

**The role of ‘persistent resilience’ within everyday life and polity: households coping with marginality within the ‘Big Society’**

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### **Abstract**

As Europe’s current economic crisis elongates many households are developing new coping practices in response to the pressures of everyday life. This paper explores such practices within Birmingham’s Castle Vale housing estate, drawing on the increasing engagement within the social sciences with notions of resilience. This concept, originating from engineering, psychology and disaster management, is increasingly used in urban and economic geography and is becoming influential in state policy. This paper furthers its current usages by proposing the concept of ‘persistent resilience’, whereby households, and their networks, develop responses not just to ‘shocks’ but also to more long-term processes, such as the changing nature of employment and/or in reply to constantly altering state policies. This form of resilience has significant policy relevance as it can be seen, albeit under different names, at the heart of the British government’s ‘Big Society’ project, within which communities are to be empowered to steer their development while ‘big government’ withdraws. This paper argues, however, that there is an inherent tension within such assumptions of such community led development as they do not consider the spaces it takes place in. As the paper demonstrates ‘persistent resilience’ is often formed in the semi-formal/informal spaces of everyday life which, in many cases, will be destroyed by cuts to government funding to communities. Thus the paper calls for a more nuanced, everyday, understanding of resilience and the spaces within which it is formed and transmitted.

### ***Key words***

Persistent resilience, coping practices, everyday life, informal spaces, urban regeneration, austerity.

## **Introduction: bringing the concept of resilience to the everyday**

Resilience is commonly taken to mean how a system, structure, network or region rebounds to something approaching equilibrium after a major external shock (cf. Vale and Campanella or 2005, Madni, 2009) and while the concept is well established within ecology, engineering, disaster management and psychology it has, as Martin (2012) notes, only recently appeared in urban and economic geography. This burgeoning engagement is partly in response to the current Europe wide austerity measures which ensure that evermore regions, places and households have to 'be resilient' to the economic downturn. Simultaneously, a neo-liberal discourse has ascended, epitomised by the British coalition's Big Society project, promulgating that despite austerity communities and households will 'cope' due to the assumed resilience of regions (Levitas, 2012). While, indeed, many households are finding new ways to cope with reduced real incomes, the retrenchment of welfare services and a shrinking non-state sector this does not give the state the right to assume that resilience is automatic, that cadres of volunteers and organisations will emerge to replace its functions or that policy changes are aspatial. To problematize these assumptions, and to extend the scale of the debates, this paper explores micro-level resilience to examine more fully the relationships between policy change and the coping tactics of households. It posits the idea of *persistent resilience*, arguing that resilience is not just about 'bouncing back' from major shocks but is also concerned with coping with the more mundane pressures of everyday life, the long-term economic restructuring of regions and changing state welfare policies.

Everyday practices are, of course, not a new observations, for example research on housing estate regeneration discusses it in detail without necessarily labelling it 'resilience' (see, for example, Geronimus, 2000; Mullings and Wali, 1999; Keene and Ruel, 2012). By drawing them into resilience debates demonstrates that they are not aspatial and intrinsic but are vulnerable to external events and policy changes and cannot be relied upon to replace the state's withdrawal. Within economic geography such analysis has concentrated on how economies mediate external shocks and their attempts to restore output levels in the shortest time possible (Martin, 2012), with resilience observed at the national (Duval and Vogel 2008), regional (Simmie and Martin, 2009) and 'high street' levels (Wrigley and Dolega, 2011). By extending this scalar path of analysis to the micro level this paper argues that key to persistent resilience is informality, be it in the formation of networks and the spaces they take place in, the sharing of knowledge and/or the mutual exchanges of everyday life, all extremely ephemeral processes which states find extremely hard to observe and conceptualize. To demonstrate this the below discussions highlight the persistent resilience that can be observed in a location held up by the British government as a shining example of community led governance and involvement, Birmingham's Castle Vale estate. The forms of resilience observed here, and the locations that it takes place in, are then used to argue that state withdrawal from such areas will have grave implications for its future success.

Before its empirical discussions the paper first outlines the multidisciplinary use of the resilience concept, detailing how its usage, and objects of analysis, differs across disciplines and tracing its evolution from examining the recovery from shocks to ideas of capacity

building to minimize the potential for such events. This section also shows how debates have altered from ‘bouncing back’ to a previous position to adaptation to a new realities and opportunities, for example, a region responding to an economic shock may not want to return to previous practices but rather to use the opportunity to develop new forms of economic development. The paper then turns to examine the political adaptation of resilience concepts, with particular reference to the UK’s Big Society policy. This approach believing that in response to government withdrawal, be it welfare or regional support, for example, regions will find ways to respond which do not rely on the state. After noting the methodologies behind the research, and the spaces persistent resilience takes place in, Birmingham’s Castle Vale estate is explored. Key to these sections are discussions on how it is the informal spaces of everyday life that are central to the estate’s resilience and it is the places where this takes place that are most vulnerable to state austerity measures, thus fatally undermining the Big Society argument.

### **From adaptation to adaptability or from ‘bouncing back’ to the persistence of the everyday**

As noted above resilience is often taken to mean how an ecosystem/region/structure rebounds to something approaching its former state after an external shock, such as an environmental disaster (Martin, 2012). Drawing up such ‘rebounds’ the concept entered the policy lexicon, incorporated into the planning of spaces at risk of such events, replacing vulnerability reduction approaches (Manyena, 2006). Space precludes a wide review of the resilience literature (see Christopherson et al., 2010 or Vale & Campanella, 2005 for excellent overviews) so the following discussions explore more fully its adoption into academic research and policy with regards to the urban resilience of places and its move from adaptation to adaptability approaches. The first key focus of resilience was in regard to the vulnerability of places and people, such as the response to catastrophic events and/or systemic breakdowns and their social and economic implications (Vale and Campanella, 2005). At this point emphasis was still placed upon the “return or displacement to single or multiple equilibria and upon internal and external factors that either strengthen or threaten systems, either contributing to or weakening their resilience” (Pike et al. 2010, p.60). The core components of this interpretation were avoidance, survival and recovery (Madni, 2009). From here research began to examine ideas of community resilience with regards to environmental hazard mitigation and impact-minimizing practices post-disaster, both in developed (Haque et al. 2007) and developing countries (Jabeen et al. 2010). Subsequent research demonstrated the relationships between social and ecological resilience, particularly for social groups or communities that are dependent on environmental resources for their livelihoods (Berkes et al. 2002, Adger et al. 2005).

This theoretical shift from response to mitigation was emphasised by Vale and Campanella (2005) who argued that ‘bouncing back’ after a disaster is not satisfactory at the community and/or individual levels as some citizens don’t want a return to ‘how things were’ but desire changes addressing former inequalities and dysfunctions. There is also a temporal element to this as the timeframes of physical and cultural resilience differ widely. For example,

Kirschbaum and Sideroff's (2005) analysis of the 'rebounding' of Gernika stresses the disjuncture between physical resilience, with the city rebuilt by the same Franco government that ordered its destruction, and its emotional and cultural resilience, a much longer process linked to the city's identity and memory for surviving residents and their descendants. Developing this further Coaffee, Wood and Rogers (2008) introduced ideas of everyday resilience, highlighting a range of policy initiatives impacting people and places through the prism of security concerns which go far beyond responses to emergencies. They stress that the concept has been normalised in governmental discourses, encapsulating concerns about 'disorder', 'anti-social behaviour' or 'civil disturbance' which are addressed in different state interventions at local level, through urban design or urban regeneration. Witness, for example, the large body of literature on resilience and emergency planning for the 2012 London Olympics in relation to anti-terrorism measures and transport infrastructure resilience (Jennings et al. 2010). Extending this idea urban geographers and planners explored how to build resilience capacity at local, regional and national levels, in other words how places can be developed in order to minimise external shocks, for example environmental disasters (Hill et al., 2008). Drawing such ideas of resilience into regeneration projects are incorporated, signalling a major shift away from 'managing and mitigating' approaches (Raco and Street, 2012, 1065) towards adaptability. As Pike et al. (2010) discuss in relation to the resilience of places and adaptation;

Adaptation is defined as a movement towards a pre-conceived path in the short run, characterized by strong and tight couplings between social agents in place. Whereas adaptability is defined as the dynamic capacity to effect and unfold multiple evolutionary trajectories, through loose and weak couplings between social agents in place, that enhance the overall responsiveness of the system to unforeseen changes.

This idea of 'multiple evolutionary trajectories' is central to the idea of persistent resilience as it is much less about 'bouncing back' than securing the future which, of course, can take many forms. Thus this concept also draws upon the housing estate regeneration literature, especially in relation to the importance of informal places and networks. While not explicitly employing the resilience concept much research looking at the everyday lives of low-income tenants, in a context of regeneration or displacement, stressed the role of geographically rooted social networks in mitigating structural disadvantage and its health consequences (cf. Geronimus, 2000; Mullings and Wali, 1999; Stack, 1974, Keene and Ruel, 2012), as well as the importance of spaces such as community centres (see for example Bennett and Reed, 1999) as sites of social interactions. These networks are crucial in providing senses of kinship, belonging, security and support (Keene and Ruel, 2012). One early study taking this approach demonstrated that kinship relationships were a major factor of African American women's ability to produce an adaptive strategy of exchanging goods and trading resources, as well as offering child care or temporary fosterage (Stack, 1974). Such relationships can go beyond everyday support but also foster community belonging, empowerment and leadership as demonstrated in Feldman and Stall's (2004) analysis of women residents' activism in Chicago public housing. Their work demonstrates the importance of how space plays a key

role in resistance, community bounding and individual self-esteem. The role of space as a driver of identity and a mediator of poverty is also stressed in other ethnographic research on poor public housing estates (see, for example, Gotham and Brumley, 2003).

This paper, drawing upon the adaptive approach, argues that there is a lacuna in the resilience literature on more long-term socio-economic transformations and their outcomes at the everyday level. At the larger scale this gap has been partially filled by the emergence of the regional resilience concept, arising from the current economic crisis (cf. Christopherson et al. 2010, Hassink, 2010, Martin, 2012; Fingleton et al., 2012). Martin (2012, p.12) argues that here resilience sits upon a system of four interconnected components; resistance (degree of sensitivity or depth of reaction of a regional economy), recovery (speed and degree), re-orientation (re-alignment and adaptation) and renewal towards a growth trajectory. Drawing on economics' hysteresis concept, Martin stresses that regional resilience differs from previous approaches as it is not primarily concerned with the preservation and 'bouncing back' of the system, acknowledging that an evolving economy sees annihilation and structural changes as common and ongoing features, as it decrypts how changes and disturbances can "shift system functioning and performance" in positive or negative ways. This interpretation of resilience differs significantly, as by exploring regional adaptive behaviour he highlights that a 'bounce back' to a previous state might not be desired as new opportunities are afforded by the destruction of outdated modes of production. Within the current economic crisis, many people face not just economic change but also social, political and/or cultural transformations, all of which have no end point, in other words the persistent pressures of everyday life. Furthermore, the crisis is not a 'shock' as such but a compounding element to long-term economic restructuring and the entailing lack of job security and full time employment. In this paper we thus position the concept of persistent resilience as a process based on adaptability involving multiple evolutionary trajectories along quite a long period of time. It does not involve bouncing back reactions further to major shocks but refers to everyday coping practices and behaviours towards ongoing and changing everyday pressures. Persistent resilience focuses on micro-level and look at households and individuals within defined spatial boundaries. As such it puts emphasis on places, people and networks. Central to this is the fact that due to its banal nature, and sheer scope, it is very difficult for the state to see, and conceptualise, adaptability within everyday life (Wedel, 2005). For example, a state can produce policy on the technicalities of unemployment but it is much harder for it to understand how people cope with it on an everyday basis as micro scale practices are often outside its research capabilities.

### **The adaptation of persistent resilience into austerity era state polity**

Central to post-crisis state polity is a form neo-liberal revanchism, whereby spending on social welfare is stripped away with many state functions devolved to the private sector (Crouch, 2011). With little meaningful research many European states increasingly assume that market is more efficient in the social sphere and that communities are best placed to respond to its constituents' needs (Levitas, 2012). From here the rhetoric arises that as

regions have previously bounced back from economic shocks why should they not do so again? Furthermore, if this is inherent within communities then why should the state be involved or provide funding for it? Nowhere is this more explicitly articulated than in the UK's government's Big Society program which, in not exactly subtle imagery of smiley and unhappy faces, portrays big society as good, big government bad. The government's vision for the nature of such relationships is detailed on the Conservative party's website;

We are helping people to come together to improve their own lives. The Big Society is about putting more power in people's hands - a massive transfer of power from Whitehall to local communities. We want to see people encouraged and enabled to play a more active role in society.

Such ideas draw upon the regional resilience concept with regions seen as distinct eco-systems, but there has been a rescaling of 'the region' from large areas to 'the community', which is then quantified as a bounded eco-system (unsurprisingly these extremely contested terms are never engaged with in a meaningful way within the concept). The government has stripped away layers of quasi-governance aimed at promoting regional development, such as the Regional Development Agencies, radically shortening the power vertical between central government and communities (see Bristow, 2013). As the above quote suggests the aim was then to pass governance over to the community with the initial aim that this would be facilitated by micro mayors and emerging local leaders. The concept is presented a spatially with the assumption that all communities are the same and that they are self-contained, as MacKinnon and Derickson (2013, 262) note this;

reinforces the neoliberalization of urban and regional development policy, fostering an internalist conception which locates the sources of resilience as lying within the scale in question.

Nowhere is this clearer than the Big Society concept's retrofitting onto places such as Castle Vale in the government's promotion of the idea. The estate's successful community led regeneration, discussed further below, was employed as a key example to demonstrate the importance of local leadership in urban governance. For example, a Demos (an influential think tank close to government) report, entitled 'civic streets: the big society in action' argued that Castle Vale exemplifies 'how the idealism of the 'Big Society' might translate into reality' (see Hancock et al, 2012, for an excellent discussion on how Liverpool was also used as a Big Society 'laboratory'). The report's central tenets are that 'governments need to get out of the way', 'help people help themselves' and that 'democracy works', going on to state;

These principles must underpin our approach to regeneration in a period of tight budgets and spending restraint. They are part of a new narrative for community regeneration – one that frees up the space for civil society to rebuild itself and its communities while providing the tools to help groups and communities demonstrate their worth and success.

In other words it is the role of local communities to be resilient and to 'bounce back'. It is presented as apolitical, who can argue against the benefits of local leadership, but in reality it is inherently neo-liberal as the private sector is seen as the real driver of economic regeneration, with (2013, 320) going as far as calling the approach a 'neo-liberal shock doctrine'. For example, the Demos report extols the importance of the opening of a large supermarket in Castle Vale to the success of the regeneration, while failing to note that the area's deficit of jobs resulted from its traditional manufacturing base elsewhere. This appropriation of resilience as a panacea for government cutbacks is extremely problematic. Firstly, as Grimshaw and Rubery (2012) highlight, the concept shifts the blame for welfare provision failures away from the state onto local groups that should 'know best'. Then, as the below states while Castle Vale is an apposite example of community led development it does not automatically mean that the networks underpinning it operate in the way envisaged by policy makers. While resilience at the household level clearly exists, as the majority cope with 'shocks', this does not mean, however, returning to MacKinnon and Derickson (2013), that they operate in isolation of the spaces that it takes place in or without outside support. It is impossible for a community to act outside the most resilient of economic forms, resurgent neo-liberalism, yet examples such as Castle Vale are presented by the state as isolated 'islands of hope' from which other spaces should learn from. To problematize this, and to highlight the negative impacts of such neo-liberal policies, the paper now provides a brief history Castle Vale's regeneration before detailing its persistent resilience visible here, before highlighting the impact of government cutbacks on them.

## **Castle Vale's persistent resilience**

### ***The role of place in persistent resilience: ownership, identity and 'feeling good'***

Castle Vale's short history has two major periods, both characterised by the estate's persistent resilience. Following high rise modernist planning principles construction began of 34 tower blocks in 1963 in a 1.5 square mile area, approximately 4 miles from Birmingham's city centre (Mitchell and Kirkup, 2003). While its new residents were initially pleased with the housing conditions (Rowlands et al. 2010), the area declined rapidly with its form making it easy for criminal and drug dealers to operate, with it quickly becoming a 'no go' area (Mornement, 2005). By 1990 the estate's unemployment levels were 23 percent and it was considered a 'dumping ground' for the city's problem tenants and living conditions deteriorated rapidly as the housing stock fell into disrepair (Kirkup and Mitchell, 2003). The estate's condition shamed both local and national governments and political expediency meant a radial regeneration scheme was formulated with, in 1993, the estate's governance passing from Birmingham City Council to the non-state sector through the Castle Vale Housing Action Trust (CVHAT) (Coatham and Martinali, 2010). Provided with a £300 million budget, two-thirds from central government the rest via private finance, the estate's regeneration began with the re-housing of almost 2500 households in low-rise buildings and the opening of The Sanctuary community centre. Retail was embedded into the regeneration with a £35 million retail centre replacing the dilapidated, low choice but high price, shopping options on the estate (Mitchell and Kirkup, 2003 and interview data). That major retailers

opened in Castle Vale both improved its reputation and provided employment as a condition of entry was that a high percentage of employees are local residents (ibid. and interview data).

Castle Vale's regeneration is undoubtedly a success, unemployment has fallen to 6 percent, rent collection exceeds 100 percent and there is a waiting list of applicants wishing to move into the area (Rowlands et al., 2010). However, there are still everyday pressures as many households cope with low incomes, part-time work and/or benefit payments. The current economic crisis exacerbated these issues but residents have had to be resilient there for a much longer period due to the decline of local manufacturing and the resultant shift from full time to part time work. To explore this resilience the paper draws upon research undertaken by the authors in the estate during 2011 – 2012, it was mainly qualitative in nature but 100 household surveys were undertaken to ascertain key issues and research questions and to provide access to potential interviewees. The surveys were undertaken, by a research assistant, across several locations including the main supermarket and community centre and provided a diversified sample across age/gender/work status, enabling understanding of resilience across these categories. Overall 38 in-depth interviews were conducted by the authors initially from survey respondents and then through the snowball methods. Slightly more women than men were interviewed, across a balanced range of ages and incomes, which was not a concern as the surveys revealed little difference in responses between men and women. Interviews were also conducted with those involved, either paid or voluntary, with The Sanctuary Community Centre as the surveys revealed that often these were often the gatekeepers of local knowledge. Given the focus of resilience the experiences of those without formal employment were of particular interest, this is reflected in the quotations used in the paper as given space constraints it is not possible to give adequate depth to all of the experiences in the estate. Also for this reason the post-regeneration period is prioritised though the experiences of some of the interviewees span both periods and these are drawn upon below. The open ended interviews lasted between 1 – 2 hours and were all recorded and transcribed with the transcripts forming the unit of analysis with interviewees referred to anonymously. As the spatialities of resilience became clear in the initial interviews further questions were added to explore this issue further in the later interviews. While space precludes a fuller discussion of the notions of practice and coping it is used here along the lines of de Certeau (1984) who discussed how 'the marginalised', in all of its many forms, develop tactics and practices to cope with the strategies of those with power.

Even though life on the estate was extremely difficult before the regeneration long-term residents all discussed there were positives as well as one said;

Although things were very difficult at times people pulled together and helped each other out. No one else would help so we had no choice. The crime was awful and people were afraid but it was still where we lived ( Female, 50-60, employed).

Many interviewees discussed how they felt a strong sense of identity, a ‘them versus us’ scenario, during the estate’s difficult period. Feeling abandoned by the government they turned to their newly forming social networks for support. People, interviewees note, often stay ‘on the Vale’ and thus over time social networks develop generational aspects, deepening senses of place and their ‘ownership’ of the spaces they operate within. As one interviewee discussed,

I was born in the Vale, I have lived in the Vale for all my life. Two of my kids are still living with me and my grandson. I have three sons also living in Castle; I have my aunt, a cousin, living in Castle Vale, another cousin as well. When I take my grandson to school, I meet the other mums who were friends with my own children (Female, 50-60, unemployed).

So although the estate was perceived by outsiders as extremely marginalised within it some people held senses of belonging and, over time, utilised strong social networks, fostering the long-term persistent resilient of its households as people knew in times of difficulty they had networks that would help them as the following interviewee discussed;

It’s good that everybody knows everybody. It is a very nice community. You know who to trust or not. If you have a problem there is always someone that you can turn to (Female, 40-50, employed).

The improvements to the estate strengthened interviewees’ pride and, unsurprisingly, social networks are still a key part of everyday life,

I know everybody here, so it makes a difference and you feel safe. It is a great community and a place I feel proud of (Female, 30-40, unemployed).

The sense of place is, for the majority of interviewees, essentially limited to Castle Vale, as feelings of belonging to the wider city of Birmingham are virtually non-existent as many residents do not leave the estate, and its surrounding areas, very often. As one interviewee said,

I go out of the Vale, once a week, max two times. I go to Erdington. I haven’t been in Birmingham city centre for years (Male, 40-50, employed). You don’t have to leave Castle Vale for anything. You don’t need to spread too far away from the Vale if you don’t want to (Female, 20-30, unemployed).

While this would seem to support the Big Society’s idea of bounded regional eco-systems outside influences impact detrimentally on the bordering of the estate (as well as outside political actions as discussed below). For example, many interviewees discussed that there are actual physical barriers to leaving the estate, as it is surrounded by major transport routes that are difficult to cross. Many younger interviewees also described how they felt ‘boxed in’,

not having the money to leave regularly as the bus to the city centre costs around £5 return for a 4 mile trip (which takes over 40 minutes). As there is no longer a railway station, and plans to reopen it have been shelved because of government cuts, buses are the only form of public transport. Car ownership is extremely problematic, especially for younger people, as insurance companies still quantify the area as one of high crime rates and insurance premiums are exorbitantly expensive for many. However, parents and younger interviewees noted that often they had no choice but to pay, as work outside the estate requires a car as public transport cannot be relied upon. This 'bordering' of the estate, however, strengthens the senses of identity and networks within it. From the perspective of persistent resilience, identity with, and 'ownership' of place enables the adaptability of households under pressure, as knowledge, networks and potential threats are constrained within this 'bordered' space. Senses of 'well being' and safety ensure feelings of confidence and support in coping with multiple pressures. The paper now turns to look at how the estate's governance and its informal spaces strengthen these networks before examining the actual coping tactics in operation.

### ***Governance and the formal/informal spaces of everyday life***

The existence of the above noted support networks is not surprising as they are fostered, directly and indirectly, by the estate's governance. Core to the estate's regeneration plans was the belief that residents should have a voice within the Castle Vale Community Housing Association (CVHAT), play an active role in decision making processes and take 'ownership' of the estate. To facilitate this CVCHA was formed in 1995 as a community-led housing association, charged with providing sustainable quality housing, estate services, community involvement, empowerment, and community safety and health (CVHATP, 2006). When the CVHAT's regeneration of the estate's housing stock was completed, in 2005, its governance was passed to the CVCHA. While there is not space here to explore fully the management structures (for a full overview see Coatham and Martinali, 2010), central to its success is the high proportion of local residents in management positions. While leadership is always contested, and indeed numerous interviewees criticised individual managers for holding too much power, or 'having favourites' when providing grants, it is clear that overall this form of governance has proved successful.

The CVCHA's key priorities are the development of safe, high quality, public spaces and improving the long term educational and economic opportunities for residents (CVHATP, 2006), as many challenges remain despite the estate's physical transformation (see <http://www.futurecommunities.net/case-studies/castle-vale-birmingham-1994-present>);

Many of the jobs available locally are low-skilled and employment schemes that have been active in previous years did not help all those deemed to be 'hard to reach'. Much of the work that CVCHA is involved with is designed to improve residents' confidence and basic skills, not so much as a step into work but as the first step on a long journey into work.

These socio-economic aims were addressed by the creation of facilities, such as the Sanctuary Community centre and a library. The Sanctuary became the estate's main focal point and meeting space for its residents. As one interviewee said,

Everybody gravitates around the Sanctuary as there are activities for everyone. You have also the park nearby and people you would not expect to come are actually coming in as they are passing by (Female, 30-40, employed ).

It provides facilities such as PCs and internet access, formal job clubs, CV advisory sessions and facilitates IT, Maths and English courses run in the library. Furthermore, it runs sport activities for both adults and children and organises residential trips for the latter. Participants are expected not just to undertake the 'fun' activities, as there is an obligation to attend, for example, health promotion courses in return for playing for the football teams. As well as the educational benefits this ensures that people encounter others whom they might not otherwise meet. This obviously helps develop formal relationships and networking, but, and central to this paper, it also provides informal spaces where looser networks and friendships develop. Many interviewees discussed how 'coping' is common goal amongst the people who use these spaces and knowledge assisting in this are shared in these spaces. Also, and arguably just as importantly, they provide space were they feel safe and away from the state's judgemental glare. As one long term unemployed woman stated,

I hate going to the unemployment centre. They make us feel like benefit thieves and want us to take jobs that are an hour and a half away – how would I take my daughter to school and get to work in time? At the job club [located in the Sanctuary] people help you and listen to any other problems you have. Also you make friends with people in a similar situation and you share information with them about work opportunities (Female, 40-50, unemployed).

Interviewees discussed how through this supportive environment they made friends who would then meet outside of the formal club to search for work using the online facilities there, ensuring that that households remain connected and don't become isolated,

It is nice to know you are not the only one out there and by coming into the Job Club you see other people in the same situation – there are a lot of people struggling out there. You can't just sit at home, if I sit at home I get depressed. I need a role and an identity (Female, 30-40, unemployed).

By meeting people every day, I feel more confident, being part of the community makes me confident (Male, 30-40, unemployed ).

These are spaces where interviewees are able to socialize within a trusted environment and it provides a link to the more formal practices of everyday life, as by spending time here

interviewees feel they become known and trusted members of the community; “not only do I meet people there, but also the social workers or the librarians know who I am”. Furthermore, such relationships enable people to ascertain who the estate’s ‘key’ people are, whom they then address in times of need. These are people who others identify as possessing information about the area; how best to ‘get things done’, how to talk to the local council and work opportunities, amongst many other things.

The estate’s persistent resilience relies heavily on such individuals acting as the area’s ‘knowledge nodes’ but, perhaps surprisingly and opposite to the Big Society’s assumptions about leadership, interviewees did not feel that senior staff at the Trust or The Sanctuary fulfil this role. Interviewees feel, rightly or wrongly, that such leaders are too busy with ‘big problems’ to have time to spend on mundane issues. Instead they identified ‘nodes’ as long term residents who are, or were, involved in the various residents committees, and/or those who run, or assist with, the running of activities such as the youth or job clubs. What is most interesting is that they are approached about a whole range of issues, not just those related to their specialisation, as an interviewee, who many people identified as a ‘node’ discusses,

I work as a health care educator running small courses at the community centre – people know and trust me and stop me in the street and ask for advice on all types of issues, not just about health but about employment and housing problems for example. They would rather ask someone they know and trust than talk to the government (Female, 30-40, employed).

The importance of these ‘nodes’ partly results from the inclusive nature of the Trust’s governance, which impacts upon the way that the formal state is imagined in the estate. Although there are multi layers of governance in the estate, from EU projects to the enactment of national government policy and directives from the local authority, many people do not see beyond the borders of Castle Vale in terms of governance. The view of the following interviewee reflects many,

For us the state is the housing association. We turn to the people there for all of our problems whether they are to do with housing or not. If they don’t know how to help you they will know someone who can. All the city council want to do is to close down things such as the kindergartens and swimming pool. As for the government in London they have no idea about our lives and do not care about them (Male, 40-50, employed).

The local authority is perceived as ‘the enemy’, especially in this time of austerity, as they are seen as taking money out of the estate, through taxes, while closing down amenities. As for the national government, as the above quote suggests, it is seen as something totally alien to the estate’s everyday life as ‘they live a different life to us’. Thus for many the Castle Vale’s governance is informal and therefore residents would rather turn to people they know for help than the state and it is in the informal spaces of everyday life that this takes place in.

### *Persistent coping tactics*

As the above demonstrates, Castle Vale's informal spaces and networks play an important role in everyday life. This, it is argued here, underpins the tactics households employ to ensure their survival, in other words, their persistent resilience. Such tactics are needed in response to low pay, instability and the general stresses of everyday life, issues present since the estate's creation. The current economic crisis has, however, exacerbated such pressures, with employment and inflation the key concerns, as this interviewee notes,

I felt more under pressure than a couple of years ago. Before there were jobs out there. The way it is going now, there are going to be riots [this preceded the UK riots of 2011]. You haven't got the money but the prices are going up in the shops (Male, 30-40, employed).

As Round et al discuss (2010), coping tactics are often conflated with paid informal economic practices, but interviewees stated that there was very little meaningful informal economic activity available locally. However, it is clear that other informal practices are extremely important to the everyday, such as a service been provided in return for a favour in the future or some other consideration (see Gibson-Graham, 2003, for the 'iceberg' range of such practices). These take a whole range of forms but often centre around care giving, as, for example, residents often cannot afford childcare and networks develop to provide such services on an unpaid basis. As work available locally is often part time households are able to share childcare, as is discussed below,

I have to be at work early in the morning so my friends across the street take all the kids to school. Then when I finish in the afternoon I am able to go and pick them up and they all come to my house. It is really flexible and it is the only way that I am able to work, plus all the kids are friends with each other now so they enjoy it (Female, 20-30, employed).

Other examples of care giving include looking after ill family members or friends and/or looking after elderly neighbours. Such networks underpin the everyday and interviewees said they are the reason why they would never leave Castle Vale. Unpaid work is also common as many interviewees, especially younger ones, undertake voluntary work on a regular basis. A great deal of this is centred around the activities run at The Sanctuary, such as youth clubs, the estate's radio station or in local companies. Perhaps surprisingly, given the estate's community spirit, the majority, when asked why they volunteered, said they did so tactically in the hope that it would lead to paid employment rather than for altruistic reasons. It was assumed that doing so would develop skills, contacts and provide access to knowledge of opportunities as they arose. There was understandably frustration that this course of action was necessary rather than being able to obtain suitable paid employment.

Arguably the estate's key coping tactic is the sharing of knowledge. Almost all the interviewees discussed how information flowed freely through their networks with regards to jobs, prices and services, which is facilitated by the spaces and networks discussed above. The below was a commonly given example;

I found my job through a friend seeing the advert being put in the window and calling me immediately. There is no way the job centre would have been able to do that... As we know each other so well we know what our friends need and if someone sees or hears something everyone knows very quickly (Male, 20-30, employed).

Such networks also carry more prosaic news such as price reductions at the supermarket, which can be crucial when household budget are stressed. There is a sense that there is always 'someone who knows someone' when you need to get things done. This could be someone with a car who will give a lift to the hospital to save on the taxi fare to someone who knows what benefits a certain group is entitled to and how to fill out the forms. That such knowledge flows swiftly enables households to 'grab' opportunities, enabling them to find new ways to cope. As de Certeau et al (1980, 7) note these have distinct spatial elements;

Tactics are meanwhile operations whose specific value derives from their stress on time as such-on the circumstances which a punctual intervention transforms into a favorable situation or conjuncture, on the rapidity of movements which can change the very organization of space.

That such 'rapidity' changes the organisation of space brings together the above arguments that feelings of place, informal spaces and the transmission of knowledge all combine to produce coping tactics. An 'outsider', without such knowledges and senses, would simply not be able to see through the mists of everyday life that exist on the estate.

The temporal element is also of importance, as when favours are reciprocated ties become stronger and extend across networks. For example, a favour might not be returned directly but to someone else in the receiver's networks, extending the sets of relationships and expanding the amount of knowledge that is available. Of course such networks also function to spread gossip but interviewees believe that such talk helps strengthen community cohesion. There is a belief that 'people look out for each other', for example,

If something bad happens here, you know that everybody will pull together. Even though you don't see them every day, you know that they are there (Female, 50-60, employed).

As well as enhancing senses of place, interviewees discussed how this also provides important psychological support, as they do not believe that they can turn to the state in times of need. Almost every interviewee had heard stories about how someone had suffered a major

event only for the state to fail them and people how people 'stepped in' to help, such as this example;

I had a lot of problems with my ex-husband and I had to move with my children. I had hardly any furniture in my new rental place. I went to social services and they said they would lend me some money but the repayments each month would have left me with hardly any money for food. I told my friends and within days they had asked around and found spare furniture for me (Female, 40-50, unemployed).

It is important, however, not to over romanticise such networks as they can have negative exclusionary outcomes. Some interviewees, mainly those newer to the area, felt that at times it could be very hard to 'break into' these social networks, leading to their exclusion. However, coping tactics, as the most sustainable and long-term feature of persistent resilience, are deeply flexible and adaptable and even isolated households employ them to some extent. Thus it is not possible to say that there is a coping tactic for Castle Vale as a whole but within the estate there are sets of diverse networks of households which facilitate the persistent resilience of its residents to long-term everyday pressures.

## **Conclusions**

Developing the concept of the persistent resilience this paper has shown that resilience is created, and takes place, in local, often informal spaces, and relies on seemingly mundane practices. These are long-term processes that respond not just to large external shocks but also to the changing socio-economic landscapes that neo-liberalism brings. This scalar extension furthers debates on resilience as to date they have not engaged fully with this local scale as they, understandably given its importance, looked at regional and national scales. This examination of everyday practices is of vital importance as it extends our understandings of the impact of austerity state policies on the local and opens up avenues of exploration on how households respond to them

Space is central to the Big Society program, stating, for example, that it 'frees up the space for civil society to rebuild itself and its communities', yet it is presented aspatially, assuming that all communities are similar, bounded and that their histories are unimportant to their future development. One reading of the above discussions would seem to substantiate these arguments; despite very difficult problems the Castle Vale estate has managed itself successfully, its residents are resilient to external shocks and it appears as an excellent example of the benefits of passing control from the state 'to the people'. However, and this is central to our arguments, policies such as the Big Society totally ignore, amongst many other things, the actual spaces which civil society and resilience takes place in. As the above discussions have shown in Castle Vale persistent resilience is produced and facilitated through interactions that take place in both formal and informal spaces, and indeed formal spaces used informally such as the example of job club attendees using it 'out of hours'. Even seemingly trivial spaces such as the dance or football clubs provide spaces for the sharing of

knowledge, the building of networks and a strengthening of community pride. The informal practices, such as care giving, and the sharing of knowledge are, the paper argues, central to the creation and maintenance of persistent resilience; the ability of the household to withstand long-term socio-economic and state policy change as well as life course events and major shocks such as the current economic crisis.

The paper's key point, however, is that schemes such as the Big Society are in fact thinly disguised attempts to destroy space as the state withdraws funding. In Castle Vale the cuts are deep and will have extremely serious consequences. In 2012 the Castle Vale Neighbourhood Partnership and the Castle Vale Tenants and Residents Alliance had their respective £200,000 and £120,000 annual funding totally withdrawn by Birmingham City Council. The situation is similar for Castle Vale Community Regeneration Services who run The Sanctuary. This, obviously, significantly impacts upon the services that it is able to provide and obviously will limit the amount of programmes it is able to maintain. The state will continue its 'hard', formal, social policies, such as Jobcentres, whereas soft policy spaces such as job clubs are much easier to target for significant budget cuts. Therefore the spaces of interaction, the very places where the community spirit and action that the Big Society movement aims to capture, will be severely compromised. Furthermore, this demonstrates that such spaces, however informal, do not, and cannot, operate outside of neo-liberal reforms and the retrenchment of welfare that austerity measures are bringing. Of course the estate will survive and households will cope but it will be despite such policies as Big Society, though no doubt the state will proclaim it is in fact because of them. In reality, however, it is the persistent resilience of households that will see their survival rather than policy outcomes. Although much further research is required on the issue it is clear that although they will 'cope' everyday life will become much more difficult on the estate due to the destruction of the informal spaces that this resilience flows through. It is clear though that the fact that regions, communities, estates and/or households are persistently resilient, and have been for a long time, cannot be used as a policy justification for their financial abandonment in extremely the vague hope that something will organically replace outside support. By destroying the informal spaces of everyday life the state will severely damage the networks it pertains to support.

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