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The street party: pleasurable community practices and place making

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The street party: Pleasurable community practices and place-making.

Abstract

Purpose. This paper explores spatial and social practices associated with a community street party through the lens of literature on encounter, conviviality and place-making, considering its role developing a place-based sense of community.

Design. The research is based upon a case study of a street party in London. Data sources include interviews, a questionnaire, observation and a literature review.

Findings. The conviviality associated with partying disrupts mundane social relations and engages diverse communities in place-making. People playfully engage with one another, performing and reinforcing community and place values in the environment outside their homes.

Practical Implications – This paper aims to engender understanding and encourage urban policy makers to support activities which combine pleasure and play to develop a place-based sense of community. It identifies practices which actively engage people at a grassroots level and enable them to articulate and perform community values.

Social Implications – Developing a sense of community in rapidly changing and diverse urban areas presents challenges for urban policy makers. Grassroots activities such as street parties often fall outside of funding streams, debates and formal policy making for cities but it is argued here that they enable people to engage in pleasurable and playful interaction and have an important role in disrupting mundane interactions and connecting people.

Originality Value: This paper progresses discussion of community events from a social perspective through an original study, identifying specific practices which contribute to a place-based sense of community.

Keywords Place-making, Conviviality, Party, Community, Event.

Paper Type Research Paper

Introduction

This paper extends the literature on community events and place-making (Duffy and Mair, 2014, 2018; Sweeney, Mee, Mcguirk and Ruming, 2018) by considering convivial practices and experiences associated with a community-led street party. It argues that partying is an important aspect of place-making and contributes to a shared sense of community, enabling playful experimentation with the geographies, sociabilities and everyday functionalities of a place. Its findings focus on the practices associated with the party, including making, doing and sharing, and the articulation and performance of values. This leads to a discussion around the characteristics of the party that support place-making and contribute to a place-based sense of community. These include its location and impermanence, multiple opportunities for engagement, associations with pleasure and disruptiveness.

The study is set in a street in North London which has staged four street parties in the past decade. Street parties are not uncommon in wider area – at least three similar events have been held nearby in the past three years. These parties provide an unusual opportunity for social interaction supported by music, dancing, games, activities and shared food. This paper is developed from research into one party in 2016 and uses literature on encounter, conviviality and place-making to explore the social and spatial practices associated with developing a place-based sense of community in a street that is socially and culturally diverse.

The street

Lynch (1960) conceptualises the street in terms of its physical form – as a linear space with a connective function providing a route, path, or space through which people travel. The street also has social functions and attributes and is ‘a tangible place for the convergence of a multitude of histories, trajectories and expressions’ (Hall 2012, 130).

1
2
3 'People of all ages and cultural backgrounds occupy the street, rub shoulders, and
4 exchange greetings' (Georgiou, 2017:267). It is 'central to the life of an area' (Hall,
5 2012:6), a neutral, shared realm, which provides a setting for everyday associations,
6 activities and experiences (Anderson, 2011; Zukin et al., 2016). While it is shared, it is
7 experienced in dissimilar ways by different people (Rota and Salone, 2014).
8 Geographical proximity does not lead to people facing similar challenges in their daily
9 lives, sharing interests or even using common amenities. In a multicultural, socially
10 diverse street people live together but can remain apart in a state of 'courteous, but
11 distanced co-location' (Hall, 2012:54). Public streets are multi-functional shared spaces
12 that accommodate a variety of users and can be contested as different needs and
13 aspirations compete. For example, car parking and through traffic present challenges to
14 the street as a place for children to play.

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There is a growing literature on events which temporarily close or reconfigure streets. These have multiple objectives and forms - some such as 'Reclaim the Streets' (Carmo, 2012; British Library, 2017) and slut walks (Reger, 2015) highlight peoples' rights and freedom on the streets. Others use recreational and social activity, conviviality and interaction to rework street uses and norms (Bunnell, 2008; Burrage, 2011; Faskunger, 2013; Mason et al., 2011). Examples include 'Ciclovia', 'Open Street' and 'Play Streets' projects which promote on-street recreational activities (D'Haese et al., 2015; Mason et al., 2011; Zieff, et al., 2016) and street festivals and parties support social interaction (Duffy and Mair, 2018).

This paper focuses the temporary reconfiguration of a street to host a community street party. In the UK context street parties started in the early twentieth century and have evolved from practices of "Street Dressing" - decorating the street with flags and bunting to mark national occasions (The Street Party, 2019). The street party is a type of

1
2
3 community festival that is held outside people's homes and is usually organised for and
4
5 by residents. In the past decade street parties have proliferated, encouraged by
6
7 nationwide community initiatives including 'The Big Lunch' and 'The Great Get
8
9 Together' (Eden Project, 2019; Great Get Together, 2019). These initiatives are often
10
11 associated with developing a place-based sense of community and are motivated by
12
13 communitarianism – 'a version of pluralism that defines collective responsibility and
14
15 problem solving with a sort of DIY activism' (Rojek, 2013:109). In this paper the street
16
17 is conceptualised in term of its social and physical attributes as a way to explore the
18
19 implications of a party which disrupts mundane interactions and contributes to peoples'
20
21 sense of community within a residential street.
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28 **Sense of community**

29
30 If 'community life is sustained when social networks are strong, when there are
31
32 people with common interests and who feel a sense of common fate' (Berkowitz, 1996:
33
34 452) it is unsurprising that there are considerable challenges in developing and
35
36 sustaining a sense of community in diverse areas. Vertovec's (2007) concept of super-
37
38 diversity is relevant in the study area where there are multiple dimensions of difference,
39
40 including social class, age, connection to the area, cultural background and ethnicity. In
41
42 areas of super-diversity creating sense of 'community' and 'belonging' is an ongoing
43
44 and complex process (Hoekstra and Pinkster, 2017). Allport's (1954) contact
45
46 hypothesis suggests that mundane and everyday encounters can create conviviality,
47
48 enabling people to make connections and to negotiate difference and belonging (Askins,
49
50 2016; Fincher and Iveson, 2008; Gilroy, 2004; Heil, 2014).
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1
2
3 There is a body of research into the nature of conviviality in multi-cultural areas
4
5 (including Amin, 2008; Nobel, 2013; Georgiou, 2017; Gilroy, 2004; Heil, 2014;
6
7 Wessendorf, 2014) much of which draws from Sennett's (2005) definition of civility
8
9 'the capacity of people who differ to live together' (2005:1). The contention is that in
10
11 areas where ethnic, cultural religious and linguistic diversity are commonplace, people
12
13 demonstrate 'civility towards diversity...as a strategy to both engage with difference as
14
15 well as avoid deeper contact' (Wessendorf, 2014:392). Amin (2008) notes how
16
17 apparently diverse public spaces can become locked into patterns of interactions 'people
18
19 who already know each other meet in known corners'... Their mingling ... 'rarely
20
21 involves transgressing long-accumulated attitudes and practices towards the stranger'
22
23 (2008:9-10).

24
25
26
27
28 Within diverse communities regular convivial encounters with neighbours in the
29
30 street can be cursory or superficial and do not necessarily create understanding, a sense
31
32 of community or 'a respect for difference' (Valentine, 2008: 323). Matejskova and
33
34 Leitner (2011) argue that fleeting encounters can reinforce stereotypes, contrasting this
35
36 with feelings of empathy engendered by the deeper and sustained encounters as people
37
38 engage in a project. Their study points to the importance of activities or events that
39
40 enable people to work together.

41
42
43
44 Much research into conviviality focusses on mundane interactions and suggests,
45
46 'daily habits of quite banal intercultural interaction' (Sandercock, 2006:42), facilitate
47
48 dialogue, and the negotiation of difference which is held to enhance the 'local
49
50 liveability' of neighbourhoods (Amin, 2002:960). More relevant to this study is Nobel
51
52 (2013) who distinguishes between those 'iterative processes which accumulate – and
53
54 moments in which a habituated behaviour might emerge as a response to an *unexpected*
55
56 situation' (2013:175). He illustrates one such moment that occurs as people share an
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1
2
3 experience of a performance in a school play which humorously parodies ethnic
4
5 boundaries. This shifts the established conventions around discussing difference and
6
7 leads to humorous exchanges across diverse groups with lasting effects.
8
9

10 11 **Sense of place**

12
13 'The relationship between community and place is indeed a very powerful one in which
14 each reinforces the identity of the other, and in which the landscape is very much an
15 expression of communally held beliefs and values and of interpersonal involvements'
16 (Relph, 1976:34).
17
18

19
20 Places are conceptualised as 'territories of meaning' (Holt-Jensen, 1999:224),
21
22 'social zones where meaningful representations of, and emotional connections to,
23 people and settings can be formed' (McCunn and Gifford, 2018:208). They are 'fluid
24 dynamic contexts of social interaction and memory' (Stokowsky, 2002:368) which are
25 sustained by narratives, imagery and symbols.
26
27

28
29 The term sense of place relates to peoples 'ability to develop feelings of
30 attachment to particular settings' (Stokowsky, 2002:368) and the term place-making is
31 often used to describe the process 'of transforming spaces into qualitative places'
32 (Cilliers and Timmermans, 2014:414). Place-making is an ongoing, emergent,
33 relational, and social process of investing in spaces (Franklin and Marsden, 2015)
34 involving collective action (Semenza, 2003). It is commonly an activity in which
35 'people actively create meaningful places through conversation and interaction with
36 others' (Stokowsky, 2002:272) through the performance 'of practices which serve to
37 connect heterogeneous elements and draw them together into conversation, to produce
38 and maintain a particular coherence; to make place' (Sweeney et al., 2018:573).
39
40 Initiatives to develop place-based community identity often rely on peoples'
41 engagement in a mixture of social and spatial activities including art, performance,
42 community gardening, festivals and social events. (Semenza, 2003; Semenza and
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1
2
3 March, 2009) These initiatives create new meaning through encounter and shared
4
5 experience, adding another layer to peoples' diverse experiences and identities (Hall,
6
7 2012).

8
9
10 Of particular interest to this paper is the literature on temporary social
11
12 interventions such as festivals and events which can contribute to peoples' place-based
13
14 sense of community by disrupting mundane social practices, strengthening social ties
15
16 and local identity, and creating pleasurable experiences (Duffy and Mair, 2018; Gibson
17
18 and Connell, 2011; Quinn, 2005; Rota and Salone, 2014; Stevens and Shin, 2014,
19
20 Stevenson, 2016). Here politics and pleasure intersect (Sharp, 2008) as people explore
21
22 and perform 'a different way of organizing social and political life' (2008:227) which is
23
24 'plural, temporary and inclusive' (Amin, 2008; 17). The 'positive, celebratory, and
25
26 leisurely' (Sharp, 2008:227) aspects of festivals can create 'symbolic solidarity' (Amin,
27
28 2008; 17) and have the capacity to draw people together and inspire social action. These
29
30 'bursts of community' (Brent, 2009:233) can be transformative at the local scale in
31
32 terms of creating a sense of belonging in a place. However their transformative
33
34 potential is both localised and limited – they do not resolve problems of social
35
36 inequality (Harvey, 1989; Waitt, 2008) and their effects can be temporary (Brent, 2009:
37
38 Koutrolidou, 2012; Rojek, 2013; Waitt, 2008).

45 46 **Method**

47
48 This paper is underpinned by a case study (Yin, 2009) of one street party and
49
50 draws together interviews, questionnaire data, observations and literature to study
51
52 multiple voices and perspectives of the party and its effects. Primary research was
53
54 conducted before, during, and just after the party and included:
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- 20 semi-structured interviews of between 45-75 minutes which were carried out before and after the party- four with residents who led and facilitated the party, 11 with residents who provided music, activities, or food outside their home, three who attended as party-goers but were not directly involved in providing activities and two with people who did not attend. The interviews were conversational and covered definitions of the local community, sense of belonging in that community (including discussion about how many people they knew by name or recognised/greeted in the street), involvement in the party and their engagement in other community/voluntary activities.
- 40 survey questionnaires - completed during the party (21 by residents and 19 by visitors) in which people were asked how they were involved in the party and what they enjoyed most and least about the event.
- Observations of organisational meetings and the party.

Data analysis was informed by grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967).

Consents were obtained from all participants. Interviews were transcribed, coded and themed using Nvivo and research memos were written during the analytical process to capture ideas as they emerged. Themes were developed further using the questionnaire data, observations, research memos, and existing literature on community events and place-making. Interviewees are numbered to maintain anonymity and the numbers appear after direct quotes in brackets thus (1).

The study

The study is based in Archway in the London Borough of Islington (LBI), a place that is socially and ethnically diverse and has experienced rapid population growth - increasing by 17% between 2001-2011 and a further 13% between 2011-18

(UK Census, 2011; LBI, 2018). It is a place of contrast - mean incomes in the Borough are high - in 2014-15 they were £56,800 compared to £31,800 in the UK (Data London, 2017) but it is also the 24th most deprived borough in the UK (LBI, 2018). This disparity is illustrated in the Ward (small electoral district in the Borough) where the study is located, and the least deprived residents live adjacent to the most deprived (LBI, 2018:17). Housing tenure is mixed in the Ward - 45% social housing, 34% owner occupation and 20% private rented (LBI, 2014) and in the street which is occupied in a mixture of tenures and forms, including family and shared houses, flats and bedsits. The street comprises 110 properties and its residents are ethnically, culturally and socially diverse - people who are affluent and those who experience deprivation live as neighbours. While there are no apparent tensions between these different people who live in close proximity, their diverse lives, practices and routines support 'a civility of indifference' and mundane interactions involving polite 'conviviality without engagement' (Georgiou, 2017:266).

Findings

Sense of Community

Interviewees identify a place-based, sense of community associated with being 'local' - a term that includes people who live in the street or regularly traverse it. They identify spatial characteristics including 'trees' and 'greenery which provide a setting for on-street sociability (5, 7, 10 and 15). Living physically close to one another in a narrow road and terraced housing and flats supports social interaction. 'The family across the road feel like your neighbours as well as the people next door so that we *community* a lot by just shouting across the road' (11). Interviewees identify important neighbourhood places where they can meet and socialise. These include a church hall in the adjacent street which is used for activities including a playgroup, after-school

1
2
3 clubs, and exercise classes. Shops at the end of the street provide ‘places that people use
4
5 but also places where they meet’ (12) and the local school offers opportunities for
6
7 residents with younger children to meet.
8
9

10 Peoples’ place-sense of community arises from ‘relationships with people in the
11
12 street’ (10) ‘friendships with people in the nearby area’ (11) and ‘recognising people
13
14 who regularly walk along it’ (15). These relationships are often based on greetings, and
15
16 brief conversations but form the basis of convivial familiarity with neighbours that
17
18 supports a sense of belonging and confidence in the environment around their homes.
19
20 They are enhanced by common interests such as raising children, political campaigning,
21
22 playing music, and on street guerrilla gardening (7, 8, 11, 18, 19). Geographical
23
24 proximity and common interests intersect creating a ‘densely acquired network of
25
26 familiarity’ (Hall, 2012:129) which develops as;
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29

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31
32 ‘whatever is local becomes a part of your life...and involves ‘getting to know
33
34 your neighbours through the small things - It could just be buying your milk
35
36 every day at the shops -you recognise people, they get to know you and then you
37
38 have a good chat’ (15).

39 Interviewees discuss challenges they face in developing a place-based sense of
40
41 community – identifying regular turbulence as people move in and out of the area and 3
42
43 major shifts - one in the 1970’s when large scale housing demolition severed
44
45 friendship networks; in the 1990’s when the area changed rapidly becoming ‘smarter’
46
47 (16) ‘or gentrified’ (18) as more ‘middle-class families moved in and refurbished
48
49 houses’ (3), and more recently in the early 2000’s as private renting increased and it
50
51 became more diverse again. This type of turbulence is not uncommon in inner cities and
52
53 is associated with wider urban processes of regeneration and change that transform
54
55 neighbourhood relations (Hall, 2012). In this street peoples’ sense of community is
56
57 dynamic, constantly being worked as the area changes existing networks are severed
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1
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3 and new networks are formed. The street party is one process which reworks peoples'
4
5 placed-based feeling of community.
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9 ***The contribution of the party to a place-based sense of community***

10
11 The party encompasses collective action to transform the street (Semenza, 2003;
12
13 Semenza and March 2009), disrupting everyday relations and creating shared
14
15 experiences and memories. 'It brings people together' (7), 'you get to meet many of the
16
17 neighbours that you might not know' (2). Relationships with neighbours change
18
19 'Rather than just a faces passing in the street they become somebody you can smile and
20
21 say "hello"... you know where they are and you can look out for each other' (7). The
22
23 party 'makes people feel a sense of belonging... a real sense of community and that
24
25 neighbours share with each other' (9).
26
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28

29
30 The civilities and associations arising from face-to-face interactions are
31
32 important (Georgiou, 2017) and the party facilitates introductions and communication
33
34 which is sustained through civil and convivial everyday exchanges.
35
36

37
38 'It creates a remarkable opportunity to meet people that I haven't met before and to
39
40 break down barriers. The last ones really contributed to relationships that have
41
42 been sustained by bumping into each other in the street once every few weeks,
43
44 seeing each other at the local shop and so on' (11).
45

46
47 Insert figure 1 around here.

48
49 Figure 1: What do people enjoy about the party.
50
51

52
53 Figure 1 is developed from the questionnaires and includes people who attended
54
55 the party but were not directly involved in its organisation. The most enjoyable aspect
56
57 is getting to know other people in the street. The most commonly used words are
58
59 'meeting' and 'neighbours' highlighting the importance of face-to-face convivial
60

1
2
3 exchanges and reflecting a shared desire to be together which resonates with research by
4
5 Brent, 2009 and Georgiou, 2017; Hall, 2012; Semenza and March, 2009. The
6
7 temporary spatial transformation of the street and the community atmosphere of the
8
9 party facilitate pleasurable and friendly interactions, enabling people to move beyond
10
11 the courteous conviviality of everyday greetings. Similar to studies by Duffy and Mair,
12
13 (2014, 2018) at this party pleasurable interaction is supported as people share music,
14
15 food and drink, and enables people to perform their identities in the unfolding story of
16
17 the place.
18
19
20
21
22

23 ***Social practices at the party.***

24 *Making, doing and sharing.*

25
26 Developing a street party is a convivial process that draws upon the diverse
27
28 skills and creativity within the community. Hall (2012) and Semenza and March,
29
30 (2009) contend that creative expression can be a means to promote togetherness,
31
32 interaction and shared experience, linking people to places. This happened as people
33
34 prepared for the party within their families and with neighbours. Six women
35
36 interviewees identified the importance of the shared experience of making party
37
38 bunting together. An open invitation was sent to everyone in the street by flyer. Twelve
39
40 women gathered on the evening - for many it was the first time they were invited into
41
42 this neighbour's house - some knew each other well and others had not previously met.
43
44
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50 'It was interesting to do something like that. Culturally it is something that women
51
52 used to be doing in other places and other times quite often, but we don't have
53
54 many opportunities to do that now and not with our neighbours. So, I think there's
55
56 something quite special about doing something creative together' (12).
57
58
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1
2
3 The experience of making bunting was perceived to create a sense of community
4
5 through the conversations, laughter and understanding that emerged in the practice of a
6
7 shared task.
8
9

10
11
12 Another creative endeavour was the preparation of food to share with
13
14 neighbours and was commonly mentioned by interviewees and questionnaire
15
16 respondents. Cooking for the party drew together extended families and friends,
17
18 providing opportunities to communicate cultural difference and traditions. For example
19
20 one interviewee whose family originate from India said:
21
22

23
24
25 'My mum cooks samosas and ... and my workplace has got loads of tea urns. So
26
27 I borrowed one of those, borrowed a trestle table and had tea and samosas. We
28
29 made a really big effort to go and say hello to people' (17).
30

31
32 As an observer I noticed that sharing food encouraged conversation and how sharing
33
34 practices gained momentum as people were offered food and drink, and in-turn became
35
36 increasingly generous. As that happened narratives about place, friendliness and
37
38 sharing were strengthened and this process continued after the party as stories were
39
40 recollected and retold.
41

42
43 Creative and sharing practices were also identified by a group of resident
44
45 musicians met before the event to work out a schedule and how to develop
46
47 collaborations between their existing bands and to 'organise the logistics and running
48
49 order for the musical items' (11). Playing music was partly about performing or
50
51 entertaining but also seen as a process of sharing, informal collaboration and
52
53 experimentation between the musicians in the street (1, 12, 17). Spontaneous
54
55 opportunities were encouraged through an 'open mic' session enabling other people to
56
57 join in and for new collaborations to emerge. Interviewees associated playing and
58
59
60

1
2
3 engaging in music with conversation, interaction and dancing during the event and more
4
5 lasting collaborations and friendships after.
6

7
8 Creative, sharing practices were also evident on the day as people brought out ladders to
9
10 put up bunting, negotiated where different element of the party should be sited and set
11
12 up different elements. They decorated the street, the exteriors of their homes, set up
13
14 stalls and prepared activities. There was a photo booth, a street museum, a badminton
15
16 court, Zumba, a quiz, art activities, face-painting, football, a storytelling clown, Lego
17
18 building, a book shop, a 'chill-out zone' for teenagers, a display from a local boxing
19
20 club, food stalls and a 'conflict resolution centre' (Figure 2) for water fights.
21
22

23
24 Insert Figure 2 here
25

26
27 During the party people engaged in a variety of activities; they talked, ate
28
29 together and played football. Children threw water bombs at one another, people
30
31 danced and listened to music. Creating and participating in these events is an example
32
33 of active place-making (Franklin and Marsden, 2015) encouraging 'plasticity of habit'
34
35 (Nobel, 2013:176) by disrupting mundane interactions and producing memorable
36
37 experiences to support post-party social interactions in the street. Similar to studies by
38
39 Semenza and March, (2009) and Nobel (2013) at this party communal creativity
40
41 developed encounters, shared experiences and collective memories.
42
43

44 45 46 *Performing and reinforcing place values.* 47

48
49 In the street party place values were articulated, performed and reinforced, a
50
51 process of active meaning-making (Stokowsky, 2002) which developed shared
52
53 understanding of the community and place. Friendliness and inclusiveness were the two
54
55 most commonly identified characteristics and values of the street. Neighbourly
56
57 friendliness was identified by all interviewees and was associated with sharing and
58
59 caring that crossed diverse social, ethnic, and cultural groups. It was 'learned' (12)
60

1
2
3 actively 'practiced' (6, 15), and required an understanding of the 'concerns and
4
5 problems faced by neighbours' (12). It was performed as people prepared for the party
6
7 together, and through the temporary intensification of friendliness during the party. Six
8
9 interviewees who were not born in the UK and described the party as part of a process
10
11 of feeling welcome, and creating a sense of belonging in the street. Interviewees
12
13 identify a family friendly street where people care for neighbours children, 'and help
14
15 each other out' (19). This characteristic was reinforced at the party by the provision of
16
17 many childrens' activities despite the majority of residents not having school age
18
19 children. Family friendly was broadly constructed and supported by residents inviting
20
21 family members and friends with children.
22
23
24
25

26 There was a widely held aspiration 'to be inclusive of everybody in the street'
27
28 (9) and this inclusiveness was articulated and performed through sharing and convivial
29
30 interactions among a diverse range of residents during the party. There was no formal
31
32 organisational structure for the event and several interviewees identified a differences in
33
34 peoples' involvement. Those most engaged in setting up the event were predominantly
35
36 white 'middle-class people' (1, 2, 3, 9) and two interviewees identified practices that
37
38 might inadvertently exclude people including the location of planning 'meetings in
39
40 people's homes' (1) and informal 'around the table' decision making' (9) which
41
42 favoured the most confident and articulate residents. However all interviewees noted
43
44 that the people who took on organisational roles created the basic structure for the party
45
46 and carried out tasks that others did not want to do. Without a formal organisation
47
48 several residents took on the 'practical stuff...getting funding...booking the clown,
49
50 getting Arsenal to come along' (9), 'filling in the application forms and getting the
51
52 insurance sorted' (4).
53
54
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59
60

1
2
3 This approach was ‘organic, inclusive and bottom up’ (10), but created a basic
4
5 infrastructure under which small events and activities could be developed by individual
6
7 households and groups outside peoples’ homes. Interviewees unanimously supported
8
9 the lack of formal structure and it was seen as a way of engaging more people and
10
11 providing freedom for individual households and sub-groups to organise party activities
12
13 independently. Many individual households developed activities – some of which were
14
15 communicated to other residents and others which emerged on the day. This informal
16
17 and often spontaneous engagement, reflects the emergent, relational and social nature of
18
19 partying. All interviewees thought that the street party was inclusive, ‘on the day
20
21 everyone will turn up and be part of it’ (9) and saw high turnout as reflecting a widely
22
23 shared aspiration for an inclusive party where people could meet neighbours.
24
25
26
27

28 The street party ‘activates and is activated by ideas and issues about
29
30 “community” identity and “place” that were already in circulation’ (Duffy and Mair
31
32 2014:54). It enabled people to engage in atypical activities and interactions and to
33
34 perform and reinforce commonly held values in an interactive process that developed
35
36 their sense of the community within the street. People’s interactions, experiences and
37
38 active engagement within the physical setting of the street created, reproduced, and
39
40 defended place values and meanings (Cresswell, 1996).
41
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47 **Discussion**

48
49 Several characteristics of the street party that develop a place-based sense of
50
51 community are discussed below.
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55 ***Proximity to home.***

56
57 The street outside peoples’ homes is ‘local’ a ‘sphere of familiarity and
58
59 intimacy’ (Hall, 2012;130) a place of mundane routines and interactions which is both
60

1
2
3 public and personal (Wessendorf, 2014). The location of the party outside peoples'
4
5 homes supported a sense of entitlement, comfort and belonging, empowering people to
6
7 arrange and take part in activities on their own terms. People felt free to set up-picnic
8
9 tables and activities independently of the main organisation of the party which
10
11 supported devolved practices in the articulation of street values. This party was located
12
13 on the street but is dissimilar to other initiatives which use recreational and social
14
15 activities to promote social interaction. Unlike the 'Ciclovia' and 'Open Street' projects
16
17 (Mason et al., 2011; Zieff et al., 2016) it was developed by people who live on the street
18
19 and unlike 'Play Streets' (D'Haese et al., 2015) it sought to involve all residents. These
20
21 differences supported diverse engagement in a shared experience which contributed to
22
23 the ongoing process of place-making.
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30 *Ephemerality*

31
32 While residents aspired to neighbourly friendliness, differences in their daily
33
34 lives meant mundane interactions were often fleeting. The party provided an unusual
35
36 and short lived opportunity to step outside of the hectic 'messiness of everyday life,'
37
38 (Heil, 2014:456) and to meet, interact, engage with difference and create shared
39
40 experiences and neighbourhood values across a diverse community. Temporary
41
42 reconfiguration of the street created a 'loose' space (Franck, and Stevens, 2006) and
43
44 makeshift structures and activities, provided opportunity for convivial interactions and
45
46 the suspension of mundane social relations. The ephemeral nature of the party meant
47
48 that negotiations about the uses of the street space were relatively relaxed. The
49
50 emphasis was on a short-lived surge of conviviality and pleasure - any inconveniences
51
52 were short-term - at the end of the day the street reverted to its mundane form.
53
54
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56
57 Experimentation, creativity, and celebration provide a way of loosening social/spatial
58
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1
2
3 relations (Sharp, 2008) which is enhanced by the party's temporary, irregular and
4
5 voluntary nature.
6

7
8 Each of the four recent street parties were developed by different alliances of
9
10 people and enacted in different ways. This creates a fluidity and an approach to
11
12 organisation that is flexible, relatively open and adaptable. A burst of energy (Brent,
13
14 2009) is required to create a party and this sporadic format enables different residents to
15
16 engage with varying intensities and in multiple ways. The ability to encompass diverse
17
18 contributions, shifting commitment and informal structure, coupled with recovery time
19
20 between events means that people who would not normally volunteer or who are wary
21
22 about committees and formal community structures choose to engage.
23
24

25
26 The ephemerality and lack of formal organisational structures associated with
27
28 the party is both a help and hindrance. Its diffuse and shifting structure facilitates
29
30 varied opportunities for engagement and draws together diverse residents. However,
31
32 without a formally constituted community organisation it is difficult to access to
33
34 funding and support from the local council. In this case, the councils' decision to waive
35
36 street closure charges for street parties combined with donations from several local
37
38 businesses to cover insurance costs enabled the party to proceed.
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46 ***Wide-ranging opportunities for encounter and conviviality.***

47

48 The street party format enables diverse opportunities for encounter around a core
49
50 of organised events, complemented by an array of activities, performances and
51
52 installations provided by sub-groups of people and individual households. It uses
53
54 creative and pleasurable activities such as cooking, participatory musical performance,
55
56 and house decorating to express and share diverse backgrounds, experiences and needs.
57
58 Partying also includes more informal and spontaneous convivial activities that arise by
59
60

1
2
3 'just being there' (8), these include 'bringing out a table and chairs and sharing some
4
5 wine' (6), 'speaking to my neighbours' (15) and 'dancing in the street' (7); The mixture
6
7 of centralised/devolved and formal/informal activities engages its diverse residents and
8
9 includes spontaneous or unexpected aspects. For example one family invited a Zumba
10
11 teacher who led an impromptu class during the afternoon. The party supports shared
12
13 practices of 'remembering, exchanging, investing and adapting...' (Hall, 2012; 134)
14
15 through engagement in this diverse mixture of activities. By creating common
16
17 experiences and conviviality it adds another layer in the ongoing development of
18
19 residents' sense of place.
20
21
22

23 24 25 ***Pleasure.***

26
27 The links between festivity, pleasure and social action are identified by Sharp
28
29 (2008) and are supported by this study. 'It's always good to have some fun. The fun
30
31 aspect is quite important encouraging us to get together for a party' (7). Anticipated,
32
33 lived and remembered pleasures encourage people to engage with the party and with
34
35 one another. Pleasure is key to developing a place-based sense of community. There
36
37 is a sense of pleasurable anticipation as people plan and engage in diverse practices of
38
39 creative thinking, designing, cooking, and rehearsing musical contributions. The
40
41 multiple micro-processes to develop activities and food are pleasurable in themselves
42
43 and are an integral aspect of their enjoyment.
44
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47
48 The conviviality, playfulness and pleasure experienced during the party enables
49
50 people to experiment with, articulate and perform community values of friendship,
51
52 sharing, and inclusivity. The festive setting provides gaiety, cheerfulness, joyousness
53
54 (Falassi, 1987) through engagement in a variety of pleasant experiences, social
55
56 interactions and unexpected contributions dispersed in different locations along the
57
58 street. The convivial and celebratory context enables greater unpredictability than
59
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1
2
3 would be accepted in a more serious endeavour - randomness and surprise are part of
4
5 the fun. The pleasure endures through shared recollections and conversations in an on-
6
7 going collective meaning making process (Cresswell, 1996; Nobel, 2013; Stockowsky,
8
9 2002) which creates an intangible community resource in the form of a profusion of
10
11 stories and memories. These stories are based on wide-ranging experiences of
12
13 conviviality, celebration and sharing, cannot be owned, fought over or managed in the
14
15 way a more tangible resource would be.
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20 21 ***Disruption.***

22
23 The conviviality born out of everyday-relations provide way of living with and
24
25 negotiating difference. However mundane convivial relations can be careful, polite and
26
27 can become locked or routinised (Amin, 2002, 2008; Georgiou, 2017; Heil, 2014,
28
29 Wessendorf, 2014). The street party explored here creates introductions and unusual
30
31 interactions across diverse groups 'destabilizing boundaries and creating new spaces for
32
33 negotiating across difference' (Leitner, 2012: 830). Amin (2002) argues that temporary
34
35 activities do little to develop sustained interaction and engagement between different
36
37 people. However, in this study the temporary occupation of the street is part of the
38
39 ongoing practice of articulating and performing aspects of community and appears to
40
41 have lasting effects. The intense conviviality, interactions and experiences of pleasure
42
43 at the party cannot be sustained, but form the basis for shared stories and memories
44
45 which underpin street based familiarity, feelings of belonging and sense of place lasting
46
47 well after the event. These findings resonate with Noble (2013) who identifies incidents
48
49 or moments which disrupt and open up relations, the effects of which persist through
50
51 shared experiences and recollections. In this case study the disruptions of the party form
52
53 a wealth of pleasurable experiences and support a collective enthusiasm to engage, meet
54
55 neighbours and develop a sense of community within the street.
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3 The 2016 party builds on experiences from previous parties. Partying is an
4
5 ongoing practice of interruption of mundane relations which enables the articulation and
6
7 performance of community values and provides opportunities for active engagement
8
9 between different people. Creating and recreating atypical conviviality through an
10
11 enjoyable enactment of community opens-up and reworks relations (Fincher and Iveson,
12
13 2008; Askins, 2016). After each party things go back to *normal* but it is a different
14
15 normal - people have met new neighbours, enjoyed something together and have
16
17 collective memories and shared stories adding another layer to the ongoing process of
18
19 developing their sense of place.
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26 **Conclusion**

27
28 This paper develops understanding of the ongoing, relational, and social practice
29
30 of place-making in diverse urban areas by exploring the processes and characteristics of
31
32 a street party. The party is a relatively intangible aspect of place-making, leaving little
33
34 physical detritus in its wake, but is an important process by which people actively
35
36 develop, negotiate and perform a place-based sense of community. This party connects
37
38 people to their neighbours and their neighbourhood, enabling enjoyable interactions and
39
40 experiences which destabilise and rework relations. It has long lasting positive impacts
41
42 as community values of friendliness are performed, retold and become part of the
43
44 narrative of the street, a shared resource held in the form of stories and memories.
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48

49 Partying encompasses making, doing and sharing practices and enables residents
50
51 to articulate, perform and reinforce street values. The temporary appropriation of the
52
53 street for communal neighbourhood festivity loosens its rules and meanings, activating
54
55 sociability through collective experiences which are pleasurable and out of the ordinary.
56
57 Location in the street – the shared, familiar and multi-use place outside people's homes
58
59 creates a sense of ownership, appealing to and engaging its diverse residents. People
60

1
2
3 participate on their own terms and playfully experiment with new possibilities.
4

5 Pleasure and place-making intersect through the activities, conviviality and friendly
6 interactions at the party. Partying helps people to narrate story of the street and their
7 place within it as they collectively create community meanings.
8
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11
12 This findings of this study are optimistic, reflecting primary research which did
13 not reveal negative feelings about the party, even from those interviewees who did not
14 attend. While three interviewees questioned whether white and middle class people
15 might have dominated the organised elements of the party – all agreed that there were
16 diverse opportunities for engagement, enabling the majority of households chose to
17 participate in one way or another. Further study in other places would be useful to
18 investigate the extent to which positivity and optimism are common features of street
19 parties.
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30 On-street partying can create place-making opportunities but also presents some
31 challenges to decision makers. There are political and practical risks associated with
32 this type of informal, temporary, voluntary and unpredictable community endeavour.
33 For example in this case it was not possible to pinpoint a single person who instigated,
34 led or held responsibility for the street party which had emerged from casual
35 interactions between individuals. The organisation lacked transparency and this
36 presented challenges to policy makers as there was a risk that the street party might only
37 represent and provide opportunities for small segments of the community. Informal and
38 ad-hoc organisation meant that residents were unable to bid for funding to support the
39 event and created some risks in terms of the management of the event itself. Without a
40 formal structure or funding residents did not have the resources to support effective
41 crowd control had too many people attended. Finally there is an unpredictability and
42 risk associated with partying, a pleasurable activity that reduces peoples inhibitions and
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3 can support social interaction or alternatively lead to anti-social behaviour or ignite
4
5 existing animosities.
6

7
8 These challenges were not apparent in the research undertaken for this study
9
10 where a mixture of an informal organisational structure and the location outside
11
12 peoples' homes enabled people to choose how and when they contribute to the party.
13
14 There was enough central organisation to arrange the street closure and a core of
15
16 activities and freedom for people to organise small events and activities outside their
17
18 homes. Residents were unable to bid for local council funds but were supported by the
19
20 council who waived street closure charges. The nature of the party meant that it did not
21
22 attract a vast crowd and while there were noisy, unusual and exuberant behaviours, none
23
24 of these is perceived to be anti-social in the party context.
25
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28
29 It is easy to underestimate the potential of the party as a place-making
30
31 mechanism due to its ephemerality, association with pleasure, informal decision making
32
33 structures and the difficulty in seeing or quantifying its outcomes. However, it is
34
35 argued here that anticipation, lived-pleasures and memories of partying creates a
36
37 collective resource of convivial experiences and memories which develop a common
38
39 sense of place. The street party effectively combines conviviality, playfulness,
40
41 friendliness and pleasure to engage people in the serious business of place making. It
42
43 enables people to articulate and perform important values, develop shared experience
44
45 and create common stories which are retold in conversations, through shared
46
47 photographs and social media. This collective resource persists in the minds of
48
49 residents, is held across the diverse community and cannot effectively be owned or
50
51 appropriated by one group.
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55
56 In this study periodic active involvement in on-street partying develops sense of
57
58 place by disrupting routine interactions and enabling people to articulate and perform
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3 neighbourly friendliness. The contention here is that the conviviality associated with
4
5 partying disrupts mundane social relations and has potential as a tool to engage diverse
6
7 communities in place-making. Further research is required to consider the intersections
8
9 between the temporary pleasures of partying and place-making in other settings and to
10
11 consider how such disruptions might be supported and encouraged by decision makers.
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Figure 1 What do people enjoy about the party
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Conflict Resolution Centre
292x390mm (300 x 300 DPI)