

Strategies for Viable and Vital Neighbourhoods

Anne Power (i)

London School of Economics
Centre for Analysis of Social Exclusion
Houghton Street
London
WC2A 2AE
England
UK

Tel: +44 (0)20 7955 6330

Email: ANNE.Power@lse.ac.uk

ABSTRACT

This paper is based on the longitudinal study of 200 families in 4 low income areas, tracked over eight years. It offers an insider perspective on what makes neighbourhoods viable and alive for families with children.

The bulk of the population is based in urban areas. Families need to survive in cities because the provision of low-cost services creates the need for a low-cost workforce to carry out these tasks. Children, meanwhile, anchor parents, particularly mothers, within neighbourhoods, and therefore neighbourhoods matter a great deal to families. But low-income families, although they provide many vital urban services, have little choice and often have to cope with many problems of poor neighbourhood conditions, services and low-income populations. Families develop survival strategies within their neighbourhoods, based on parenting, the acceptance of incomers, and reliance on community activities. The study shows a major need for wider public support and intervention to equalise conditions but it also shows the need for fine-tuning interventions to local social conditions, and particularly to local networks of mutual support which should be enhanced, rather than damaged by improvements.

The families make many proposals for improving neighbourhood conditions, principally asking for more family-friendly facilities, with more mixed income services, as well as more affordable housing, more local supervision and a more pro-children, pro-youth environment. This would require more hands-on local services. Our overall conclusion is that cities need to hold onto families but that families with choice will only stay if city-neighbourhoods become more viable for children and young children through more local control of conditions.

Key Words: families, city neighbourhoods, local control