



Towards a Community-led Agenda for Urban Sustainability Research:

Insights from the Citizens Science for Sustainability (SuScit) Project

Community engagement for science and sustainability: Insights from the Citizens Science for Sustainability (SuScit) Project

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For further information visit www.SuScit.org.uk

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1. Public engagement, Science and Urban Sustainability

It is today widely acknowledged that promoting urban sustainability is critical to improving the environmental, economic and social wellbeing of the UK as a whole.

At the same time we know that it is often disadvantaged members of our society living in poorer neighbourhoods who are exposed to the greatest environmental risks (such as pollution from traffic and industry, vulnerability to flooding), have the worst access to environmental goods and services (such as good quality housing, energy efficiency measures, green space, etc) and who experience the poorest health and quality of life (Lucas et al, 2004(a)).

These communities are also the least likely to be engaged in dialogues about how science and technology can help to address these problems.

This report describes the findings from the Citizens Science for Sustainability (SuScit) Project, a unique attempt to provide local communities with a voice in the future of urban sustainability research.

Funded under the EPSRC's Sustainable Urban Environment's Programme, the SuScit Project comprised an innovative programme of action research and networking activities designed to promote engagement and dialogue between the EPSRC research community, professional stakeholders and sustainability practitioners, and most importantly local citizens: particularly socially and economically excluded citizens, such as older people, single parents, young people, and those from black, Asian and ethnic minority communities.

Through this process we sought to explore whether it was possible to identify a distinctive community-led agenda for urban sustainability research, and if so what such an agenda might look like.

This report first provides an overview of the innovative 'bottom-up' public engagement and foresight process developed through the SuScit Project, before setting out a ten point agenda for urban sustainability research developed through our work with the local community in the Mildmay area of Islington, North London.

Whilst we do not claim that this work is in any sense 'nationally representative', we do believe that it provides valuable insights for both the EPSRC and other bodies responsible for funding research or delivering practical solutions to the challenges of urban sustainability.

2. Design principles of the SuScit engagement process

The challenge for the SuScit project has been to design a 'bottom-up', public engagement and foresight process which empowers lay citizens in dialogue with scientists, policy makers and professional stakeholders, and which articulates the environmental and sustainability research needs of marginalised and excluded urban communities.

In addressing this challenge we sought to design a participatory process that:

- Recognised the inherently contested nature of sustainability, through providing an open and reflexive framing of the problem, and valuing local knowledge and expertise.
- Supported lay participants through the use of appropriate facilitation and engagement tools, and by recognising the differing roles and responsibilities of the various participant groups involved.
- Worked with and through the local community in order to build trust, promote engagement and maximise the value of the project's outcomes to all those who participated.

3. Working with the local community in Mildmay

Islington in North London is an area of striking contrasts between affluence and poverty. Despite its middleclass image, Islington faces significant social, economic and environmental challenges.

According to the local authority Islington is in many ways a vibrant and diverse borough. It has a high proportion of younger and black and minority ethnic residents. Some 72% of its residents are under 45 compared with 60% for the UK as a whole, whilst 25% percent of Islington residents describe themselves as having a black and minority ethnic background (Islington Council 2006:14). Around 54% of the borough's population are Christian, 8% Muslim and 7% practice other faiths (Islington Strategic Partnership 2006:9).

Islington is the sixth most deprived borough in the country (Islington Council 2006:14-5). All of its wards are in the most deprived 5% in the country and yet it is also home to some of the wealthiest people in the Capital (Islington Strategic Partnership 2006:9). Whilst the average gross annual earned income of Islington owner-occupiers is £49,254 that of Islington council tenants is just £6290 (Islington Strategic Partnership 2006:11).

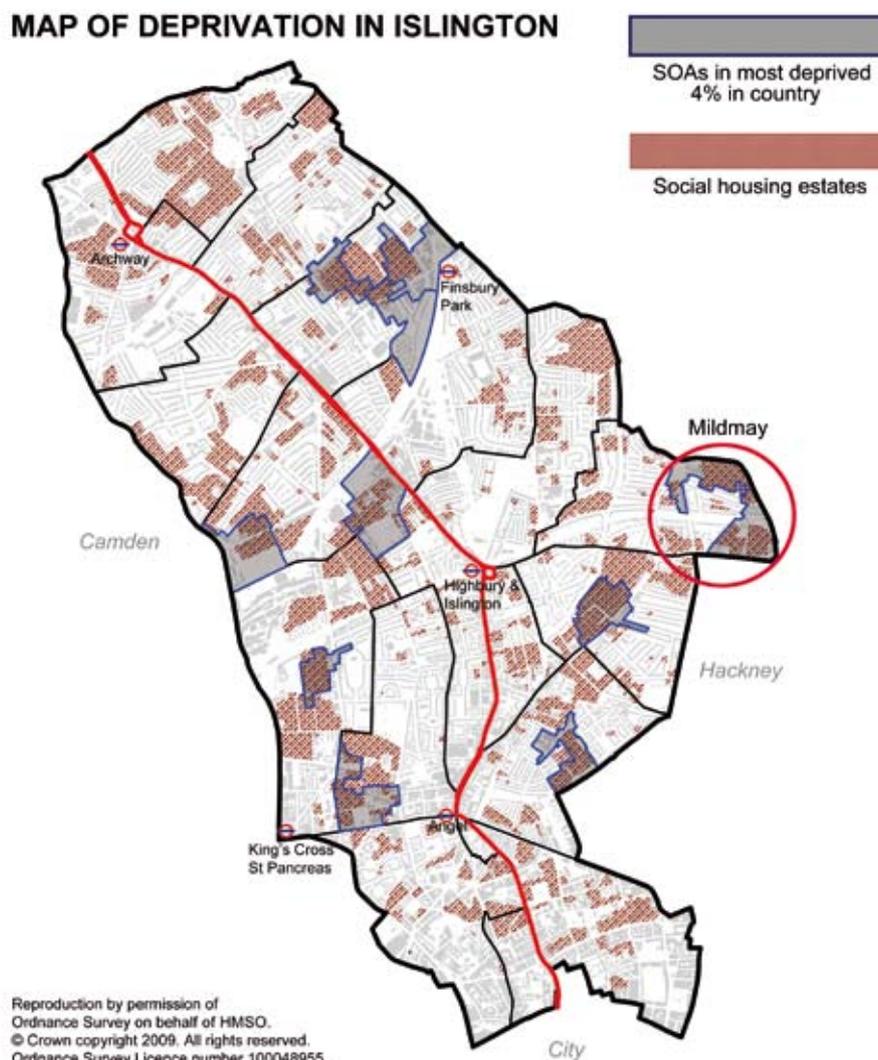


Figure 1: Deprivation in Islington and location of the case study research. (Adapted from Islington Strategic Partnership 2006: Annexe C).

Islington is a small densely populated borough, the second smallest in the capital, covering an area of just under six square miles (Islington Council 2006:14). There is limited land available for development and as a result there is often significant pressure on existing buildings and land uses. Moreover, Islington has the least open green space of any London Borough (Islington Strategic Partnership 2006:9).

Some 48.9% of Islington's 86,300 residential properties are Council or Housing Association owned, with overcrowding a significant challenge. According to the Local Authority some 67.6% of Houses in Multiple Occupation are unfit for the number of occupants living in them (Islington Strategic Partnership 2006:11).

Within Islington the most deprived wards are Finsbury Park, Holloway and Mildmay (Islington NHS Primary Health Trust, 2008). The public engagement and dialogue element of the SuScit project was undertaken in the Mildmay area between January and July 2008.

Over two thirds of Mildmay's 11,000 residents live in rented accommodation (Islington Strategic Partnership, 2006b). Many are economically inactive. The built environment of the ward is dominated by estates of mixed quality social housing.

The SuScit project worked closely with Islington Council and the Mildmay Community Partnership. In addition to managing the Mayville Community Centre and a range of local community development projects, the Mildmay Community Partnership is also the lead agency for Neighbourhood Management for the ward.

At the time of the research the Mayville Community Centre was the principal local venue hosting community activities. These included: luncheon clubs for older people; youth clubs; IT, music, health and fitness classes; mother & baby and toddler groups; a community gardening club; and outreach activities for the homeless.

By establishing strong working relationships with key local stakeholders and locating the initial phases of the fieldwork in the Mayville Community Centre the project aimed to promote both ongoing local ownership of the process and maximise the benefits to the local community.

4. The five phases of the SuScit model

The SuScit process comprised a six-month programme of meetings, workshops and group activities, structured around five key phases (see figure 2).

The central idea of the programme was to reflexively explore community understandings of, and perceptions and aspirations for, urban sustainability in order to provide a basis for identifying relevant research needs and opportunities. This was reflected in the overall structure of the engagement process whereby local residents initially took the leading role in articulating community perspectives (and researchers and practitioners were encouraged to listen and reflect), whilst in the later phases of the process responsibility shifted to the Researchers and Practitioners to deliberate and respond to what they had learnt from the local community, by developing a research agenda for urban sustainability which reflected the issues raised. Anthony Psaila, an experienced independent facilitator was employed to run the focus groups and workshops.

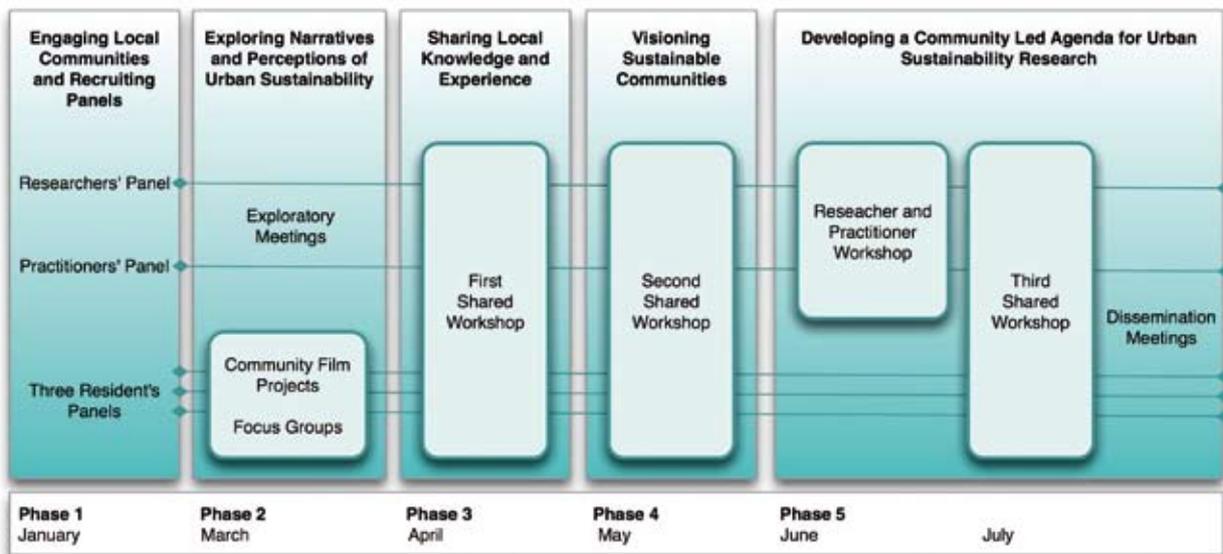


Figure 2: Five Phases of Action Research

Phase 1: Engaging Local Communities and Recruiting Participants

Three different groups of participants were involved in the SuScit dialogue process: sustainability researchers; practitioners; and local residents:

- The **Researchers' Panel** comprised twelve senior academics with expertise across a broad spectrum of urban sustainability issues (urban planning and design; transport; energy; water; waste; engineering; and geography, etc). (For full details see Annex 1).
- The **Practitioners' Panel** comprised thirteen professionals from local, regional and national stakeholder organisations (including the Mayville Community Partnership, Islington Council, Transport for London, the Environment Agency, Forestry Commission and several London based environmental NGOs) with expertise across a broad range of sustainability issues. (For full details see Annex 1).

Three **Residents' Panels** were recruited from the local area in collaboration with the Mayville Community Centre. Each comprised mainly economically inactive residents from in and around the Mildmay ward. The composition of the Residents' Panels reflected different life stages, and the ethnic and cultural diversity of the local area. Two of the panels were mixed gender, whilst the Women and Lone Parents' Panel comprised only women.

- The **Young Peoples' Panel** comprised twelve members (seven women and five men) between the ages of 16-21 years.
- The **Women and Lone Parents' Panel** comprised eleven women aged 25-40 years.
- The **Older Peoples' Panel** comprised eleven members (five women and four men) all over the age of 65.

Phase 2: Exploring Narratives and Perceptions of Urban Sustainability

Researchers' and Practitioners' Exploratory Meetings

The Researchers' and Practitioner' Panels were introduced to the project at two separate meetings. These exploratory meetings aimed to: prepare them for the forthcoming engagement process; build commitment and ownership of the process; and, explore initial views on urban sustainability research. Members of each panel also took part in a guided 'community walk' (led by a representative from the local community partnership) intended to begin to familiarise Panel members with the local neighbourhood.

Citizen Focus Groups

Initial focus group meetings were held with each of the three Residents' Panels to introduce the project and to explore experiences of living in the local community. Knowledge and perceptions of environmental and sustainability issues were explored and the concept of 'research', and how research might further urban sustainability, discussed.

Environmental Puzzle

Focus groups were facilitated using an 'Environmental Puzzle' (Lucas et al, 2004(b)) exploring aspects of urban sustainability. The puzzle comprised a series of key words placed in concentric circles. Participants worked in small groups to discuss what each of the words meant to them, before discussing the puzzle in plenary. The first layer of the puzzle explored the concepts of sustainability through a discussion of Environment, Quality of life, and Community. The second layer introduced the topics of Transport, Housing, Safety, Health, Energy, Recycling, Amenities, and Wealth. The next layer comprised topics chosen by the participants themselves, which they felt were missing from the puzzle. For all three Panels these topics generally focussed on the social dimension of sustainability (e.g: Crime, Racism, Community Activities, Respect, Love, Ownership, Parks, Trust, Employment, etc). Finally the topic of Research was introduced and placed at the centre of the puzzle.

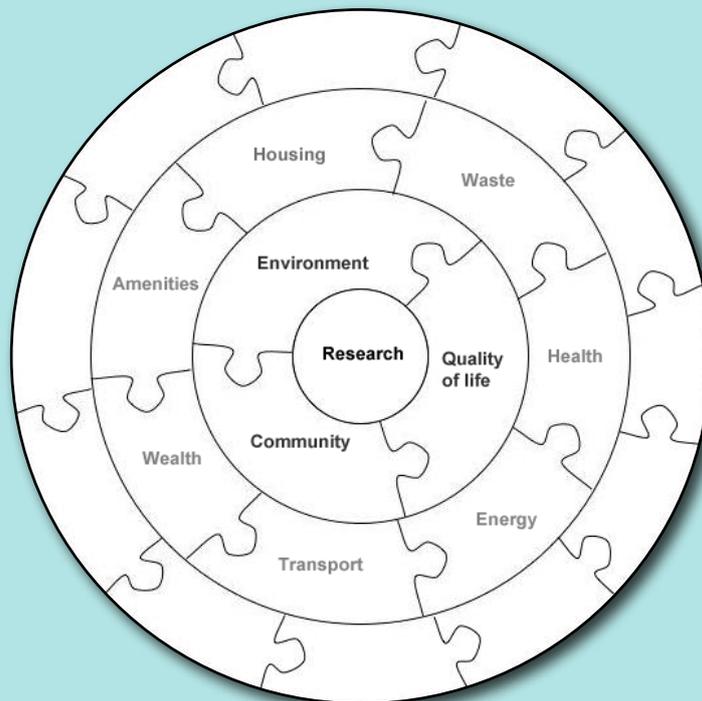


Figure 3: The environmental puzzle

Community Film Projects

The purpose of the film projects was to allow residents to explore and articulate their own perspectives on their local environment and urban sustainability in a manner which would bring dynamism, creativity and artistic expression to the subject. Working with Black Country Films (BCF), an experienced group of participatory filmmakers, residents were encouraged to develop and explore their own stories (experiences; perceptions; aspirations; critiques; and dilemmas) of living in their local community and what the environment and sustainability meant to them. The choice of themes and storylines for the films was very much left for the residents themselves to decide.

Each of the Residents Panels met weekly with BCF over a period of almost two months, planning, acting in and shooting their own films. In all some twelve short films were produced by the residents panels, together with interviews with each of the Residents shot by BCF.

By using the effectiveness of different creative techniques to articulate these lived experiences a number of short videos reflecting the residents' views and experiences were produced.

Community films and related themes

Young Peoples' Panel

| | |
|--------------------------|---|
| <i>Litterbug</i> | A humorous piece about litter, citizenship and environmental responsibility. |
| <i>Caught Red Handed</i> | A fictional exploration of young peoples' experience of crime and violence. |
| <i>Youth Workers</i> | A documentary on the role of youth work and challenges of youth culture. |
| <i>On Environment</i> | Interviews with young people about their concerns and understandings of both local and global environmental issues. |

Women and Lone Parents' Panel

| | |
|--------------------------------|---|
| <i>Garden and Grow</i> | A documentary about local community gardens as affordable, healthy and sustainable alternatives to junk food culture and the dominance of the major supermarkets. |
| <i>My Right to a Roof</i> | A documentary about housing, homelessness and the experience of living in poor quality over-crowded temporary accommodation. |
| <i>Making Ends Meet</i> | A documentary about the necessity of reusing and recycling second hand products, and supporting a family on a limited budget. |
| <i>A walk around the block</i> | A documentary about local environmental quality issues, including problems with refuse and recycling, noise, and anti-social behavior. |
| <i>Our concerns</i> | Interviews about local concerns such as crime, fuel poverty, housing quality, training and education, social cohesion, etc. |

Older Peoples' Panel

| | |
|------------------------|---|
| <i>The Domino Club</i> | A documentary reflecting on the life experiences and aspirations of members of the Newington Green Black Senior Citizens Club, highlighting issues of racism, social-cohesion and quality of life. |
| <i>3 steps</i> | A love story about overcoming social isolation and public transport. |
| <i>Food</i> | A documentary about the importance of food in cultural identity and luncheon clubs as a means of fostering social cohesion. |
| <i>Love and Music</i> | Interviews exploring understandings and attitudes towards the environment, cultural and community values and quality of life. |
| <i>The environment</i> | Interviews about experiences of living in the local community: covering issues of crime and violence, local environmental quality, social isolation, cultural identity, community spirit and social cohesion. |

Phase 3: Sharing Local Knowledge and Experience

1st Shared Workshop

This day long workshop brought together all the panels for the first time. It aimed to: introduce the participants; establish a positive and supportive forum; share citizens' local knowledge and experience; and facilitate open, conflict managed discussions between the different participant groups concerning their potentially differing perspectives on local environmental and sustainability issues.

The core element of the day was the viewing and facilitated discussion of the films produced by the Residents' Panels, a mixture of documentaries, dramas, and artistic expressions, which very powerfully brought to life the concerns and interests of the local community. By deliberating together upon the issues raised by the films the residents were able to further articulate their perceptions and concerns, whilst the researchers and practitioners were provided with the opportunity to engage, listen and learn from the residents' local knowledge and experience. By the end of the day residents, researchers and practitioners had together begun to distil some emerging themes with respect to the community's views and concerns for urban sustainability.

Phase 4: Visioning Sustainable Communities

2nd Shared Workshop

This second day long workshop again brought together all of the project participants with the aim of eliciting and developing residents' visions of sustainable urban communities. Working within a twenty-year perspective, participants were asked to think beyond their present reality, and develop visions of what a sustainable future might look like. Rather than seeking to engage in prediction or forecasts, participants were asked to think creatively about desirable futures. By deliberating together upon visions of urban sustainability residents were able to explore their normative views of the future, whilst the researchers and practitioners were again provided with the opportunity to engage, listen and learn from the residents' aspirations.

The workshop was structured around two exercises, involving mixed groups of Residents, Researchers and Practitioners: "2028: Tomorrow's News" and "Mildmay 2028: Visioning Sustainable Urban Futures".

Phase 5: Developing a Community Led Agenda for Urban Sustainability Research

Researcher & Practitioner Workshop

Members of the Researcher and Practitioner Panels met together over two whole days to reflect and deliberate upon what they have learnt from their engagement and dialogue with the Residents Panels. This workshop aimed to develop a research agenda and recommendations for EPSRC and other funders, which responded to the concerns and priorities of citizens in Mildmay and similar communities. The workshop also provided participants with an opportunity to develop ideas for more specific projects and initiatives which could be taken forward with the local community.

Video was again used to produce a short film – entitled Common Knowledge – in which members of the Researchers and Practitioners Panels provided an oral record of their deliberations and emerging thinking on the form which a community led research agenda on urban sustainability might take.

3rd Shared Workshop

At this final half-day shared workshop all of the participants once again came together. The Researchers and Practitioners film was shown and members of the Panels also reported back in person on ideas for specific local projects and initiatives. Residents were provided with an opportunity to comment upon and respond to the emerging research agenda. The workshop ended with discussion of opportunities to build upon the experience of SuScit engagement process, and a celebration of what had been achieved.

Whilst this final shared workshop brought to a close the formal SuScit process, the research team and Mildmay Community Partnership have continued to work with the project participants to build a local legacy from the project.

5. A ten point agenda for urban sustainability research

The following section describes ten key themes and indicative research issues developed on the basis of the SuScit dialogue and deliberation process. These cover

- 1. Crime and Safety**
- 2. Eco-Social Housing**
- 3. Affordable Green Energy Services**
- 4. Urban Food Production and Consumption**
- 5. Sustainable Urban Transport**
- 6. Greenspace, Parks and Places to go**
- 7. Rubbish and Recycling**
- 8. Community Cohesion and Empowerment**
- 9. Shopping and Local Services**
- 10. Health and Well-being**

Together these inter-related themes comprise a community led agenda for urban sustainability research.

1 Crime and Safety

Crime and safety was a significant and recurrent concern for all of the Residents Panels. Concerns over crime and safety clearly impacted upon residents' experience of their environment, acting as a key deterrent upon the use of outdoor space and discouraging young people in particular from travelling outside of the immediate neighbourhood.

For the Young People's Panel in particular fear and experience of the consequences of gun and knife crime was a striking and pervasive element of their deliberations. For the young people street violence was often linked to local territorial identity, and the dangers of travelling outside of one's postcode area. However, older people also expressed fears of 'outsiders' coming into the neighbourhood to commit crime or acts of violence.

"Even if you are in a safe area, I mean, they could come at time you are walking out in the evening. You can get a person who comes from another area and that comes into you area, it could kill you" (Member of the Older People's Panel)

"This area is typical for many areas over the country. When you don't hear of anything happening it is a nice area to live in. (...) Well, it is drugs and guns and knives and burglaries.., and it's a typical area really". (Member of the Older People's Panel)

For all of the residents there was clearly a heightened fear of crime, and sense of an absence of personal safety, during the night time. Members of the Older People's Panel in particular expressed a fear of leaving their homes after dark.

"I've got gates on the back door and on the windows because people get over the wall and on the front door. I feel quite safe in there but sometimes you look out and you look as though you're in prison because you're behind the bars"
(Member of the Older People's Panel)

Even during daylight hours, however, crime and fear of crime meant that few people frequented areas away from main shopping streets surrounding the Mayville Estate.

Fear of crime resulted in stress and anxiety, inhibited opportunities for physical exercise and the use of greenspace, reduced wellbeing, and undermined trust and social capital.

Indicative research issues:

- What can we learn from better integrating the measurement and mapping of crime, and fear of crime, with other aspects of environmental amenity, health and wellbeing?
- Through what mechanisms does crime, and fear of crime, impact on quality of life for urban communities, and what are the implications for policies intended to promote sustainability?
- How can the different experiences of crime, and fear of crime, of different social groups best be integrated into urban planning and design research and practice?
- What approaches to urban planning and design to reduce crime, and the fear for crime, are compatible or in conflict with the promotion of wider sustainability and quality of life objectives?

2 Eco-Social Housing

The need for secure, affordable, good quality housing was a very real and pressing concern for residents. For some simply ensuring a roof over their heads, for themselves and their children, was a daily struggle. Many others talked about their experiences of living in overcrowded and unsuitable accommodation. At the same time some residents clearly felt that the increasing density of housing development in the area was adversely impacting upon their quality of life.

"They are building housing on every piece of land... its getting back to Victoria times because they'll be so squashed in you know, it's the slums of the future."
(Member of the Older People's Panel)

Despite the immediacy of such concerns some residents were aware of the need to mainstream the use of 'alternative' eco-friendly materials and practices in construction.

Moreover, for some, participation in the process clearly provided an opportunity to engage with mainstream discourses around the overarching challenges of climate change and sustainability.

"It's kind of an important thing to reduce your carbon footprint as global warming is a major issue around the whole world, it's affecting everyone. So I think, if everyone made kind of small difference then it made a big difference. 'Cause we are six billion people in the world so six billion differences make one huge difference" (Member of the Young People's Panel).

Although such discussions were often qualified or countered by a sense that residents lacked the opportunity or the economic resources to make a difference: in particular that new environmental or green technologies were expensive and would not be available to them.

However, when provided with an opportunity to express their aspirations many residents envisioned a range of challenging and innovative 'green' housing futures.

Indicative research issues:

- How best to develop (new and retrofitted) high-density, energy efficient, eco-friendly affordable and social housing for all who need it?
- Overcoming barriers to the use of alternative eco-friendly materials and practices in the affordable and social housing sectors.
- Reconciling community aspirations and environmental sustainability through participatory design.
- The role of innovative building design in the provision of urban environmental services (renewable energy, water capture and recycling, green roofs/walls & food production, etc).

3 Affordable Green Energy Services

Deliberations around the social, economic and environmental costs of energy and energy use were framed in a number of different ways by participants in the SuScit project.

Fuel poverty, specifically the costs and difficulties of heating poor quality housing, was a concern discussed by all of our Residents' Panels.

"Like the gas meter and electric meter are always running out and the place is like really cold because like the housing isn't done properly and it's got single glazing and have to heat the house like a lot more and the money just keeps going and you have to keep doing it and it just like cost a lot." (Member of Young Peoples Panel).

Over and above these immediate concerns, some residents were clearly aware of both the challenges of global climate change and our *"dependency on oil and gas which is running out"* (Member of Older Peoples Panel); the potential of distributed renewable energy technologies, and the need to reduce energy use.

"...its all right to say put solar things on the house ...another way of looking at energy is to our light bulbs, to our heating in our house you know, your fires, those are the things that you look at to save energy." (Member of Older Peoples Panel).

Looking forward, renewable energy - particularly solar and micro-wind - technologies were a prominent feature of our participants' visions of a sustainable urban future.

Indicative research issues:

- Improving the targeting and effectiveness of measures to address fuel poverty.
- Mainstreaming low carbon, and renewable energy, solutions for those living in social housing.
- Retro fitting the existing social housing stock to meet zero carbon standards.

4 Urban Food Production and Consumption

For all of the panels, and in many different ways, food featured as a recurrent and important theme in their deliberations. Members of the Women and Lone Parents Panel in particular had previously been involved in a community garden scheme and saw local food production (at even the smallest scale – window boxes) as an important element of self sufficiency and sustainability.

For members of the Older Peoples' Panel the collective preparation and sharing of food was a means of overcoming social isolation, building trust and celebrating cultural identity and diversity.

Alternative geographies and cultures of food production and consumption, a desire for affordable and accessible alternatives to fast food, an awareness of the connections between food and health, and the environmental impacts of intensive food production were all features of the dialogue.

"...quality of life is about being able to obtain and consume good quality foods and the environment and the community all have an effect on whether that's available and whether it's not" (Member of the Women and Lone Parents Panel).

Indicative research issues:

- What role could alternative systems of urban food production and consumption (allotments, community gardens, food co-ops, lunch clubs, community kitchens, etc) play in promoting environmental, social and economic sustainability?
- Nutrient cycling, energy and water use in alternative systems of urban food production and consumption.
- What are the most appropriate metrics and indicators of assessing the sustainability costs and benefits of urban food production and consumption?
- How can urban planning and design best facilitate opportunities for urban food production and consumption?
- Quantifying the potential for, and barriers to, urban food production and local self-reliance.
- Urban food production and consumption, social capital and wellbeing.

5 Sustainable Urban Transport

Residents' deliberations about transport issues initially tended to be framed in terms of concerns over social isolation and the safety and accessibility of public transport. With respect to social isolation, particular concerns were expressed that public transport systems were designed to meet the needs of commuters, rather than local communities.

When provided with an opportunity to envisage a more sustainable future, however, many of the residents were keen to explore ideas for reducing car use or creating car-free areas. There was an enthusiasm for promoting walking and cycling, improving the connectivity offered by public transport, but also for the introduction of 'environmental friendly' zero-emission vehicles into the urban environment. Clear connections were made between transport, local environmental quality and health, and the need to address the global problems of carbon emissions and climate change.

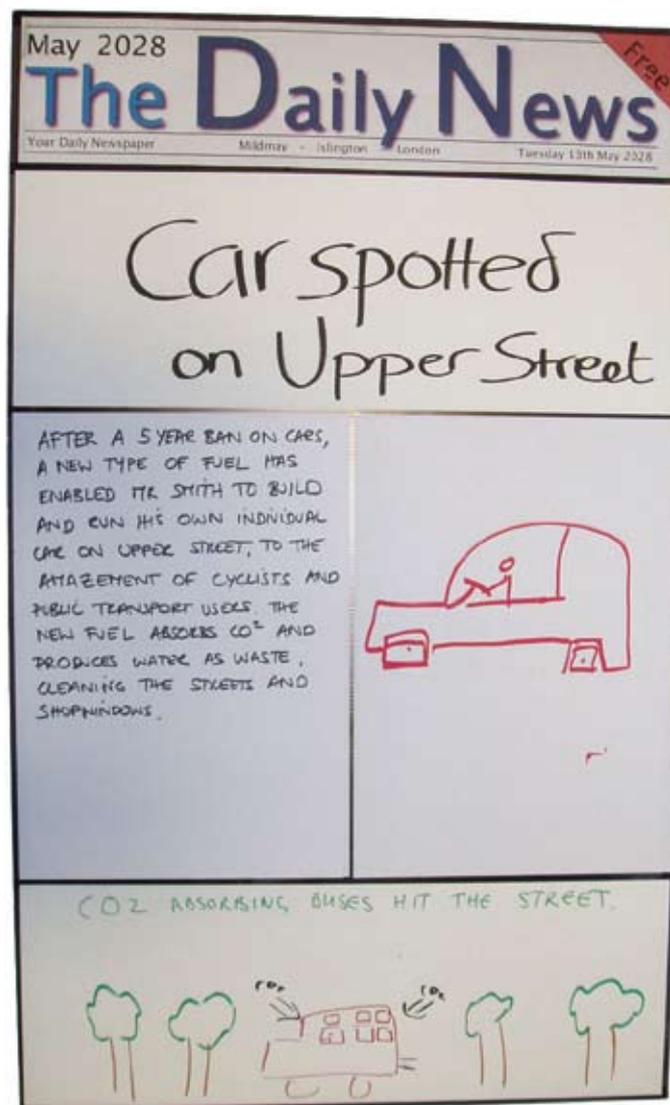


Figure 4: Vision Exercise: The Daily News 2028

Indicative research issues:

- How can the provision of public transport services be better designed to meet the needs of local communities and economically marginalised people?
- What approaches to changing social norms and behaviour would be most effective in improving safety and promoting the use of public transport?
- What lessons can be learnt from existing car-free developments both in the UK and abroad?
- What are the specific barriers to promoting walking and cycling in deprived urban areas?

6 Greenspace, Parks and Places to go

Whilst the professional discourse of 'access to green space' had little resonance, residents spoke readily about the lack of parks, a desire for more gardens or allotments, and about the pressing need for more recreational spaces and facilities. For young people in particular the absence of 'places to go' within the local area was a very real frustration.

"I don't like the fact that there aren't enough parks. Even they are a luxury, there aren't enough" (Member of the Young People's Panel).

All of the Residents' Panels, including many of the young people themselves, linked a lack of places to go and youth hanging around on the streets, particularly in the evenings, as contributing to concerns over community safety and anti-social behaviour. Moreover, as noted above, crime and fear of crime were clearly important deterrents to the use of public and green spaces.

At times conflicts over the use public spaces were also evident: both within and across generations (e.g. between parents with young children and older children, youth and older people, dog owners and non-dog owners, etc).

Despite these problems 'green space' retained associations with relaxation, wellbeing and health, with opportunities for sport and exercise, and to connect with nature or grow your own food.

A striking aspect of the residents' deliberations about the future was a desire for a greener environment, which would bring aspects of the 'rural' or 'natural' into the city. Water (blue space) also featured prominently in these visions of sustainable urban futures.

Indicative research issues:

- Understanding the social determinants of access to and use of greenspace and recreational facilities, by different social and demographic groups, to maximise social value.
- Improving the multifunctional design urban green space, incorporating diverse user perspectives.
- Exploring the future potential and amenity value of sustainable urban drainage systems.
- Innovative design to maximise green space in dense urban environments.
- Developing a toolkit for promoting and supporting community gardens.

7 Rubbish and Recycling

Issues relating to rubbish and recycling were seen to be important both as indicators of environmental quality and as expressions of environmental citizenship and awareness.

Litter and rubbish on the streets clearly played an important role in shaping residents' perceptions of the quality of their local environment. Concerns over the design and effectiveness of waste management and recycling services, serving areas of high density multiple occupancy housing and mixed (residential/retail) use were voiced by both residents and local practitioners.

"There's rubbish on the corners, none of this should be here, but there is nowhere for it to go. There are no bins, we had a bin once, but it got stolen"
(Member of the Women and Lone Parents' Panel).

For some members of the Women and Lone Parents Panel re-using and recycling clothes and other household goods, through charity shops, was seen as part of a culture of mending and making do on a limited income. However, they also understood and valued the environmental benefits of such re-use and recycling, making explicit connections with wider debates on green consumerism and sustainable consumption.

Interest in composting suggested a need to further explore opportunities for capturing the benefits of sustainable waste management practices at a local level.

Indicative research issues:

- Why do local waste and cleaning services continually fail in deprived urban areas, and how could they be improved?
- Community engagement to improve the design and implementation of urban waste management and recycling services.
- The design and implementation of socially acceptable decentralised waste management systems, which maximise the local recovery of energy (heat & power) and nutrients (compost) in an urban context.
- Systems design, social norms and user behaviour in promoting and 'mainstreaming' re-use and recycling.

8 Community Cohesion and Empowerment

The importance of 'community' was a powerful narrative throughout the SuScit process. The older residents and single parents in particular, clearly had an intuitive understanding of the importance of social capital. They spoke movingly about the importance of trust, neighbourliness, mutual respect, unity and compassion in the quality of their daily lives. Residents valued the opportunity to participate in collective activities (mother and baby groups, youth clubs, lunch clubs, etc), and for some faith and religious practices where clearly also important.

"So what do you hope for?" "Unity. Unity among the races. Leave colour out of it. You and I are striving for a better London; a better England; a better place to live in; a better place to bring up the children. That's how I look at it" (Member of the Older People's Panel).

Inevitably much of this dialogue concerned the absence of 'community': the difficulty of getting to know ones neighbours, the lack of communication and prevalence of uncivil behaviour, problems of racism and a breakdown of relationships between generations.

With respect to this later point the need to better support, engage and empower young people was seen as critical - through providing safe spaces and places, opportunities to take part in arts, music and educational activities, and to participate in initiatives which built bridges and brought the generations together.

More broadly improving opportunities for participation, consultation and access to decision making were all viewed as important to community cohesion and empowerment. However, community empowerment was not just about influencing decisions taken by those in authority it was particularly discussed in terms of promoting autonomy and self-reliance.

Indicative research issues:

- How can we better understand the relationship between the built environment and social cohesion, and how can planning and urban design better foster social cohesion and sustainable community development.
- How can planning and urban design better foster mixed and shared use of places and spaces across generations and different cultural groups.
- How can technology be better used to fostering community consultation and empowerment in marginalised urban communities.
- What role can arts, culture and education play in fostering social cohesion and sustainable community development?
- How can initiatives to promote environmental citizenship be better designed to meet the needs and circumstances of marginalised urban communities?
- Developing appropriate tools to facilitate the engagement of young people in urban planning and design.
- Mainstreaming action and participatory research into urban sustainability.

9 Shopping and Local Services

Whilst closely linked to issues around transport, social cohesion, health and wellbeing, concerns about shopping and local services stood out from the Residents' deliberations as a distinctive topic in their own right.

Many of the residents purchased much of their everyday shopping from the small retailers in the local area. Local street markets were also valued for providing affordable basics and local texture. By contrast, some residents were clearly concerned about the encroachment of major supermarkets, particularly the opening of a number of 'Tesco Express' stores in the local area. Rather than promoting regeneration, it was felt that Tesco would undermine small independent retailers and damage the local economy. Were as small retailers were generally perceived to be environmentally benign, supermarket chains were identified with over-packaged and unhealthy processed foods.

"They sell a lot of junk food and pre-prepared and heavily packaged food which creates so much waste". "We need more access to shops selling healthy food at reasonable prices and ideally more opportunities for people to get allotments" (Member of the Women and Lone Parents' Panel).

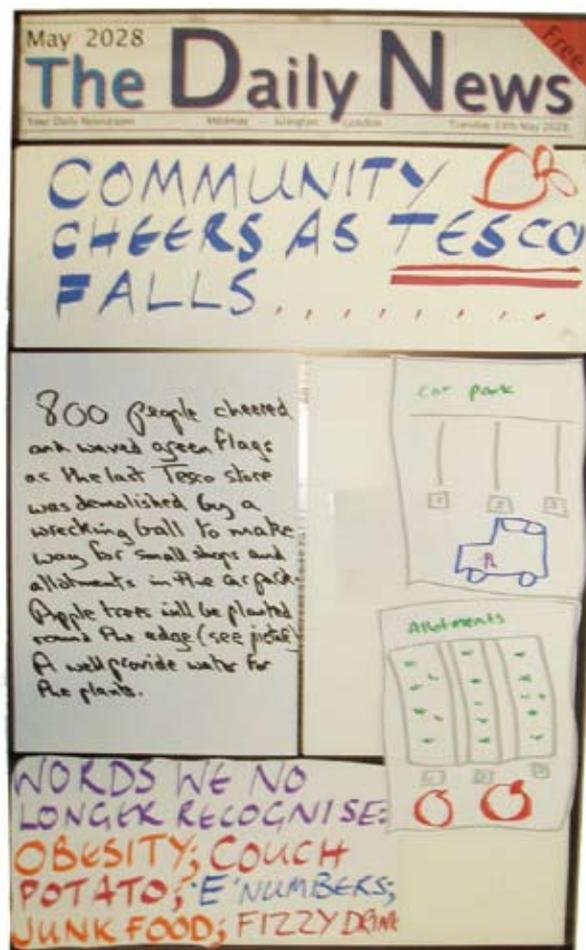


Figure 5: Vision Exercise: The Daily News 2028

Members of the Older Peoples Panel and Women and Single Parents Panel also raised concerns about access to a range of public and private services, such as primary healthcare (GPs), educational (secondary schools), banking and public transport services, at a local level. In this context problems with physical access, location and access to information about services, were all perceived as important barriers.

Indicative research issues:

- Benchmarking the provision of local services against social, economic and environmental outcomes.
- Assessing the social, economic and environmental impacts of changes in the structure of local retail markets.
- Improving community participation in planning processes and developing tools to support the design of local services to meet community needs.
- Tools for improving access and provision of local information.

10 Health and Well-being

Health and wellbeing emerged as an important cross-cutting theme in the SuScit dialogue. Health was discussed not just in terms of access to health services, such as GP surgeries etc. but also in relation to the broader environmental determinants of physical and mental wellbeing.

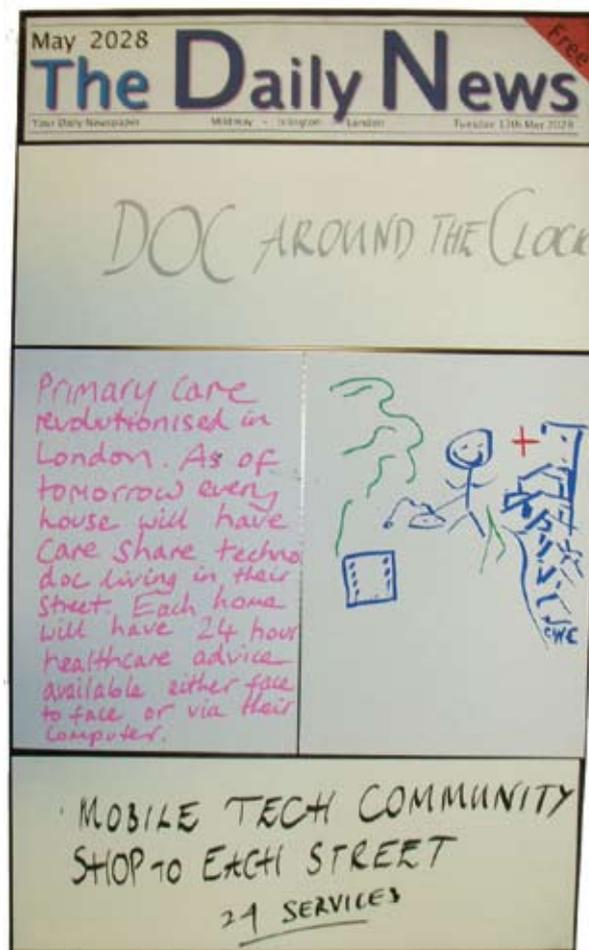


Figure 6: Vision Exercise: The Daily News 2028

Residents readily made connections between for example:

- Impacts of crime and safety and the absence of community cohesion on social isolation and mental health.
- Overcrowded and poor quality housing and negative health outcomes.
- Consumption of poor quality food, obesity and ill health.
- Opportunities for exercise and relaxation provided by parks and greenspaces.
- Health benefits of walking and cycling, and
- Connections between asthma and traffic pollution.

Indicative research issues:

- Understanding the complex connections, correlations and causal relationships between health, wellbeing and urban environment quality.
- How does urban environmental quality impact on self esteem and mental wellbeing?
- To what extent is it possible to engineer and design healthier urban environments.
- What types of policy and institutional measures, such as improved interagency working, are most effective in addressing the links between the urban environment and ill health.
- Assessing impacts on health and wellbeing from community participation in environmental projects.

6. Discussion & Recommendations

The SuScit project has comprised a unique experiment in community engagement, which has sought to push the boundaries of conventional approaches to science and technology (S&T) foresight. In so doing we have shown it is possible to develop a dialogue process which is firmly grounded in the community and which responds to their needs and concerns through engagement with the sustainability research and practitioner communities.

Whilst questions can inevitably be raised concerning the wider validity of the findings from a pilot project of this nature, particularly given its limited geographical scope, it is nonetheless useful to reflect upon the broader insights from the research, and their potential implications for future research policy.

Key insights

- It is possible to articulate a distinctive community-led agenda for urban sustainability research, which responds to the needs and concerns of socially and economically excluded citizens.
- Community participants in the SuScit process generally attached a high priority to the social dimension of sustainability. However, care should be taken not to simply equate addressing the social dimension of sustainability with social scientific research. Rather it is clear that science and engineering have a vital contribution to make in developing the interdisciplinary, solution oriented, research necessary to address these problems.
- Some of the key themes identified within this report (particularly: crime and safety; urban food production & consumption; and, community cohesion) are not well covered within the EPSRC's current portfolio of SUE research.
- Even for those themes (energy, housing, recycling, greenspace, health and wellbeing) which are a more established part of the broader sustainable urban research agenda, the SuScit process of dialogue and deliberation brought into focus the particular needs and concerns of socially and economically excluded citizens.

The SuScit process also provided an opportunity for members of the Researchers' and Practitioners' panels in particular to reflect and deliberate upon the implications for future research policy and the challenges and potential benefits of participatory research, working with local communities to address the challenges of sustainability.

"What I've learned from this process, was the importance of listening..., and just how important it is to be open to ideas, and yes, sometimes the patience that it takes, but it's worth it. And also... we can sometimes talk about the same things, but always in a different language. So it's using that listening to actually find where the common land is, where the common language is, and building up from there, rather than as academics where we do tend to use jargon, and so do policy makers. So it is about finding that common space"
(Member of the Researchers' Panel).

In particular, for many of the researchers and practitioners, their involvement in the SuScit process highlighted the need to engage marginalised local communities more directly in urban sustainability research in order both to better harness their particular local knowledge, but also to better respond to and develop practical solutions to the particular challenges these communities face.

Barriers to working in partnership with local communities to develop participatory and action research were seen to include:

- Building effective partnerships with local communities requires significant upfront investment of time and resources to establish contacts, build trust and relationships etc.
- It is important to involve the local community at an early stage in developing shared goals for research.
- The limited resources available to residents and local community organisations often limits their ability to participate in research initiatives from which they might benefit, or to which they might make a particular contribution.
- The need to ensure that research also delivers practical benefits for community participants. Whilst research cannot necessarily deliver immediate solutions to sustainability problems, projects can seek to benefit community participants by building in education and skills development for those who take part.
- There is often currently a mismatch in modes of funding available for research and what is required for facilitating effective community involvement, e.g.: i) the challenge of linking locally grounded small scale initiatives with large SUE consortia bids, ii) community participants or organisations may not be eligible to receive funding from research grants; etc.
- Funding and researcher incentives: there is a need to provide greater recognition for non-academic research outputs (e.g. outputs other than those published in peer-reviewed journals).

As a result of their participation in the SuScit process a number of the researchers, practitioners and residents involved have begun working together to develop both local sustainability initiatives and future research projects.

Recommendations

For EPSRC and other research funders

- EPSRC and other funders of environmental and sustainability research (such as ESRC, NERC, CLG, Defra, EA and the other members of the Environmental Research Funders Forum (ERFF)) should build upon the experience of the SuScit project to better engage local communities, particularly those from marginalised and excluded communities, in dialogue over future sustainability research policy.
- EPSRC and other funders should consider opportunities to address some of the distinctive research priorities identified as part of the SuScit research agenda.
- In order to address the emerging research agenda outlined in this report it will be necessary to build upon and strengthen the inter- and trans-disciplinarity of the EPSRC's SUE research.
- There is a need for more innovative modes of funding to support research on urban sustainability with marginalised communities. With respect to the EPSRC SUE Programme specific initiatives which could be considered would include support for community research fellowships, specific funding for participatory and action research, or for a research network promoting research with deprived communities.

For future public engagement and foresight activities

- Upstream public engagement for S&T should address societal needs as well as scientific and technological opportunities.
- Engagement processes need to ensure participation of socially and economically excluded communities that reflect ethnic, gender and age balance.
- In order to address the differential skills and education attainment of disadvantaged communities public engagement should include opportunities for skills development.
- Engagement and foresight activities need to be clear and open about their purpose and limitations.
- Information gathered from the process should be shared at all stages to facilitate informed public decision making.

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Annex 1: Membership of SuScit Researchers and Practitioner Panels

Researchers' Panel

Dr Sarah Bell, Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering, University College London

Professor Susan Buckingham, Centre for Human Geography, Brunel University

Dr Chris Boyko, Institute for Contemporary Arts, Lancaster University

Dr Sue Brownhill, Department of Planning, Oxford Brookes University

Dr Heather Cruickshank, Centre for Sustainable Development, Cambridge University

Professor Graeme Evans, Cities Institute, London Metropolitan University

Professor Paul Fleming, Institute of Energy and Sustainable Development, De Montfort University

Professor Stephan Jefferis, Centre for Environmental Strategy, University of Surrey

Professor Peter Jones, Centre for Transport Studies, University College London

Dr Rachel Lombardi, School of Engineering, University of Birmingham

Professor Marion Roberts, School of Architecture and the Built Environment, University of Westminster

Dr Nicholas Watts, Applied Social Sciences, London Metropolitan University

Practitioners' Panel

Mike Carless, Islington Council

Jonathan Gibb, Islington Council

Stephen Golden, Transport for London

Maxine Holdsworth, Islington Council

Shalini Jayasinghe, London Sustainability Exchange

Kerry Kirwan, Islington Council

Trevor Mbatha, Mildmay Community Partnership

Chris Mitchell, Islington Council

Bartle Sawbridge, Mildmay Community Partnership

Dr Jasber Singh, Forestry Commission

Dr Keiron Stanley, Environment Agency

Roma Thomas, (Consultant to TFL) Roma Thomas Communications

Colleen Whittaker, London 21



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