

ESRC Final Report

Autonomous Geographies: Activism and everyday life in the city

(RES-000-23-0957)

Paul Chatterton (University of Leeds) and Jenny Pickerill (University of Leicester)

Background

The major aim of the project was to *undertake a detailed investigation of the everyday aspects of the lives of activists in the city*. We intended to explore and support, through writing and participatory action research, different aspects of what we termed ‘**autonomous geographies**’ – those spaces where there is a questioning of the laws and social norms of society and a creative desire to constitute non-capitalist, collective forms of politics, identity, and citizenship.

This research grew out of our desire to interrogate the concept and practice of autonomous activism in the UK. Theoretically, it is situated within critical ideas of autonomy derived from the Greek *auto-nomos* meaning self-legislation, or self-management. This is an area which has received much attention since the emergence of what has been variously described as the anti-capitalist, or global social justice movements, with a huge range of subsequent writings on the ‘movement of movements’ (see Mertes, 2004; see George et al, 2001; Tormey, 2004; Notes from Nowhere, 2004; Callinicos, 2003; Lowes, 2007; Parker and Reedy, 2007). However there remained a need for a critical interrogation of the beliefs and actions of these kinds of activists as they are practiced in the UK.

Objectives

The **original aim** of the project was to look at how ‘autonomous geographies’ are created and recreated by activists in their everyday lives in the city. The project had four initial detailed research questions or objectives which stemmed from this aim:

1. *Identity*: To determine what are the core ideas, beliefs and visions expressed by autonomous groups and projects.
2. *Action*: To understand how such ideas are translated into action, especially in terms of everyday practices through gestures, tactics, actions, language and aesthetics.
3. *Spaces*: To explore what kinds of spaces are created for participation and different ways of belonging that are being created through autonomous spaces.
4. *Boundaries*: Finally, to examine what it means to live interstitially (in the spaces between), in contradictory and overlapping ways, and to cross such boundaries such as activism/ non-activism.

These were used throughout as guiding principles for our case study work. The aim and each research question were fully addressed. Qualitative data was gathered in each of the three case studies (Social Centres, Low Impact Developments, and the Save Little London Campaign) during interviews, participant observation and focus groups which explored the four research questions. These **findings are discussed in detail in the results section of this report**.

Methods

When we began the project we had understood autonomous activism in Britain as strongest in three areas: the *virtual*, through the online website Indymedia; the *local*, through legal and occupied social centres, and the *translocal*, through anticapitalist networks like Dissent! and Peoples Global Action. An advisory group was established of five activist-academics and five participants with activist backgrounds to help us refine the methodology and conceptual ideas. Through their advice we retained only one of the original case studies (social centres) and adopted two new case studies on Low Impact Development and tenants' struggles against housing privatisation (see section 7 of the final award report form). Table 1 summarises the three case studies.

Table 1: Summary of case study groups included in project

Groups	Structure and location	Aims of group	Justification for inclusion
Social Centres network	A detailed exploration of a network of activists in Newcastle attempting to set up a social centre, with additional material in 5 other locations, visits to 13, and conversations with the wider network.	To set up an autonomous, self-managed social centre including café, cinema, children's facilities, meeting space and library	It offers an understanding of how activists attempt to ground and translate anti-capitalist politics in particular places and embed creative alternatives
Lammas Low Impact Initiatives	A Swansea-based collective who operate through a non-hierarchical committee and broader membership base, as well as additional visits to five other locations	To establish an autonomous residential community which provides for all its own needs	It offers examples of self-managed, socially accessible communities which challenge the norms of house building and pricing, and the existing planning system
Save Little London Campaign	A Leeds-based coalition of tenants and anti-privatisation campaigners who operate independently from (but not in opposition to) the official tenants association of the neighbourhood	To stop the privatisation of housing services and the demolition of council housing, and fight for investment in public housing	It offers examples of self-managed, independent, grassroots struggles against capitalist enclosures of public services and land and community destruction, and insights into the tensions between state provision and non-capitalist alternatives.

This research was a deliberate political intervention into autonomous activism using the well established technique of participatory action research (see Kindon, Kesby and Pain, 2007). We sought to combine our scholar-activism work with academic research, seeing them as intrinsically connected. As we have documented elsewhere, our methodology has been complex and evolving (see Autonomous Geographies Collective, *submitted*). We worked closely with three very different groups – the Social Centres Network, Lammas Low-Impact Initiatives Ltd., and the Save Little London Campaign. Using a participatory approach we included each group in the design of the methodology and sought to respond to their needs. Our project had to negotiate the messy complexity of competing demands, and the uncertainties and inconsistencies within the groups and between ourselves as researchers. As a result, different methodological approaches emerged with the different groups. Lessons from this process are documented in our methods paper and provide valuable insights for other scholar-activists.

Nevertheless, across the three case study themes we conducted a total of 40 informal in-depth interviews and 10 focus groups, worked with groups in producing 5 research reports and

consultation documents, 2 accessible booklets for public dissemination, collaborated in the making of two short documentaries (EcoVillage Pioneers and Save Little London), conducted numerous site visits (visiting 13 social centres and five Low Impact Developments) and, most importantly, engaged in twelve months of meetings and immersion with the groups themselves. We turn now to briefly outline these three very different case studies.

Social Centres: Resisting, Creating and Embedding Alternatives

Social Centres are place projects which can be squatted, rented or co-operatively owned, and they include elements such as book shops, affordable café and bars, food co-operatives, free shops, space for meetings, cultural/political events and educational activities. What sets them apart from established community centres is a desire to be autonomous and self managed using direct forms of democracy. They have become key activist hubs for political organising and they value ‘horizontality’, cooperation and solidarity, and often ally with the notion of being ‘anti-capitalist’. They have gained added importance in the light of urban gentrification and the privatisation of city centres. Although the various centres throughout the UK have an identity as a network, discussions regarding their role and what they were trying to achieve were only just beginning. The aim of the case study was to better understand the social centres network, develop a clearer understanding of what autonomy and anti-capitalism meant in this context, and strengthen networks of support between centres.

Before the project began, we made contact with a small number of social centres in the UK to discuss the project and early feedback was generally positive. Two of the research team had an intimate personal involvement with the social centres network so boundaries within this case study had to be carefully managed. As a result of these links and this project, we became involved in organising a UK wide gathering of social centre projects (January 2006), and subsequent meetings at the annual London Anarchist Bookfair and in Bradford in early 2007, where plans were made for websites, network wide leaflets, an accessible booklet and better sharing of resources and events. We also visited 13 social centres, conducted five focus groups with participants from LARC (London), The Common Place (Leeds), Star and Shadow (Newcastle), 1 in 12 (Bradford) and OARC (Oxford), and kept a research diary throughout. We spent one month intensively engaging with a particular group in Newcastle who were attempting to set up a social centre. This allowed us to explore the ideas, values and practices of the group as they attempted to build a project.

As part of this case study, we co-produced a number of resources: a ‘reader’ of academic articles about social centres that was distributed to each centre; an analysis of social centres in the form of an accessibly written pamphlet of which 1,000 copies were distributed to social centres, bookshops and independent cafes; and finally, a collaborative booklet (What’s this place?) which was the pinnacle of this action-research as it allowed different social centres to tell their story in their own words. It was accessibly written, heavily illustrated and published online to aid dissemination.

Sustainable Living and Living Autonomously: the Lammas Low Impact Settlement Project

Low Impact Development (LID) is a form of living where houses are built from recycled, local, and natural products, and livelihoods are made in sustainable ways from the land. They have low visual impact by blending with their surroundings. They are often small scale – creating a direct link between their occupants, their needs, and their waste. It is a radical holistic approach which is concerned with personal and emotional sustainability and education as well as seeking to provide more affordable housing options. They are

autonomous in the sense that they often located at distance from mains supplies of water, electricity or sewage.

The study of a residential community was core to understanding both the problems and potentials of living autonomously. LIDs often have an engagement strategy that includes educational outreach and the invitation of others into their community which complicates their autonomy and extends their impact. Although thus far LIDs have been built in rural areas they employ approaches and principles which can be applied in urban settings, they challenge the fundamentals of house building and pricing, and the existing planning system.

Lammas is a Low Impact Development proposal for south west Wales and became our core case study. They were proposing to build a LID of 25 eco-smallholdings on farmland near Glandwr, Pembrokeshire. This settlement was to be autonomous by creating livelihoods from the land. It is one of the true pioneering examples of a group seeking greater autonomy and they were deliberately seeking links with education professionals to aid in support, research and outreach. Collaboration with the group involved participation in meetings, researching and writing four reports in support of their planning application, helping co-ordinate a public consultation meeting through which to hear local people's views of their proposal, and co-writing four magazine articles publicising their proposal to gain wider support. We also participated in the making of a film about LIDs (EcoVillage pioneers), helped design and print flyers to advertise their share sale, and financed the redesign of their website. In addition to working with Lammas we also visited five LIDs (Steward Woodland Community, Hockerton Housing Project, Brighton Earthship, Project X [a pseudonym], and Hill Holt Wood). In total we conducted nine interviews and wrote research diaries for each site visit.

Enclosure and Resistance in the Inner City: Housing Privatisation and Community Activism in Little London, Leeds

The aim of this case study engagement was to support community opposition to a housing regeneration scheme in an inner city estate called 'Little London' in Leeds. Leeds City Council had, for many years, been proposing regeneration in this marginalised neighbourhood on the northern edge of the recently regenerated city centre. Their choice of funding was via a Private Finance Initiative (PFI). It is an important case in a study of autonomous activism because it is a prime fight against privatisation and thus about protecting more collective, public spaces from enclosure. Moreover, unlike the other case studies it was located in a working-class community, where autonomous anti-capitalist politics was not the norm and thus part of the campaign became about supporting self-organised resistance among working class communities.

The methodology for this case study was geared towards encouraging social change by challenging the Private Finance Initiative. One of our aims was to bring different groups together across the estate and stop them working in isolation. To do so we worked closely with the Little London Tenants and Residents Association (LLTRA). We participated in the Save Little London Campaign by helping to produce newsletters, websites, leaflets, running public meetings, helping to organise a public lobby of the Council, banner-making, holding an 'alternative consultation', writing short papers for LLTRA, and eventually becoming 'Community Advisor' to LLTRA. We worked with the local media by writing press releases and set-up a campaign website. We also led the production of a complaint to the Local Government Ombudsman. This was more than just a passive participation but involved leading discussions and at times the direction of the campaign. We conducted 20 interviews of tenants and some council officers and five focus groups. Our work with the Save Little London Campaign has since developed into a city-wide housing campaign, Hands Off Our

Homes, which brings together tenants and residents of all affected regeneration areas of Leeds.

Results

Using these three different case studies we identified how everyday activist practices attempt to (or in some cases fail to) create autonomous geographies through challenging capitalist social relations and embedding alternatives. Reflecting on the three case studies, below we summarise the key findings from our four research questions (for results from the case studies see 'non-technical summary').

(a) What are the core ideas, identities and visions expressed by autonomous groups and projects?

Based on our empirical work we identified three recurring themes in this research question: *pragmatism*, *complexity*, and *professionalism*. First, we found Melucci's (1996) work convincing, that activists act in the present and hence are as much goal and project orientated as interested in movement building. We found activists committed to working towards goals or particular needs, but there were clear discursive differences. Some were motivated by a well established DIY ethic (see Trapese, 2007; McKay, 1998) and an explicit rejection of state and capital, while others, especially tenant organisers, rarely evoked such ideas. In all three cases, there was a desire for more networking and strategising, but time commitments to maintaining projects and campaigns undermined this.

Second, this pragmatism reveals a complex articulation of political ideals which rejects overly fixed or dogmatic debates. Our work resonates with recent post structural interpretations of radical identities (through the work of Doel, 1999; Day, 2005; May, 1994, and Newman, 2007) which stresses the rejection of fixed, essentialist ideals and identities. Instead we found messy, complex and multiple identities - always in the process of becoming and moving forward through experimentation and negotiation (see Gibson-Graham, 2006; Whatmore, 1997; Castree, 2003). Rather than seen as a constraint, this lack of definition was seen as an opportunity to let ideas develop organically. Thus many sought to articulate activism as part of their everyday life, avoiding dogmatic anti-state approaches (see Holloway, 2002) that fixes them to a particular political identities and which might alienate supporters. Where labels such as anti-capitalism were used, they were not a given for participation.

Finally, activists have adopted a less defined, and often more professional identity in recent years to enable them to negotiate with official bodies and to reach out to wider groups. In contrast to the more hard-edged macho activist identity prevalent during the anti-roads protest years (Anderson, 2003) many activists adopt a more fluid identity, to the extent of claiming 'we are not activists' (Chatterton, 2005). This activist self-critique is also an attempt to translate activism to the everyday in an accessible way, and to embrace a plurality politics which comes through engagement. As such there has been an explicit attempt to turn activist identities outwards and engage with others in a less confrontational and aggressive manner.

(b) How are such ideas translated into action?

Activists translate their ideas into action at many levels through gestures, tactics, actions, language and aesthetics. There are three themes of interest here – *resilience*, *implementation* and *legibility*. First, these everyday actions represent unstructured but purposeful attempts to embed new resilient competencies which give ideas such as autonomy and self management meaning in practice. Many activists considered their actions as essential survival tactics which increase resilience and adaptation in the face of perceived ecological and social problems

(Homer Dixon, 2006). Many activists embarked on project building through a personal concern for future viability and personal survival as they regarded essential infrastructure or services such as community cohesion, affordable and ecological housing, or welfare services for the most marginal neither widespread nor robust enough.

Second, despite the use of strong principles such as collectivism, self management and consensus, activists struggled to define them in practice. Thus there was often an aesthetics of consensus and horizontal organising that rarely explored underlying principles and implications (Fisher, 2000). Many groups did attempt to give more substance to such soft infrastructure through workshops in consensus decision making and facilitation. However, problems such as unequal power relations, the function of sharing and co-operation, and the fundamental acceptance of freedom as individuals were under scrutinised. Problems remain such as a lack of clear understanding of the principles and techniques of consensus and self management, egotistical individualism and meeting fatigue. There remain real perceptual barriers to the translation of such ideas into traditional working-class political contexts. The sheer amount of organisation that occurs and impact upon activist energy and direction is also a key finding from all our case studies.

Finally, a core aim for many activists was to translate their ideas into visions that would be legible to others and all case studies were committed to creating networks. There was mixed success here. All the case studies valued 'outreach' activities and worked hard to communicate their ideas to new audiences. But they all also illustrated the difficulties of communicating the often-complex ideas of autonomy, self-management and direct resistance in a language that is non threatening and comprehensible. At the same time, activists showed constant attempts to innovate with new ways to translate ideas through marketing, group process or new web 2.0 technologies.

(c) Are new kinds of spaces for political participation and identity created by autonomous praxis, and if so how?

A key element of translating ideas into actions was through the creation of spaces which would facilitate political participation and new ways of belonging. There are three themes here: *permanence, localisation and community*, and *multi-scalarity*. First, all case studies showed a strong desire for a greater control of space and many activists in the last decade have sought more stable and long-term spaces, alongside, and even instead of, temporary moments of resistance and alterity. Thus rather than relying on the vulnerability of squats, social centres have been established in rented or owned buildings, and LIDs are applying for formal planning permission rather than risk being evicted from their land. This permanency has implications. Norms of participation can develop that create boundaries against newcomers, and yet permanency can enable longer-term collaborations with local communities to be developed and also allows place projects to act both as safe spaces for retreat and reflection and for the incubation of ideas. Many activists used the idea of the commons as the spatial grounding of their desire for autonomy and self management (de Angelis, 2007: Midnight Notes, 1990).

Second, in many of these projects there is a persuasive localisation above a regard for extra-local politics. In some instances this localisation appears to actively advocate disconnection, such as the need to be self reliant and meet local needs. But rather than a simple inverted sense of place which rejects its relational construction (Massey, 2004) there is also a complex set of choices at work here, through a defensive localism that seeks to protect gains in particular places (Escobar, 2001). Through this localisation activists sought to recreate a sense of community (see also Melucci, 1996; Tarrow, 1998). This is illustrated by the new

settlement proposed by Lammas, the strong place identity of social centres, and attempts in Little London to reclaim community spaces to resist the PFI scheme.

Third, in autonomous political projects we can see strong, if fragile and neglected, multi-scalarity. Groups such as Lammas understood their place in broad debates of autonomy and sustainability and actively sought to expand their ideals to other places. For social centres there was a desire to federate and link between local projects, and campaigners in Little London were quick to see the potential of a broader city-wide campaign which would aid their own cause. Activists evoke this interlinking of different local places as a form of solidarity which must be embodied through experiences and mutuality to have meaning (Sundberg, 2007). What we found was a desire for multi-scale solidarity, but less evidence of its actual implications, especially at a broader international level (see also Routledge *et al.*, 2007).

(d) What does it mean to live in interstitial, contradictory and overlapping spaces?

In translating ideas into action and creating spaces for resistance activists cross boundaries, both perceived and real. There are three issues in this final research question: *segregation*, *tactical necessity* and *interstitiality*. First, while a lack of interaction with wider society is a repeated concern for autonomous activists, segregation and the retreat to activist 'safe' spaces does still hold huge appeal (see also Doherty, Wall and Plows, 2001). Moreover, both social centres and LIDs still have perceptual barriers to overcome as ghettoised subcultural spaces and there exist real differences of tactics and ideals amongst groups on the political left. Second, many struggled against such ghettoisation through active boundary crossing and outside engagements with more traditional groups, such as trade unions, tenant groups and Non Government Organisations. Thus boundary crossing becomes a political tactic for many which ensures the long-term viability of their campaigns and projects.

Third, defining actual boundaries that are crossed becomes problematic, suggesting that inbetweenness (interstitiality) is ever-present rather than a fixed or momentary event. Rather than discrete opposites (capitalist/non-capitalist, autonomy/heteronomy) activist lives weave together shades of grey. The boundaries are messy and complex with no 'pure' activist space. Thus life becomes 'despite or within' capitalism rather than beyond it (Holloway, 2002). However, even if poorly defined, boundaries are still articulated and emotionally felt by many of those seeking to live autonomous politics and these ideas are still perceived as romantic and self-defeating by others (such as working class campaigners in Little London). At certain moments the gulf between ideals and reality can appear huge and confounding, and the more oppositional and utopian these spaces become the greater and more difficult boundary crossing becomes. The Little London case study also highlighted a rejection of boundary crossing in preference for the safety of traditional state-based public service provision.

Activities

We have engaged in a broad range of activities:

Type	Title	Host	Location	Date
Invited academic seminars	Indymedia and contested understandings of participation on-line	Department of Media	Bournemouth University	February, 2005
	Finding the future in the present: Towards the autonomous city	Which Urban Crisis - Whose Urban Opportunity? workshop	Technical University of Berlin	November, 2005
	Notes towards autonomous geographies: creation, resistance and self management as survival tactics	School of Geography	Universities of Oxford, Liverpool and Swansea	February, 2006
	Do it yourself: a politics for changing our world	ESRC Local anti-neoliberalism seminar series	Glasgow University	November, 2006
	What do we want Resistance Studies to do?	Launch of the Resistance Studies Network	Gothenburg University, Sweden	June, 2007
	An Alternative Housing Strategy for Scotland	A day's symposium by the School of Geosciences	University of Edinburgh	October, 2007
	Autonomous spaces and social centres: Lessons for developing and deepening anti-capitalist urban strategies	'Utopian Property' ESRC seminar series	London	November, 2007
	Activism and Social Change: the Role of Critical Geography	Universidad Autonoma de Barcelona	Barcelona	May 2008
Presentations	Una geografía de la autonomía: El activismo y la vida cotidiana en la ciudad/ <u>Autonomous Geographies: Activism and everyday life in the city</u>	International Critical Geography Conference	Mexico City	January, 2005
	Activism and everyday life in the city	'Contesting capitalism' workshop	Leicester University	May, 2005
	<u>Living autonomously? Land, housing, food, and energy</u>	Royal Geographical Society-IBG Annual Conference	London	August, 2006
	Autonomous spaces and social centres: Lessons for developing and deepening anti-capitalist urban strategies	Association of American Geographers Annual Conference	San Francisco	April, 2007
	Making strategic interventions	Giving Back Session, Royal Geographical Society-IBG Annual Conference	London	August, 2007
Event organisation: Academic conference sessions	Organisers of Conference Session 'Making autonomous Geographies. Inspiring and participating in social change from inside and outside the academy'	Royal Geographical Society-IBG Annual Conference	London	August, 2006
	Organisers of a Panel Session 'Activism, autonomy and alternatives: Putting theory into practice and practice into theory'	Association of American Geographers Annual Conference	San Francisco	April, 2007

Event organisation: Public Meetings	'Leeds City Council: Hands off our Homes'	Rupert Beckett Lecture Theatre, University of Leeds	Leeds	May, 2006
	'Our homes are not for sale: challenging privatisation in Leeds'	Little London Community Primary School	Leeds	July, 2006
	'Little London Private Finance Initiative: what happens next?'	Little London Community Primary School	Leeds	December, 2006
	'Leeds Housing Crisis: why isn't regeneration delivering affordable homes?'	Rupert Beckett Lecture Theatre, University of Leeds	Leeds	February, 2007
Exhibitions	Photography Exhibition of Social Centres	The Common Place Social Centre	Leeds	February, 2006
	Photography Exhibition of Social Centres	Kebele Social Centre	Bristol	May 2006
	Photography exhibition on Eco-housing and Low Impact Developments	Launch of the Centre for Environmental Research	Leicester	October, 2007
Workshops and other talks	Building a social centres network	Camp for Climate Action	Selby	August, 2006
	UK Social Centres	London Anarchist bookfair	London	November, 2006
	Low Impact Living	Spring into Action activist workshops	Nottingham	April, 2007
	The privatisation of Leeds	Leeds NAFTHE	Chapel Allerton, Leeds	June, 2007
	Leeds housing crisis	Alliance for Green Socialism	Chapel Allerton, Leeds	August, 2007
Networking	Dissemination of material about Little London campaign	INURA Conference: Transformation, survival and emancipation in a world city.	London	June, 2007

Outputs

We have produced a broad range of outputs from this project. Wherever possible we have co-written this with participants of the groups and have written one under a collective name.

Key academic publications

As a result of the project we have published/submitted **nine research papers in academic peer-reviewed journals** (*Progress in Human Geography*, *Antipode* (2), *City*, *ACME*, *the Journal of Geography in Higher Education*, *Geography Compass*, and *Urban Studies* (2)), and we are compiling a **special issue in the journal *Antipode*** on the theme of 'Autonomy'. Selected key articles include (see ESRC Society Today return for full list):

- * Pickerill, J and Chatterton, P (2006), 'Notes towards autonomous geographies: creation, resistance and self-management as survival tactics', *Progress in Human Geography*, 30, 6, 730-746.
- * Chatterton, P (*forthcoming*) Autonomous spaces and social centres. Developing and deepening anti-capitalist urban politics? *Urban Studies*. Invited contribution for special issue on urban politics.

- * The Autonomous Geographies Collective. (*submitted*). Making Strategic Interventions: The Messy but Necessary World of Scholar Activism Inside, Outside and Against the Neoliberal University. *ACME*
- * Hodkinson, S (*submitted*) Housing Regeneration and the Private Finance Initiative in Leeds (UK): The New Urban Enclosures?' *Urban Studies*.
- * Pickerill, J and Maxey, L. (*submitted*). Geographies of sustainability: Eco-architecture, radical ruralities and Low Impact Development. *Geography Compass*.

Key non-academic publications

- * **Magazine articles** have been published in *Red Pepper* (including a special issue on housing guest edited by Hodkinson), *The Land*, *Sustainability magazine*, *Permaculture magazine*, *Big Issue in the North*, *Green Socialist*, *Home@Leeds*, (Magazine of Leeds Tenants Federation) and *The Yorkshire and Humber Regional Review*.
- * **An accessible and illustrated booklet** documenting stories from the case study on social centres titled 'What's this place?' as well as a small pamphlet which was disseminated to UK social centres.
- * **Supporting documentation** in the form of a formal statement to Local Government Ombudsman prepared by the project team for a local tenants group.
- * **Reports in support of planning applications** were research and written for Lammas on local economic activity in Glandwr and its surrounds (2006), Lammas public meeting, Glandwr, Wales (2006), Social and Economic Status of Crymych area, Wales (2006) and Marketing of Produce (2007).

Dissemination

As detailed in the Award Report Form we have engaged in a broad variety of dissemination activities that have included involvement in workshops and event organisation, reports and newsletters, a documentary video on low impact developments, photography exhibitions, and articles in regional newspapers.

Websites

The **Autonomous Geographies website** @ <http://www.autonomousgeographies.org/> formed the bedrock of the project and the main public face for dissemination. It is an ongoing, live resource and it features information on the project, the advisory panel, our publications, RSS feeds to relevant topics areas, resources (including video clips), our project 'frequently asked questions', a glossary and contact details. We have also contributed towards:

- * the Lammas website @ <http://www.lammas.org.uk/>
- * the website for 'What's this place? Stories for UK Social centres in the UK and Ireland' developed jointly with members of the social centres network @ <http://www.socialcentrestories.org.uk>
- * *The Save Little London website* @ <http://www.savelittlelondon.co.uk>
- * *The Hands Off Our Homes website* @ <http://www.handsoffourhomes.org.uk>

Datasets

We can confirm that we are in the process of depositing six selected anonymised transcripts from each case study with the ESRC data archive.

Impacts

The strength of this project is that it has had impacts not just in terms of theory, but also in practice, application and policy. Across the three case studies, the research has been used in a variety of ways:

1. *Theory*: We have made a **major contribution to the discipline of critical human geography** through the concept of ‘autonomous geographies’ which has developed a rigorous socio-spatial exploration of contemporary autonomous activism in the UK. This has built on existing debates on post-capitalist and activist politics (see Gibson-Graham, 2006; Routledge, 2000; Fuller and Kitchen, 2004; Featherstone, 2003). We have critically explored associated themes such as participatory research, activism, autonomy, the privatisation of space, and the potentials and limits of self management. These ideas have been explored at conferences and published through academic outputs, but also through magazine articles and our website reaching a broader public audience.
2. *Practice*: A key aim of our project was a participatory methodology which aimed to **empower those we were working with**. We achieved this in several ways:
 - a. Dissemination of the ideas of groups (for example, through Little London campaigning, aiding the Lammas website and leaflet production, and promoting social centres through an illustrated book);
 - b. In Little London our engagement with the local community activists has arguably helped them to push the Council into scaling down the amount of demolitions and privatisation.
 - c. Increased spaces of engagement between groups (for example, through promoting the Social Centres Network and helping form a city wide network in support of public housing with trade unionists and the local tenants federation in Leeds);
 - d. Creating methods for critical reflection of group practices (co-writing with members of case studies such as members of Lammas and social centres);
 - e. Longer term collaborations have begun as a result of this research (Pickerill is to continue working with Lammas on low impact projects, Chatterton and Hodkinson have launched a Masters Programme ‘Activism and Social Change’; Hodkinson is active in local and UK housing campaigns);
 - f. Providing visible resources and frameworks for researchers, students and campaigners looking at self management, activism and campaigning.
3. *Application*: Much of our work has been **used by the groups we worked with** to support their activities, for example:
 - a. A planning application was submitted (and resubmitted after initial rejection) by Lammas using research and support by Pickerill;
 - b. A Judicial Review application, and a formal complaint to the Local Government Ombudsman, were submitted by Little London tenants with Hodkinson’s support and he has gained a reputation for assisting communities under threat of

privatisation or demolition, and has been inundated with queries from across the UK.

- c. Support was given to the social centres movement in terms of website development, publicity and meetings by Chatterton.

4. *Policy*: Our work has been **policy relevant** in a number of ways. We have:

- a. Helped shape the agenda for the validity of Low Impact Development through work with the Lammas case study;
- b. Created better understandings of how processes of urban regeneration and mechanisms such as Private Finance Initiatives are gentrifying communities and privatising public assets, through the lens of Little London;
- c. Created a clearer understanding of the potential for self-management within cities and how to respond to gaps in welfare provision through our case study on social centres, especially through the website and accessible book.

Future Research Priorities

There are several lines of research arising from this project with might be profitably pursued:

1. A further and more comprehensive programme of participatory co-enquiry regarding social centres, their limits, potentials and working practices would be extremely useful and has been voiced by social centre participants.
2. An examination of the potentials of urban Low Impact Developments could be conducted with other ongoing work on transition towns and the government-led eco-towns programmes.
3. Finally, continued research into the experience of council housing refurbishment under PFI, housing privatisation across Britain with particular reference to the future of the post-war welfare state, the role of regulatory bodies like Ombudsmen, and future strategies for tenants struggles.

Ethics

To guide the ethical approach of the project we used the British Sociological Association's Statement of Ethical Practice (see Appendix 2). Contacts and access for fieldwork was negotiated openly and overtly via snowballing through initial contacts. During fieldwork, the uses to which the fieldwork would be put and their right to confidentiality and to refuse to participate was made clear. Data collection was overt, interviews were undertaken through written or verbal consent and some accepted the offer (made to all) to remain anonymous. All data was kept on a password protected shared electronic file space managed at Leeds University.

Word count: 4,950 (excluding tables)

APPENDIX 1: BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Anderson, J (2003) The ties that bind? Self- and place-identity in Environmental direct action. *Ethics, place, environment*. Vol. 7. No 1. pp45-57.
- Callinicos, A (2003) *An anti-capitalist manifesto*. Cambridge, Polity Press.
- Castree N (2003) A post-environmental ethics? *Ethics, Place and Environment* 6 (1):3–12
- Chatterton, P (2005) 'Give up activism' and change the world in unknown ways. Or, learning to walk with others on uncommon ground. *Antipode*. 38(2) p259-282
- Day, R (2005) Gramsci is dead. Anarchist currents in the newest social movements. Pluto: London
- de Angelis, M (2007) *The beginning of history*. Pluto Press: London.
- Doel, M. (1999) *Poststructuralist Geographies: The Diabolical Art of Spatial Science*, London: Rowman & Littlefield
- Doherty, B, Plows, A and Wall, D (2001) *Comparing Radical Environmental Activism in Manchester, Oxford and North West Wales*. School of Politics, IR and the Environment: Keele University.
- Escobar, A. (2001) Culture sits in place: reflections on globalism and subaltern strategies of localization. *Political Geography*. Vol. 20. 139-174.
- Featherstone, David. 2003. Spatialities of transnational resistance to globalization: the maps of grievance of the Inter-Continental Caravan, *Transactions of the IBG*, 28, 404-421.
- Fisher J (2000) *Working with conflict: skills and strategies for action*, Zed Books: London.
- Fuller, D. and Kitchen, R. 2004. (eds) *Critical Theory/Radical Praxis: Making a Difference Beyond the Academy?* Vernon and Victoria, BC, Canada: Praxis e Press.
- George, S (2001) *Anti-capitalism: A Guide to the Movement*. Bookmarks: London.
- Gibson-Graham, J. K. (2006) *A postcapitalist politics*: Minneapolis.
- Holloway, J (2002) *Change the world without taking power*. London: Pluto.
- Homer-Dixon T (2006). *The Upside of Down: Catastrophe, Creativity, and the Renewal of Civilization*. Island Press. New York.
- Kindon S, Pain R and Kesby M. (2007) *Participatory action research approaches and methods: connecting people, participation and place*. Routledge, London
- Lowes, D (2007) *The anti capitalist Dictionary*. Zed Books: London.
- Mackay, G (1998) *DIY Culture party and protest in nineties' Britain*. London: Verso.
- Massey, D. (2004) Geographies of responsibility. *Geografiska Annaler*. 86 B 5-18
- May, T. (1994) *The Political Philosophy of Post-Structuralist Anarchism*, Pennsylvania: Penn State Press
- Melucci, A. (1996) *Challenging codes: Collective action in the information age*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- Mertes, T. 2004: *The movement of movements. A Reader*. Verso: London.
- Midnight Notes (1990) *The new enclosures*. Autonomedia. New York.
- Neuman, S. (2007) From Bakunin to Lacan: Anti-Authoritarian and the Dislocation of Power, Maryland: Lexington Books
- Notes From Nowhere eds.: 2003: *We Are Everywhere, the Irresistible Rise of Anti Capitalism*. Verso. London.
- Parker, M and Reedy, P (2007) *The Dictionary of Alternatives*. Zed Books: London.
- Routledge P. 2000. 'Our resistance will be as transnational as capital': Convergence space and strategy in globalising resistance' *GeoJournal* 52, 1, 25-33.
- Routledge, P., Cumbers, A. and Nativel, C. (2007) "Grassrooting Network Imaginaries: Relationality, Power, and Mutual Solidarity in Global Justice Networks", *Environment and Planning A*, 39(11) pp.2575-2592.
- Sundberg, J., 2007. 'Reconfiguring North-South Solidarity: Critical Reflections on Experiences of Transnational Resistance' *Antipode*, 39 (1), 144-166
- Tarrow, S. 1998: *Power in Movement: Social movements and Contentious Politics*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Tormey, S (2004) *Anti capitalism: a beginners guide*. One world: London.
- Trapese (2007) *DIY: a handbook for changing our world*. Pluto Press: London.

Whatmore, S (1997) Dissecting the autonomous self: hybrid cartographies for a relational ethics.
Environment and Planning D: Society and Space. 15. pp37-53.

APPENDIX 2: STATEMENT OF ETHICAL PRACTICE FOR THE BRITISH SOCIOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION. MARCH 2002

This statement is one of a set of Guidelines on a variety of fundamental aspects of professional sociology. The British Sociological Association gratefully acknowledges the use made of the ethical codes and statements of the Social Research Association, the American Sociological Association and the Association of Social Anthropologists of the UK and the Commonwealth.

- 1) The purpose of the statement is to make members aware of the ethical issues that may arise throughout the research process and to encourage them to take responsibility for their own ethical practice. The Association encourages members to use the Statement to help educate themselves and their colleagues to behave ethically.
- 2) The statement does not, therefore, provide a set of recipes for resolving ethical choices or dilemmas, but recognises that it will be necessary to make such choices on the basis of principles and values, and the (often conflicting) interests of those involved.
- 3) Styles of sociological work are diverse and subject to change, not least because sociologists work within a wide variety of settings. Sociologists, in carrying out their work, inevitably face ethical, and sometimes legal, dilemmas which arise out of competing obligations and conflicts of interest.
- 4) The following statement advises members of the Association about ethical concerns and potential problems and conflicts of interest that may arise in the course of their professional activities. The statement is not exhaustive but summarises basic principles for ethical practice by sociologists. Departures from the principles should be the result of deliberation and not ignorance.

The strength of this statement and its binding force rest ultimately on active discussion, reflection, and continued use by sociologists. In addition, the statement will help to communicate the professional position of sociologists to others, especially those involved in or affected by the activities of sociologists.

Professional Integrity

- 5) Sociological research is a valuable activity and contributes to the well-being of society. Members should strive to maintain the integrity of sociological inquiry as a discipline, the freedom to research and study, and to publish and promote the results of sociological research including making data available for the use of researchers in the future
- 6) Members have a responsibility both to safeguard the proper interests of those involved in or affected by their work, and to report their findings accurately and truthfully. They need to consider the effects of their involvements and the consequences of their work or its misuse for those they study and other interested parties. Sociologists should note that there are national laws and administrative regulations (for example Data Protection Acts, the Human Rights Act, copyright and libel laws) which may affect the conduct of their research, data dissemination and storage, publication, rights of research subjects, of sponsors and employers etc..
- 7) While recognising that training and skill are necessary to the conduct of social research, members should themselves recognise the boundaries of their professional competence. They should not accept work of a kind that they are not qualified to carry out. Members should satisfy themselves that the research they undertake is worthwhile and that the techniques

proposed are appropriate. They should be clear about the limits of their detachment from and involvement in their areas of study. (Also see 45.-47)

8) Social researchers face a range of potential risks to their safety. Safety issues need to be considered in the design and conduct of social research projects and procedures should be adopted to reduce the risk to researchers.

9) In their relations with the media, members should have regard for the reputation of the discipline and refrain from offering expert commentaries in a form that would appear to give credence to material that, as researchers, they would regard as comprising inadequate or tendentious evidence. (Also see 20.-24).

Relations with and Responsibilities towards Research Participants

10) Sociologists, when they carry out research, enter into personal and moral relationships with those they study, be they individuals, households, social groups or corporate entities.

11) Although sociologists, like other researchers are committed to the advancement of knowledge, that goal does not, of itself, provide an entitlement to override the rights of others.

12) Members should be aware that they have some responsibility for the use to which their data may be put and for how the research is to be disseminated. Discharging that responsibility may on occasion be difficult, especially in situations of social conflict, competing social interests or where there is unanticipated misuse of the research by third parties.

Relationships with research participants

13) Sociologists have a responsibility to ensure that the physical, social and psychological well-being of research participants is not adversely affected by the research. They should strive to protect the rights of those they study, their interests, sensitivities and privacy, while recognising the difficulty of balancing potentially conflicting interests.

14) Because sociologists study the relatively powerless as well as those more powerful than themselves, research relationships are frequently characterised by disparities of power and status. Despite this, research relationships should be characterised, whenever possible, by trust and integrity.

15) In some cases, where the public interest dictates otherwise and particularly where power is being abused, obligations of trust and protection may weigh less heavily. Nevertheless, these obligations should not be discarded lightly.

16) As far as possible participation in sociological research should be based on the freely given informed consent of those studied. This implies a responsibility on the sociologist to explain in appropriate detail, and in terms meaningful to participants, what the research is about, who is undertaking and financing it, why it is being undertaken, and how it is to be disseminated and used.

17) Research participants should be made aware of their right to refuse participation whenever and for whatever reason they wish.

18) Research participants should understand how far they will be afforded anonymity and confidentiality and should be able to reject the use of data-gathering devices such as tape recorders and video cameras.

19) Sociologists should be careful, on the one hand, not to give unrealistic guarantees of confidentiality and, on the other, not to permit communication of research films or records to audiences other than those to which the research participants have agreed.

20) Where there is a likelihood that data may be shared with other researchers, the potential uses to which the data might be put must be discussed with research participants and their consent obtained for the future use of the material.(iv). When making notes, filming or recording for research purposes, sociologists should make clear to research participants the purpose of the notes, filming or recording, and, as precisely as possible, to whom it will be communicated. It should be recognised that research participants have contractual and/or legal interests and rights in data, recordings and publications.

21) The interviewer should inform the interviewee of their rights under any copyright or data protection laws

22) Researchers making audio or video recordings should obtain appropriate copyright clearances

23) Interviewers should clarify whether, and if so, the extent to which research participants are allowed to see transcripts of interviews and field notes and to alter the content, withdraw statements, to provide additional information or to add glosses on interpretations

24) Clarification should also be given to research participants regarding the degree to which they will be consulted prior to publication. Where possible, participants should be offered feedback on findings, for example in the form of a summary report.

25) It should also be borne in mind that in some research contexts, especially those involving field research, it may be necessary for the obtaining of consent to be regarded, not as a once-and-for-all prior event, but as a process, subject to renegotiation over time. In addition, particular care may need to be taken during periods of prolonged fieldwork where it is easy for research participants to forget that they are being studied.

In some situations access to a research setting is gained via a 'gatekeeper'. In these situations members should adhere to the principle of obtaining informed consent directly from the research participants to whom access is required, while at the same time taking account of the gatekeepers' interest.

Since the relationship between the research participant and the gatekeeper may continue long after the sociologist has left the research setting, care should be taken not to compromise existing relationships within the research setting

26) It is, therefore, incumbent upon members to be aware of the possible consequences of their work. Wherever possible they should attempt to anticipate, and to guard against, consequences for research participants that can be predicted to be harmful. Members are not absolved from this responsibility by the consent given by research participants.

27) In many of its forms, social research intrudes into the lives of those studied. While some participants in sociological research may find the experience a positive and welcome one, for others, the experience may be disturbing. Even if not harmed, those studied may feel wronged by aspects of the research process. This can be particularly so if they perceive apparent intrusions into their private and personal worlds, or where research gives rise to false hopes, uncalled for self-knowledge, or unnecessary anxiety.

28) Members should consider carefully the possibility that the research experience may be a disturbing one and should attempt, where necessary, to find ways to minimise or alleviate any distress caused to those participating in research. It should be borne in mind that decisions made on the basis of research may have effects on individuals as members of a group, even if individual research participants are protected by confidentiality and anonymity.

29) Special care should be taken where research participants are particularly vulnerable by virtue of factors such as age, disability, their physical or mental health. Researchers will need to take into account the legal and ethical complexities involved in those circumstances where there are particular difficulties in eliciting fully informed consent. In some situations proxies

may need to be used in order to gather data. Where proxies are used, care should be taken not to intrude on the personal space of the person to whom the data ultimately refer, or to disturb the relationship between this person and the proxy. Where it can be inferred that the person about whom data are sought would object to supplying certain kinds of information, that material should not be sought from the proxy.

30) Research involving children requires particular care. The consent of the child should be sought in addition to that of the parent. Researchers should use their skills to provide information that could be understood by the child, and their judgement to decide on the child's capacity to understand what is being proposed. Specialist advice and expertise should be sought where relevant. Researchers should have regard for issues of child protection and make provision for the potential disclosure of abuse.

Covert Research

31) There are serious ethical and legal issues in the use of covert research but the use of covert methods may be justified in certain circumstances. For example, difficulties arise when research participants change their behaviour because they know they are being studied. Researchers may also face problems when access to spheres of social life is closed to social scientists by powerful or secretive interests.

32) However, covert methods violate the principles of informed consent and may invade the privacy of those being studied. Covert researchers might need to take into account the emerging legal frameworks surrounding the right to privacy. Participant or non-participant observation in non-public spaces or experimental manipulation of research participants without their knowledge should be resorted to only where it is impossible to use other methods to obtain essential data.

33) In such studies it is important to safeguard the anonymity of research participants. Ideally, where informed consent has not been obtained prior to the research it should be obtained post-hoc.

Anonymity, privacy and confidentiality

34) The anonymity and privacy of those who participate in the research process should be respected. Personal information concerning research participants should be kept confidential. In some cases it may be necessary to decide whether it is proper or appropriate even to record certain kinds of sensitive information.

35) Where possible, threats to the confidentiality and anonymity of research data should be anticipated by researchers. The identities and research records of those participating in research should be kept confidential whether or not an explicit pledge of confidentiality has been given.

36) Appropriate measures should be taken to store research data in a secure manner. Members should have regard to their obligations under the Data Protection Acts. Where appropriate and practicable, methods for preserving anonymity should be used including the removal of identifiers, the use of pseudonyms and other technical means for breaking the link between data and identifiable individuals. Members should also take care to prevent data being published or released in a form that would permit the actual or potential identification of research participants without prior written consent of the participants. Potential informants and research participants, especially those possessing a combination of attributes that make them readily identifiable, may need to be reminded that it can be difficult to disguise their identity without introducing an unacceptably large measure of distortion into the data.

37) Guarantees of confidentiality and anonymity given to research participants must be honoured, unless there are clear and overriding reasons to do otherwise, for example in

relation to the abuse of children. Other people, such as colleagues, research staff or others, given access to the data must also be made aware of their obligations in this respect. By the same token, sociologists should respect the efforts taken by other researchers to maintain anonymity.

38) Research data given in confidence do not enjoy legal privilege, that is they may be liable to subpoena by a court and research participants should be informed of this.

39) There may be fewer compelling grounds for extending guarantees of privacy or confidentiality to public organisations, collectivises, governments, officials or agencies than to individuals or small groups. Nevertheless, where guarantees have been given they should be honoured, unless there are clear and compelling public interest reasons not to do so.

40) During their research members should avoid, where they can, actions which may have deleterious consequences for sociologists who come after them or which might undermine the reputation of sociology as a discipline.

41) Members should take special care when carrying out research via the Internet. Ethical standards for internet research are not well developed as yet. Eliciting informed consent, negotiating access agreements, assessing the boundaries between the public and the private, and ensuring the security of data transmissions are all problematic in Internet research. Members who carry out research online should ensure that they are familiar with ongoing debates on the ethics of Internet research, and might wish to consider erring on the side of caution in making judgements affecting the well-being of online research participants.

Relations with & Responsibilities towards Sponsors and/or Funders

42) A common interest exists between sponsor, funder and sociologist as long as the aim of the social inquiry is to advance knowledge, although such knowledge may only be of limited benefit to the sponsor and the funder. That relationship is best served if the atmosphere is conducive to high professional standards.

43) Members should ensure that sponsors and/or funders appreciate the obligations that sociologists have not only to them, but also to society at large, research participants and professional colleagues and the sociological community. The relationship between sponsors or funders and social researchers should be such as to enable social inquiry to be undertaken professionally. In research projects involving multiple funders or inter-disciplinary teams, members should consider circulating this Statement to colleagues as an aid to the discussion and negotiation of ethical practice.

44) Research should be undertaken with a view to providing information or explanation rather than being constrained to reach particular conclusions or prescribe particular courses of action.

Clarifying obligations, roles and rights

45) Members should clarify in advance the respective obligations of funders and researchers where possible in the form of a written contract. They should refer the sponsor or funder to the relevant parts of the professional code to which they adhere. Members should also be careful not to promise or imply acceptance of conditions which are contrary to their professional ethics or competing research commitments.

46) Where some or all of those involved in the research are also acting as sponsors and/or funders of research the potential for conflict between the different roles and interests should also be made clear to them.

47) Members should also recognise their own general or specific obligations to the sponsors whether contractually defined or only the subject of informal and often unwritten agreements. They should be honest and candid about their qualifications and expertise, the limitations, advantages and disadvantages of the various methods of analysis and data sources, and acknowledge the necessity for discretion with confidential information obtained from sponsors.

48) They should also try not to conceal factors that are likely to affect satisfactory conditions or the completion of a proposed research project or contract.

Pre-empting outcomes and negotiations about research

49) Members should not accept contractual conditions that are contingent upon a particular outcome or set of findings from a proposed inquiry. A conflict of obligations may also occur if the funder requires particular methods to be used.

50) Members should clarify, before signing the contract, how far they are entitled to be able to disclose the source of their funds, the personnel, aims and purposes of the project.

51) Members should also clarify their right to publish and disseminate the results of their research.

52) Members have an obligation to ensure sponsors grasp the implications of the choice between alternative research methods.

Guarding privileged information and negotiating problematic sponsorship

53) Members are frequently furnished with information by the funder who may legitimately require it to be kept confidential. Methods and procedures that have been utilised to produce published data should not, however, be kept confidential unless otherwise agreed.

54) When negotiating sponsorships members should be aware of the requirements of the law with respect to the ownership of and rights of access to data.

55) In some political, social and cultural contexts some sources of funding and sponsorship may be contentious. Candour and frankness about the source of funding may create problems of access or co-operation for the social researcher but concealment may have serious consequences for colleagues, the discipline and research participants. The emphasis should be on maximum openness.

56) Where sponsors and funders also act directly or indirectly as gatekeepers and control access to participants, researchers should not devolve their responsibility to protect the participants' interests onto the gatekeeper. Members should be wary of inadvertently disturbing the relationship between participants and gatekeepers since that will continue long after the researcher has left.

Obligations to sponsors and/or Funders During the Research Process

57) Members have a responsibility to notify the sponsor and/or funder of any proposed departure from the terms of reference of the proposed change in the nature of the contracted research.

58) A research study should not normally be undertaken where it is anticipated that resources will be inadequate.

59) When financial support or sponsorship has been accepted, members must make every reasonable effort to complete the proposed research on schedule, including reports to the funding source.

60) Members should, wherever possible, disseminate their research findings as widely as possible and where required make their research data available to other researchers via appropriate archives.

61) Members should normally avoid restrictions on their freedom to publish or otherwise broadcast research findings.