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From Communities to Neighbourhoods II: Evaluation*

Steve Baldwin
Neighbourhood Networks Project
TACADE
1 Hulme Place
Salford M5 4QA
United Kingdom

Polytechnic Southwest
Plymouth
United Kingdom

Summary

This paper investigates the relationship between the concepts of 'neighbourhood' and 'community' in the context of deinstitutionalisation attempts. The dominant service ideology of so-called 'community care' is viewed as repressive, restricted and authoritarian. In the broader context of architecture and environmental design, the concept of neighbourhood is explored, with reference to service planning for a range of client groups. This focus is made in the wider perspective of service evaluation.

Résumé

La relation entre les concepts de 'quartier' et de 'communauté' est examinée dans le contexte des démarches de désinstitutionnalisation. L'idéologie dominante pour ce qui est de l'offre en services liés à la santé qui s'exprime dans ce qu'on appelle la 'prise en charge communautaire' est vue comme repressive, limitée et autoritaire. Le concept de quartier est discuté dans le contexte plus large de l'architecture et de l'aménagement, référence étant faite à la planification de services pour un éventail de groupes 'clients'. Cette discussion est située dans une perspective générale d'évaluation des services eux-mêmes.

1. Definitions and Typologies - Towards Synthesis

Examination of sociological perspectives on the concept of neighbourhood brings the conclusion that the level of understanding and explanation has rarely exceeded that of descriptive accounts. Typically, these have been based either on an ethnographic approach (Warren & Warren, 1977) or on a more active involvement in the method of observation (Henderson & Thomas, 1980). Progress in the field beyond

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the level of description has been restricted by a perceived failure to specify an adequate typology of neighbourhoods.

In the field of human geography, there has been a trend towards substitution of non-spatial, nominal terms such as neighbourhood. Instead, natural science models have been adopted to study such relationships. In the search for precision and better specification, 'neighbourhood' has been substituted by terms such as 'locality'. This model of physical reality is based on the relative position of people and places in three-dimensional space.

Contemporary developments in environmental psychology have produced a flux in the field. Traditional views of the relationships between people and places have been based on a deterministic, behavioural model. This mechanistic view of much of human behaviour as determined by environmental factors has received much criticism. Studies in the field have assisted in the refinement of the powerful technology of operant conditioning. Recent critics, however, argued for the inclusion of mediating factors, such as understanding of the meaning of these environments for different people.

A synthesis of these three perspectives suggests that the search for the 'definitive' typology of neighbourhoods may be extremely difficult to find. As one observer has noted, "there are no set of facts as elusive as neighbourhood facts" (Yin, 1985).

It may even be counter-productive to prolong this search for a classification system. Evidently, any future attempt to produce such a system should transcend the level of previous subjective descriptive accounts which lack any empirical base. Meanwhile, it is unsurprising that attempts at classification have produced much frustration; with so little agreement and so much confusion about definitions of neighbourhood, it is likely that these attempts will add little to an understanding of the concept.

This apparent disarray has prompted some observers to question the validity of the concept of neighbourhood. In particular, some critics have noted that 'neighbourhood' is an ambiguous term, which does not have shared meaning amongst different people (e.g., Allan & Higgins, 1987). In particular, underlying assumptions about cohesiveness, size, unity, integration, and homogeneity in neighbourhoods have been challenged (Abrams, 1986; Bulmer, 1986).

It is highly appropriate to nurture the conditions for constructive dialogue and debate, to examine underlying assumptions. It is inappropriate, however, to suggest abandonment of the concept altogether, in favour of the 'more neutral' term of locality, as some have proposed (Allan & Higgins, 1987). As noted, an examination of the field of human geography indicates that terms such as 'locality' are certainly not value-neutral. Moreover, the natural science origins in physics of such terms severely limit their applicability in the context of behavioural and social sciences.

Such criticism reveals that the concept of neighbourhood is at-risk of devalutions. It is particularly revealing to observe the same criticisms of 'community' now applied to neighbourhood. This may have resulted from a fundamental failure to learn from previous errors of conceptualisation and practice, with the concept of community. Thus, for example, it has been disconcerting to witness several recent attempts to specify the demographic size of neighbourhoods, in terms of minima and maxima (Henderson & Thomas, 1980; Cumberledge, 1986). Such attempts are doomed to failure.

Whilst, therefore, there are some unresolved questions about 'neighbourhood', it is a considerable improvement on the concept of community, which remains riddled with conceptual and practical problems. 'Community' has been unworkable as a way of understanding, planning, developing, or evaluating human services for client groups (Baldwin, 1987). More than 30 years ago, ninety-four definitions of community were identified (Hillery, 1955).

Overuse and abuse of terms such as 'community care' and 'care in the community' have produced considerable confusion about their meaning. The current usage has become synonymous with 'non-hospital services', with no indication of location, type, range, quality, or quantity. Such conceptual confusion effectively *set the conditions for non-evaluation of human services during the 1980s.*

2. The Challenge for Neighbourhood Studies

The current challenge for the future is to determine whether fact-gathering in neighbourhoods can be used as a process which is amenable to empirical social science. The concept of neighbourhood may need to be refined differently; evidently the risk exists of conceptualising 'neighbourhood' as a diminutive of community. This naive reductionism should be resisted; evidently neighbourhood is also qualitatively different from traditional views about community. 'Neighbourhood' suggests social, physical, geographical, and cultural characteristics which relate to a specific phenomenon which is *different* from the unit of analysis of city, town, village, household, or individual.

Several obstacles to progress remain unresolved. In particular, it may be necessary to accept that no 'standard' definition of neighbourhood exists; possibly, the search for an all-purpose definition should be discontinued. Certainly, the current non-agreement about this definition should not be a barrier for future investigations. A second barrier to progress relates to previous evaluation work completed in the field: many studies report 'no-difference' or negative findings. This may have been the result of misapplication of inappropriate methodologies and technologies. Equally, however, it may be necessary to set the conditions whereby the reporting of negative findings becomes more acceptable (Yin, 1985). In a general research climate which generates expectations of 'success' (Rossi & Freeman, 1982), it may be necessary to alter the conditions to accept the negative findings of evaluation studies.

Other obstacles to progress relate to general difficulties of obtaining data for dependent variables in neighbourhood evaluations: the nature of the milieu is dynamic change, which produces inevitable problems for measurement and instrument validity. The lack of an adequate typology for neighbourhoods renders sampling techniques for comparative evaluation studies somewhat dubious; this has produced a trend to study individual neighbourhoods in isolation. These studies have relied on cross-sectional methods to measure changes over time. This has produced many single-case studies which have not specified adequate controls.

Further unresolved problems relate to units of analysis and levels of explanation in neighbourhood studies. 'Neighbourhood research' in practice may imply study of small groups of people, which is clearly a separate phenomenon. The adequate specification of the focus for study will remain elusive, as long as problems continue with definitions and typologies. In addition, it is often difficult to account adequately

for external events when studying neighbourhoods; those forces are often remote, and difficult to isolate.

These factors exert considerable influence on such investigations, to the extent that subsequent studies and evaluations often focus on individual neighbourhoods. This trend towards examination of isolated neighbourhoods has produced a reliance on single-case studies. In practice, many such investigations have been restricted to post-hoc analysis, or simplistic before-and-after studies (Yin, 1985). The need remains to design robust, rigorous, comparative neighbourhood evaluations.

3. Evaluation Methodologies

3.1. Planning an Evaluation Study

The major justification for evaluation studies in neighbourhood work is the data yielded by such systematic investigations. To provide value for money (to justify the additional expenditure), the study should be designed to produce inputs for subsequent planning and policy-making.

The optimum strategy to set the conditions for this outcome requires the use of scientific procedures to achieve maximum rigour in any particular situation. This will require a focus not only on outcome (ends), but also on the process (means) by which this is achieved. Thus, the contents, of the neighbourhood programme should not be restricted to statements about goals, but should also make statements about how these goals should be achieved.

Certain preconditions exist for testing neighbourhood programmes. In particular, the programme contents should be clearly specified, in order to be able to determine whether implementation has been successful (Rutman, 1977). This will require detailed statements about desired goals and their intended effects. In practice, however, the 'real' programme goals may be obscure; hence, an exclusive focus on formally stated goals will be inadequate. Complementary monitoring of side-effects and unintended consequences is thus required. The rationale of the relationship of the evaluation to the programme requires specification. This rationale is designed to address the fundamental question of evaluability assessment. It requires an analysis of decision-making systems, and a clarification of the evaluation questions. In particular, it is imperative to know if the primary intended users have agreed the content, goals, and objectives of the neighbourhood programme. This approach to formative research evaluations requires an explicit commitment to feedback of results to the users following completion of the programme.

To examine the true purpose of individual neighbourhood programmes, it is necessary to clarify their stated goals and objectives. Many programmes will contain a hidden agenda and it is therefore essential to know the exact source of initiation of the evaluation (Suchman, 1972; Rutman, 1977). To specify the relevant programme variables for measurement and evaluations, programme components should be correctly identified and articulated. This process of specification should enable similar identification of programme goals, and other possible intervening variables.

The rationale should outline how the programme can potentially accomplish the goals. Despite this specification, however, the measures used to define the relative success of the programme will introduce considerable variation to the eventual out-

come. In particular, the choice of indicators used to measure change will relate different ideological and theoretical positions. Recurrent problems of reliability and validity will add to this variation. To reduce the effects of this variability, the rationale should contain explicit statements about the utilisation of the findings of the evaluation. This may help to avoid subsequent misapplications and re-interpretation of outcome data by groups with vested interests.

3.2. Designing an Evaluation Study

The single most salient criticism of so-called 'community care' and 'care in the community' programmes has been the failure to employ evaluation methodologies. The implementation of deinstitutionalisation initiatives, in particular, has been characterised by non-evaluation as the standard (Praill & Baldwin, 1988). Moreover, attempts at deinstitutionalisation for a range of client groups, including elderly people, people with a mental handicap and people with long-stay (rehabilitation) problems, have not been based on empirical evidence on efficacy or efficiency. Rather, such attempts have been based more often on economic, moral, pragmatic, or political viewpoints. In particular, 'community care' has been used as an empty metaphorical counterpoint to 'non-hospital care'.

In a dominant ethos where evaluation has been viewed as a luxurious afterthought to the design and implementation of human services, it has been difficult to modify attitudes and behaviour to favour such initiatives. In particular, it has been difficult to integrate the concept of evaluation at the design stage. This has been partly due to a lack of agreement about what constitutes a strong evaluation methodology. To date, social science methods have been adopted in human services evaluations: in a field with a relatively short history and dubious pedigree, the rules of data collection have not yet been determined, and remain unclear. As yet, consensus about research designs has not been achieved.

The evaluation of neighbourhood services has produced several characteristic problems, which relates to initial decisions about design. Specifically, the design elements required for comparisons and statistical analysis have created methodological problems. Thus, for example, the identification of appropriate control groups, randomisation of subjects/interventions, and the generation of sufficient data points to allow the meaningful application of statistical procedures, all present particular problems for the evaluation of neighbourhood services. Such elements, however, are fundamental to a robust design (Fitz-Gibbon and Morris, 1987), and will require resolution to permit the development of more adequate methodologies for neighbourhood evaluations.

A further problem for the rational implementation of neighbourhood services has been a prevailing view that has marginalised evaluation attempts as an activity unrelated to services provision itself (Patton, 1982). One aim of neighbourhood services, therefore, should be to create a subsequent climate in which evaluation initiatives become an explicit goal of service provision. In a context in which statutory funding agencies often view the fundamental aim of service provision as the guarantee of 'minimum standards', it is potentially threatening to generate data which indicate 'negative' outcomes. The design of neighbourhood evaluations therefore should attend specifically to questions about the audience for subsequent reports, and utilisation of findings.

3.3. Designs for Neighbourhood Evaluations

Four types of research design have produced promising results in the evaluation of neighbourhood services:

- True Control Group, pre-test post-test
- Non-equivalent Control Group, pre-test/post-test
- Single Group Time Series
- Time Series with Non-Equivalent Control

3.3.1. True Control Group, pre-test post-test

This classical design requires random assignment of subjects to two groups, E and C. The design requires that Group E receives Programme X. Group C, meanwhile, receives no programme, or an alternative programme Y. Providing that pre-test scores show Groups E and C to be equivalent, differences at post-test can be attributed to Programme X.

This is a powerful design, which permits direct comparisons of programmes in neighbourhoods. Frequent problems of randomisation, however, can make implementation of this design difficult in neighbourhood evaluations.

3.3.2. Non-equivalent Control Group, pre-test/post-test

This design requires the formation of a comparison Group C, which is similar to the experimental Group E. These groups, however, are not formed by random assignment. The formation of Group C requires the identification of a group which is as similar as possible to E. Group E receives Programme X, whilst C receives no programme, or an alternative programme. Information should be collected about ways in which Groups E and C are similar and different at pre-test. If it can be demonstrated that E and C are approximately equivalent, it is possible to attribute differences at post-test to Programme X.

This design is less powerful than the previous one; it is more practical, however, for neighbourhood evaluations. In practice, it is difficult to achieve true randomisation, whether by neighbourhoods, interventions or clients. This design offers a pragmatic solution to the requirements of statistical analysis.

3.3.3. Single Group Time Series

This design does not permit comparisons between neighbourhoods; rather, it is applied to studies of individual neighbourhoods. It requires the collection of data with test measures at regular intervals prior to the implementation of Programme X. This experimental Group E can be formed either by repeated administration of the test measures to the same group over time, or to a succession of groups. The test measures are then repeated during Programme X. Finally, these measures are repeated at regular intervals, after completion of Programme X. Examination of time series graphs plotted from test measures allow extrapolation of trends in the data. Elimination of other explanations for subsequent changes in levels of the test measures allows the conclusion that these changes were a result of Programme X.

This design offers an ideal method of analysis for the evaluation of programmes in individual neighbourhoods. Whilst it does not allow comparisons between different studies, it is a useful design using a neighbourhood as its own control.

3.3.4. Time Series with Non-Equivalent Control

This is an extension of the previous design, with the addition of a comparison group. Having identified the E Group, another Group C should be located which is as similar as possible to E. The programme of Group C can be designated Programme C. Test measures are then collected for both Groups E and C at regular intervals. These measures are repeated during the implementation of Programmes E and C. Following completion of the programmes, the test measures continue at the same regular intervals. Differences between E and C which cannot be explained by other factors/events can be attributed to Programme E.

This design offers many possibilities for neighbourhood evaluations. It can be applied both to investigative comparisons between neighbourhoods, and also to examine the effects of different interventions within the same neighbourhood.

4. Overview of Experimental Design

These quasi-experimental designs offer a range of applications in field settings (Campbell, 1969; Campbell & Stanley, 1966; Cook & Campbell, 1976, 1979). A firm commitment to principles of design and implementation has assisted their application in the USA in some neighbourhood evaluations (e.g., Rossi & Freeman, 1982). Examination of recent studies in the UK, however, indicates that many neighbourhood projects have not been subject to formal evaluations. Much of this work in neighbourhoods has been based on flimsy methodology and very weak designs, such as before-and-after studies (Baldwin, 1986; Baldwin & Baser, 1986); descriptive demographic surveys (Cunningham *et al.*, 1985); and after-only designs (Abrams, 1978; 1980; Bayley & Tennant, 1985).

It has been difficult to achieve a true commitment to evaluation principles in the applied settings of neighbourhoods. Thus, whilst social science methods have offered a promising range of evaluation technology, much neighbourhood work has been conducted in the absence of any formal evaluations. This may be due partly to a historical phenomenon; traditionally, social workers and community workers often have been the most frequently represented professional groups involved in neighbourhood work. These groups are not renowned for their commitment to evaluation research. Much sociological enquiry has been conducted using a method of participant-observation (Henderson & Thomas, 1980; Yin, 1985) and ethnographic study (Warren & Warren, 1977).

In practice, a rational balance between 'objective' and 'subjective' data has been extremely elusive in the field of neighbourhood work. Studies which have relied on soft, impressionistic accounts of interventions have been unconvincing; equally, studies which have relied solely on 'products', at the expense of consideration of 'process' variables, have sometimes been overcommitted to an objective, 'hard-nosed' approach to evaluation. Accurate performance measures are required, which generate relevant information about intervention effects, with respect to the original programme goals. This explicit commitment to measurement of initial and current performance levels

allows rational decision-making. It requires, however, a prerequisite of clear, accurate and precise programme objectives and goals (Spiegel, 1977).

The complexity of neighbourhood evaluations also requires an appreciation of the subject of 'ownership'. Frequently, residents and users of services in neighbourhoods have been excluded in design and implementation (Hester, 1975). Similarly, evaluation initiatives frequently have not been initiated as a result of consumer requests (Patton, 1982). An appreciation of the political reality of evaluation studies requires the recognition that the use of information and data is not value-free.

Participation and involvement of consumers in design should meet at least four minimum requirements:

- consumers should 'own' it;
- an adequate sampling of users should occur;
- a commitment to gradualism and impermanence; and
- the use of a satisfactory medium to represent accurately the final design (Kaplan, 1978).

True consumer involvement as eventual 'stakeholders' (Patton, 1981; 1982) should be a prerequisite for all neighbourhood evaluations.

5. Improving Neighbourhood Evaluations

The single most important reason to insist on evaluations in neighbourhood work is to be able to distinguish between useful current programmes and ineffective or inefficient programmes. Given appropriate design and implementation, evaluation data should inform the nature and scope of problems, and *which programmes and which interventions are best matched to particular populations.* Such data also should be informative about cost-benefits and effectiveness. This systematic use of social-research procedures is more than an application of methods, however: given a sound rationale, evaluation should become an integral part of social policy and public administration. Whilst it is apparent that human services and statutory government agencies operate according to different sets of norms, the results of local neighbourhood evaluations should form en essential input to the complex mosaic of national service provision.

Evaluation initiatives, therefore, should exert a major influence on subsequent improvements to service delivery, as well as providing an explicit mechanism for accountability. Decisions about continuation, expansion, or curtailment of service components should be linked to feedback from evaluation questions. The legitimation for individual programmes (and subsequent policy) should be linked to estimates of percentages of successful implementation and target completion. Neighbourhood evaluations should have specific consequences for subsequent features of design, implementation, timelines, and staffing (Rossi & Freeman, 1982). In field settings, however, it has been difficult to consistently produce timely and unambiguous findings with high reliability and validity. In reality, most evaluation initiatives are likely to be a mid-point between what is ideal, and what is feasible.

Future improvements to neighbourhood evaluations may require the recognition that traditional social science research designs ultimately have limited applicability. Other models from economics, history, and even political science may offer alternative frameworks for neighbourhood evaluations. Certainly, no single research model exists

for such evaluations, and choice of design depends on the local setting and constraints. Despite these variations, however, the fundamental question in neighbourhood evaluations remains: *has this programme improved conditions for users/clients in this neighbourhood?*

Several unresolved problems relate to this question. First, there is the collective nature of the unit of analysis of 'neighbourhood' which poses major problems for purposes of comparison. Second, it is apparent that interventions work unevenly across the whole unit: 'user/client behaviour' cannot be readily translated into a 'neighbourhood effect'. Third, the nature of political and administrative reality produces difficulty for implementation: in practice, interventions become staggered over time, which contaminates subsequent data collection. Fourth, it is extremely difficult to obtain meaningful, accurate, reliable, and valid test measures. Fifth, the application of traditional research designs, in particular the need to establish randomisation and control groups, has been very elusive. Sixth, it frequently has been an uphill struggle to persuade management and administration to provide adequate funding for robust evaluations.

There are evidently no immediate solutions to all these questions. The increasing recognition of the need to involve users/clients is, however, a welcome and overdue shift in perspective. The early involvement of users as 'stakeholders' (Patton, 1981; 1982) in evaluation research initiatives has helped to resolve some problems of ethics, implementation, and accountability. The single outstanding task within neighbourhood work remains to shift the dominant ethos of evaluation from 'expensive luxury item' to 'essential prerequisite'.

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