation affecting their areas, in comparison with other areas, and thus consider it normal. This lack of understanding may affect their aspirations to better life conditions. People living in surrounding areas seem to be used to deprivation and to be unable to see a different way to live. This lack of awareness affects their aspirations towards potential involvement for dealing with issues in their community. The attitude of active people living in those areas has been found to be different. They have already 'woken up': they seem to be aware of the issues and deprivation affecting their area and want to do something to change the situation. Community work has positive effects on the community as well as on the activists. In fact, their involvement seems to empower them and give them new opportunities to improve their knowledge and skills. Those reflections on the implications of community commitment in

deprived contexts clarify the importance of the encouragement of it as well as the value of the support for the activists' work.

The encouragement of community participation requires some underlying conditions. The authority's representatives should recognize the usefulness and value of activists' contributions. The picture coming from activists' accounts shows this condition is not met. In fact, it shows that for the local authorities, involvement of residents seems to represent an obstacle rather than a help. If the authorities recognised the usefulness of activists' work, they could accept the residents' associations as a source of feedback from the community. The authorities would also realise that activists may facilitate the work of the local services. If the work of the activists was taken seriously, the effectiveness of the collaboration between them and authorities would be improved and community work would consequently be better organised.

I (SR) reached my understanding of the relationship between authorities, professionals and activists through my participation in the project. From this experience, I would say that the achievement of effective collaboration requires some collaborative working between the two groups on an equal basis. On one hand, authorities and professionals should not dispel superior attitudes towards the activists. On the other hand, activists need to make the effort to keep open attitudes towards professionals and authorities as well as to avoid defensive styles of interaction. This defensiveness is sometimes adopted after frustrating experiences with local authorities and professionals. In other cases the reason of the activists' difficulties seems to lie in a sort of conflict: they seem to be aware of the power of their interlocutors on their lives and of the need to be able to negotiate and compromise: in addition, the activists need to be respected, to claim their rights, to complain about the deprived conditions in which they still have to live. Improvements in the relationship between those two groups and the enhancement of the partnership between them would bring advantages for both sides. For the local authorities, the activists' work would help to meet the community needs, and the activists would avoid or reduce frustrating experiences in their interactions with the authorities reaching an increased effectiveness of their work. If these changes happened, good local authority' commitment in the meaningful encouragement of community participation would be possible, beyond the rhetoric of participation.

The picture of community work from the activists' point of view may be useful in order to identify possible areas of intervention[7]. It shows those life experiences that may promote the increase of motivation to get involved in community work. It may then be possible to design interventions that aim to improve people's interest in their community as well as to encourage and support residents who are already active.

Involvement in neighbourhood activities seems to require the interest of residents in their community, as well as situations and opportunities to stimulate their actual engagement. Public celebration of the results of the activists' work may be considered as an intervention to encourage the involvement of new people. It may attract the attention of non-active residents and consequently enhance the development of their interest in the community. For those neighbours who are already interested but still not active, it may represent the opportunity to meet the community activists as well as to become aware of the work going on in their area. Other locals may be encouraged to join current activists as a result of the celebration of the goals achieved. At the same time, this may have a different function for the activists as it may form the acknowledgement of their work and consequently encourage them to keep being involved. Furthermore, the possible involvement of other local people in those activities has indirect positive effects on the activists as it may enhance the supportive role of the community towards the work of the activists.

The activists' accounts seem to show that their interest in the community has its roots in their up-bringing. In some cases the family encouraged it, and in others the interest was more generally derived from a background characterized by a culture of interest in people and environmental issues. In order to motivate the involvement of new people in those communities, the stimulation of the development of interest would seem to present more of a challenge. Indeed, some of the participants stress that the change of people's attitudes requires enormous effort. At the same time, finding a strategy to raise the interests of residents and their attitudes towards the community may be important in the

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[7] 'Intervention', here is being used as a term to encompass action for the future: action that is grounded in local people's lived realities and implemented by them (with outside support and resources) where possible.

long term. If more residents got interested in local community work, the younger generations may grow up in an atmosphere that would encourage their interest. The success of interventions at this level may be the most difficult part to achieve. At the same time, these kinds of interventions may have more relevant advantages and long term positive implications.

The accounts of the activists collected through the interview provide evidence of the central role of their subjective experience of community work which seems to influence their motivations and their views about the community. The community experiences of the activists seem to be a possible source of satisfaction as they increase their motivation to continue their work. At the same time, there are frustrating experiences that might discourage their involvement. Those contributions may be a useful source of information for interventions to help activists in continuing their work. There is a clear need for activists to be supported in their work. Some interventions for increasing satisfying experiences as well as for the compensation of the frustrating experiences may affect the level of support perceived by the activists. Those interventions may aim to influence the support coming from the community, effectiveness of the activists' team work, as well as the collaboration between activists and local authorities and professionals.

In order to influence the relationship between activists and other people in their community, interventions should help develop other residents' sensitivity towards and support of the work of the activists. We already saw the possible effects of interventions directed to the community on the community itself. We also saw that the same interventions may indirectly influence the activists' work. Interventions that aim to encourage the recognition of activists' work by other residents may represent an important source of moral support for active people. Furthermore, the same kind of intervention may encourage other people to get involved and consequently may become practical support for the work of the activists. Furthermore, a commitment to protect the improvements in the community achieved through the work of the activists may help to reduce frustrating experiences. For example, preventing damage to the environmental work done by the activists might be a morale booster for them. Even when wider interventions in the community are not possible, the increased attention of

local professionals, authorities and residents may avoid the activists becoming resentful. At the same time, those community improvements achieved may last longer.

The activists' team or local group may become a focus for interventions. Some interventions to facilitate collaboration within the activists' group may help them to value the role and the work of each member of their team as well as to improve their capability to communicate. The development of new skills for listening and expressing themselves might help the members make the most of the capacities within their group. Models of communication that allow each member to share their pressures and ideas with the others as well as respect the other people's needs are needed. This kind of intervention may increase the effectiveness of collaboration within the team, at the same time lead to the work being more satisfying and less stressful. Furthermore, an intervention to facilitate the positive functioning of the group may indirectly widen its capacity to deal with the frustration of its members. Frustrations experienced by members could be expressed within the group, and become a source of support.

Another possible target of intervention may be greater collaboration with the local authorities and professionals. First of all, an increase of the willingness of all parties collaboration would be useful. The accounts collected show the concern of the activists to collaborate with local councillors and professionals, a collaboration which is currently marred by histories of poor relationships and negative experiences. Activists perceive a lack of interest in achievements of the community work on the part of professionals. Some means of improving the understanding of the local authorities towards the work of the activists may be useful. It may also represent a direct test of their interest in and availability for active people, as well as an opportunity for them to give their accounts. The presence of an open attitude from both groups is essential, but can only be built over time. These kinds of interventions may increase the effectiveness of the authorities and public services, as well as activist's action in the community. In fact, the combined efforts of the two groups and their effective collaboration would affect the quality of their work. If professionals and activists worked together well, they would probably achieve greater development of the community. At the same time, an effective collaboration may have advantages

for the activists, through the reduction of the frustrations they currently derive from their dealings with local authorities.

Improving the collaboration between activists and local authorities does not diminish the activists' role of challenging the status quo. Being an activist involves reporting to the relevant authorities the problems of the community and giving them some feedback from the community. Effective collaboration would still leave room for activists to play their role with responsibility and to challenge the work of the professionals.

It is the local authorities and professionals that should take the lead in committing to, and ensuring positive collaboration with the activists, as they are paid to represent the residents and their needs. At the same time, it may be the case that some of the activists' negative attitudes (born from their past experiences) may be obstructing a functional relationship with the professionals.

APPENDIX 1

First version of the interview

1. MOTIVATION
   - When did you get involved in community work?
   - What is it that differentiates people who are active, like, you and these who are not?
   - What are the values that underpin your work?
   - Do you think your family model favoured your involvement in the community? How?
   - Is religion relevant for your experience in the community? How?
   - What is it changed in your life after starting community work?
   - How do you fell to be involved in community work?

2. DIFFICULTIES AND CONFLICTS IN COMMUNITY WORK
   - How easy is it to work with others?
   - May conflicts come up in the collaboration with others? If yes, what are the conflicts that come up between you and others?
   - What are the difficulties in your collaboration with others and how may these be overcome?

3. When people stop to be active in their communities, why is it?

4. What are other people around here like? Which pressures do they have?

5. What are professionals around here like? How do they treat residents?

6. What do you think about the services settled in your community?

7. How might services be helped for doing a better work?

8. How might the services support people in working in your community?

9. Have you ever considered your community work as a waste of time? Why did you (or other people) think that the involvement in the community is a waste of time?

10. Should community work be recognised? How?
    - Should it be recognised by the community itself?
    - Should it be recognised through a pay?
    - Should it be recognised by local authorities?

11. Do you think that community work is political? If yes, in what ways?

APPENDIX 2

Second version of the interview

| |
|---|
| 1) Can you talk us about your formal or/and informal involvement in community work? |
| MOTIVATION |
| 2) When did you get involved in community work?

3) When did your interest or curiosity in your community start?
 ➢ Would you say that you were interested in your community also before your direct involvement?

4) Can you recognise something in your life (events, problems, people) or in your education that encouraged your engagement in community work?
 ➢ Do you think your family favoured your commitment in the community? How?
 ➢ Is religion relevant for your experience of community work? How?

6) What are the values that underpin your community work?

7) What are the differences between people who are active and these who are not?

8) Did your life change after starting community work?
 ➢ Has something changed in your everyday life? (busyness, time for partner or friends, ext)
 ➢ Can you identify some negative and some positive aspects in your experience of community work?

9) How do you feel to work in the community?
 ➢ Can you describe your experience of community work using some emotional adjectives? (examples anger, frustration, satisfaction, feeling to be useful) |
| DIFFICULTIES AND CONFLICTS |
| 10) How easy is it working with others? The word "Others" includes:
 ➢ other community activists;
 ➢ authorities and professionals (councillors, police, ext)
 ➢ non active residents of your community |

11)   May conflicts come up working with others? If yes, which kind of conflicts?

- ➢ Conflicts with other community workers;
- ➢ Conflicts with authorities and institution;
- ➢ Conflicts with not active people of community

12) Do you consider possible overcoming those difficulties and conflicts?

  IF THE ANSWER IS YES:
- ➢ How may difficulties and conflicts be overcome?

  IF THE ANSWER IS NOT ALWAYS:
- ➢ What are the difficulties and conflicts that may be overcome?
- ➢ What are the difficulties and conflicts that may not be overcome?
- ➢ What are the obstacles in overcoming those difficulties and conflicts?

  IF THE ANSWER IS NOT:
- ➢ Why cannot difficulties and conflicts be overcome?
- ➢ What are the obstacles in overcoming those difficulties and conflicts?

13) When the people stop to be active in their communities, why is it?

14) Do you think that something might and/or should be done to help active people to carry on their work?

VIEW OF THE AREA

15) What are other people around here like? What are their pressures?

16) What are professionals around here like? How do they treat residents?

17) What do you think about services settled in your community?

18) How might services be helped for doing a better work?

19) How might services support people in working in your community?

20) Have you ever considered your work in the community as a waste of time? Why did you (or other people) think that community work is a waste of time?

21) Should community work be recognised? How?

- ➢ Should it be recognised by the community itself?
- ➢ Should it be recognised through a pay
- ➢ Should it be recognised by the authorities

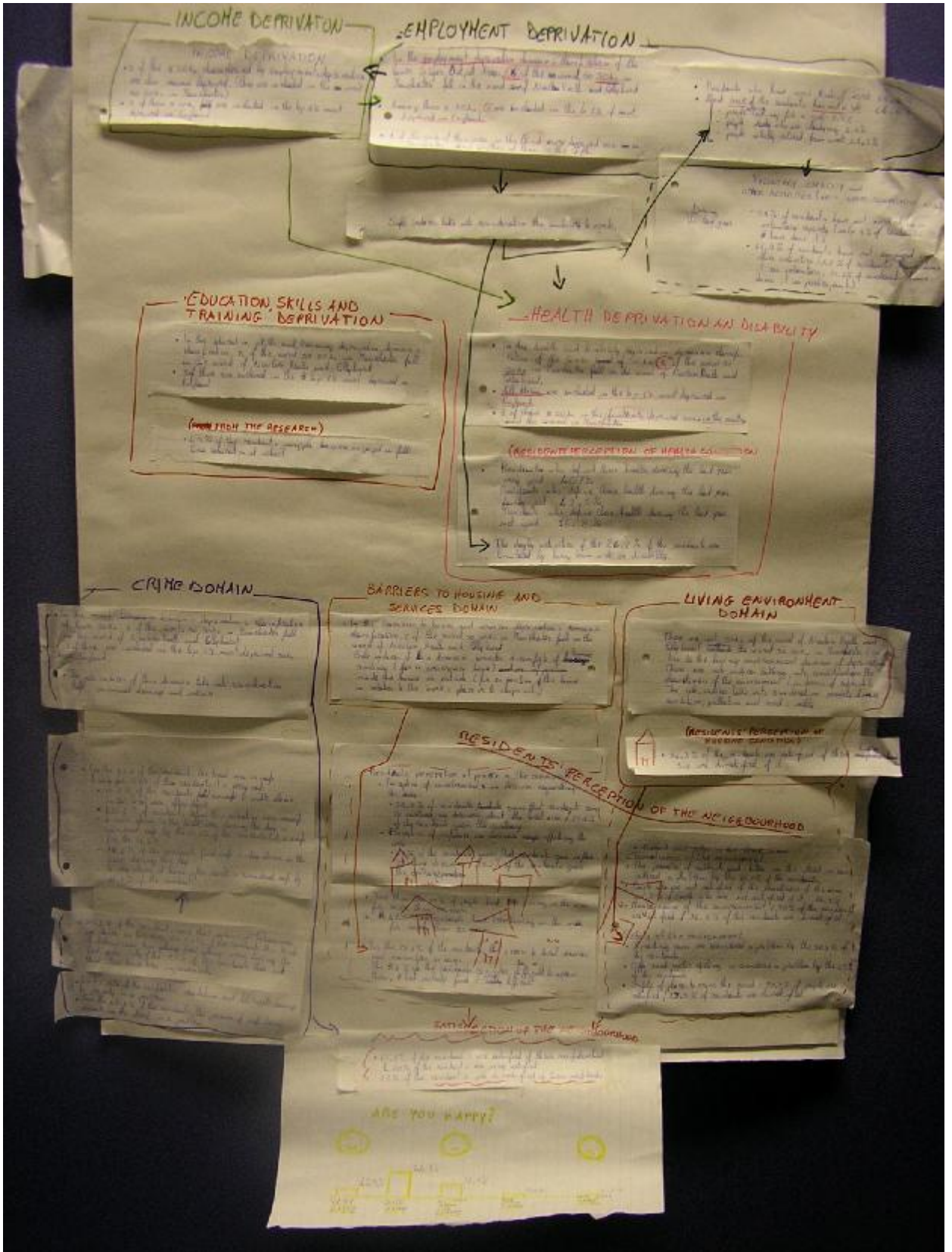22) Do you think that community work is political? In which ways?

Chart 1. Organisation of the information collected through the interviews
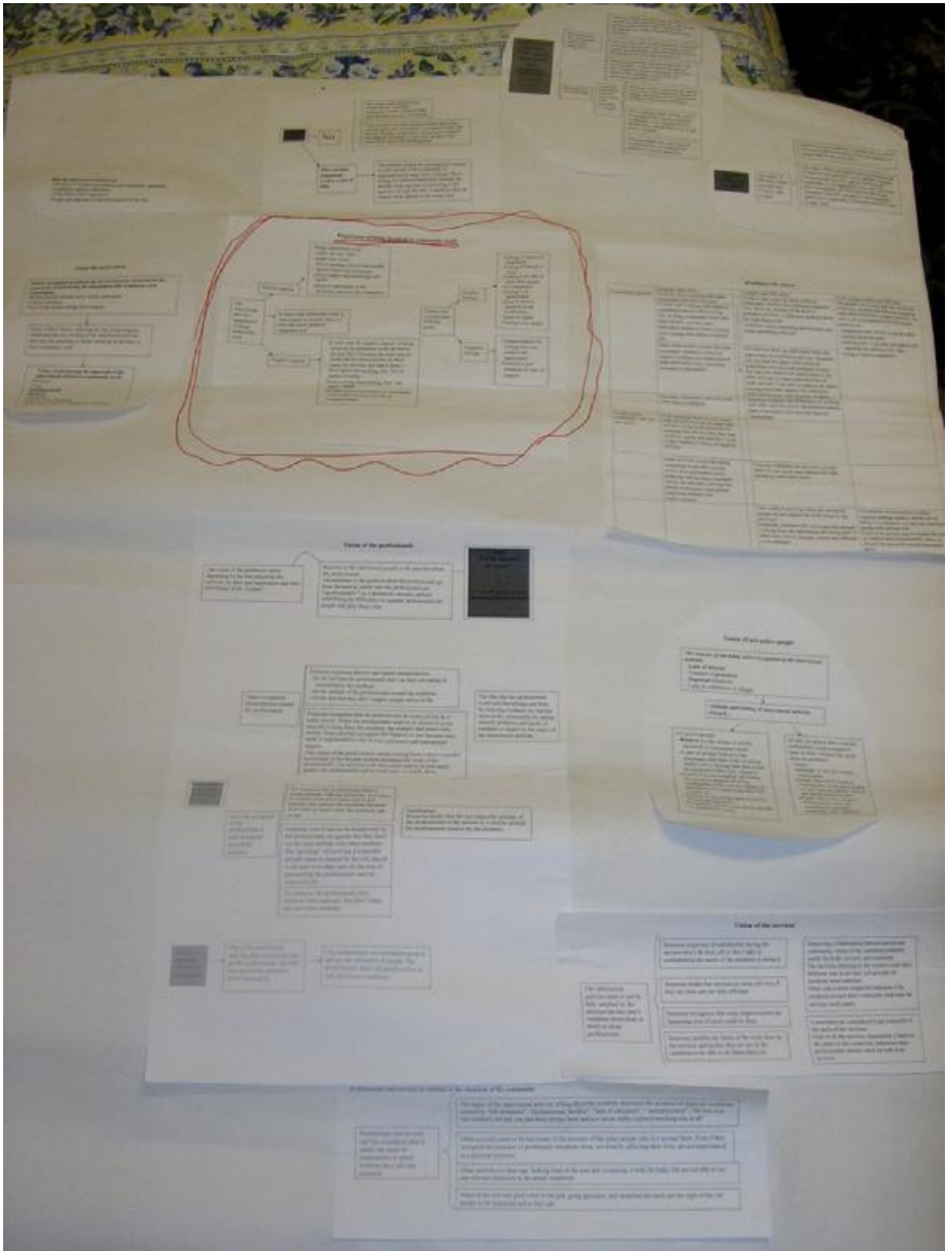
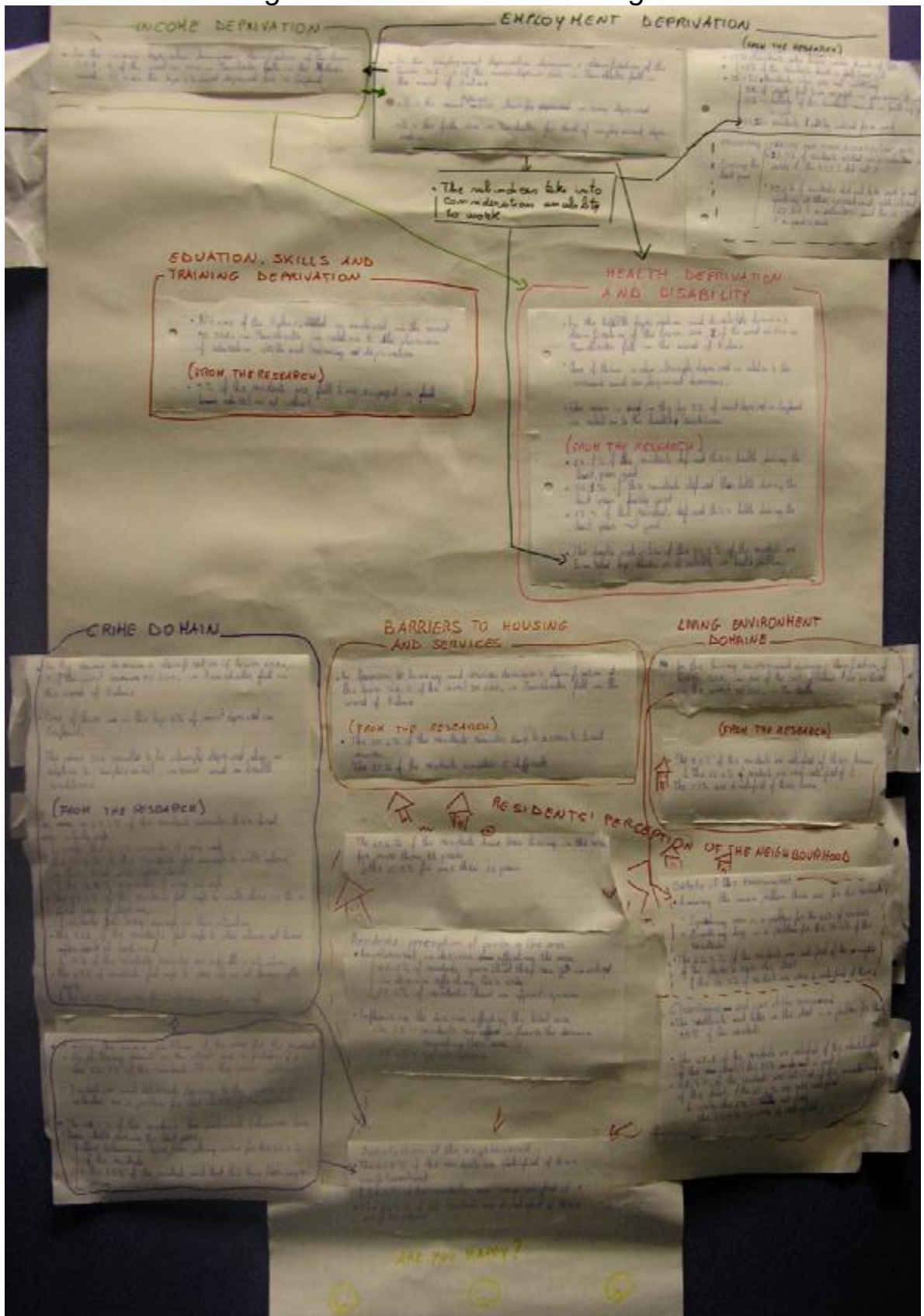*Chart 2. Organisation of the data relating to the ward of Collyhurst and Newton Heath*

Chart 3. Organisation of the data relating to Hulme

Reflective Account by Simona Raschini[8]

My participation in the "Community activists' project" had many meanings for me.

First of all, it forced me to improve my English, as in order to carry out the project, I needed to face many difficulties with the language. Also the collaboration with Angela, as well as understanding the interviews' contents and writing this report, required my commitment to overcome the limitations of my language. My first important result was the improvement of my English. I think the project helped it. At the beginning, communication with Angela, who was really patient with me, and the transcription of the interviews were really hard. With practice, I got used to those activities even when I would still not say that they were easy for me. At this phase, I felt I could also do with improving my written English.

My collaboration on this project also meant that I had to learn about community work and community psychology practice. I was new to the work of the activists which was a new field and different from my past experiences as a volunteer. The project gave me the opportunity to discover and to learn about community work from the direct experiences of the activists. Instead of studying the many aspects of people's involvement in their community from some books, I had the chance to meet them. I could hear the main protagonists' stories with my own ears and see the effects of their work in their community with my own eyes, as well as learn from their experiences. The direct contact with those activists gave me also the opportunity to satisfy my curiosities and to study deeper the aspects of their experiences that I found most interesting. Learning about community work through this project was a pleasure for me, and enabled me to link theory with lived experience.

Again, this project implied the use of methodologies of research that I knew only from my academic books. During the university courses I practiced quantitative methods of research but I only knew the theory of qualitative methods. When I arrived to the Manchester Metropolitan University, I realised that my mind was

so trained to think in terms of probabilities that I found it difficult to approach qualitative methodology. I understood that I had the chance to fill in this gap and to learn some of the skills required for practice of new methods with which I was unfamiliar. I realised that this could increase my research abilities and I consequently wanted to make use of this opportunity. The acquisition of this research approach was not easy for me. It challenged the way I used to think. It required me to make my mind more flexible as this project involved the use of qualitative methods. Data were collected through interviews and treated through a content and thematic analysis. My participation required not only the acquisition of those research tools but also a more general understanding of the qualitative approach. I learned the advantages involving the planning of a study and use of information directly from contact with the participants combined with my experiences. At the same time, I could experience the difficulties arising from the choice of this methodology. For example, the part of the research that tried to find linkages and relationships between different aspects and different accounts highlighted by the data was challenging. I learned that the use of quantitative data and their analysis facilitated this part of the research. I now realise that my participation on the project changed my way of thinking about research: I now perceive people involved in the project as "participants" instead of "subjects".

My participation in the project also involved going to those places where activists live and do their work. Going to those areas opened my eyes and gave me a more grounded picture of the city of Manchester. I realised that next to some nice places to enjoy a night-out there are others where residents are scared to walk alone after dark. I saw that in the same city there were a lot of foreign students and low educated young people. In some areas, there are a lot of jobs opportunities and in others a high number of unemployed people. I could thus experience of the contradictions of this city. This city is really welcoming for students coming from abroad or other UK cities but at the same time it is a place where life is hard for some groups of residents.

Participation in the project implied the partnership between me and Angela, who is a community activist. I came out of the academic world, where everything is

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[8] This project was undertaken as part of a postgraduate community psychology placement undertaken by

organised, planned and expected and went in the activists' world. I found that the main characteristic of this reality was its unpredictability. If I now look back at the observations that I wrote after each interview, I can see that most of the time some unexpected events happened. I have always been used to planning my work and study activities. In order to adapt those habits to Angela's, I needed to be flexible and open to her initiatives and spontaneity. For me, it was a challenge as I had to rely more on improvising than that I used to. I understood that, in order to work with activists, I needed to be ready to organise myself at the last minute as well as to change plans and find new solutions when I needed. For me, managing and carrying on the project in a world without proper plans, catching the moments and opportunities was more the rule rather than the exception. This was not always easy and sometimes a source of stress. Now, at the end of the project, I realised that I learned to appreciate the ability to improvise, and the capability to feel the right thing to say or to do in unexpected situations. Also, sometimes those solutions seemed probably to be better solutions than the planned ones!

I have always been aware that I could learn a lot from the activists and through my experience with them. Now I feel that I did. I gained knowledge and skills from this project. Furthermore, I did this through emotional experiences. Sometimes I became happy and satisfied, other times angry and nervous. This project enriched me in many aspects and this may be the reason that I felt I had to give the most that I could, in terms of energy, commitment and time. In order to summarise the many meanings of my involvement, I would say that this experience required me to challenge myself to open my mind.

I would like to thank the participants for their tremendous contributions. And also, would like thank Carolyn because she gave me the opportunity to take part in this project. I am in particular grateful to Isabel for her help in writing the report. She did not have to help me but she did it because she wanted to. I thank Angela for her "formal" work as well as for her more "informal" help and for her patience with my language.

Simona, a postgraduate of Bologna University, Italy at Manchester Metropolitan University.

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