

Community and conviviality? The social relations of social leisure organizations in diverse urban places

Abstract

This paper contributes to understandings of the conviviality which has dominated recent sociological approaches to urban multiculturalism. The paper argues for conviviality's conceptual extension by reference to recent rethinking of community as a profound sociality of 'being with' (Studdert and Walkerdine 2016) and a culture of urban practice (Blokland 2017). The paper draws from a qualitative dataset examining sustained encounters of cultural difference and the relationships within, social leisure organisations in three different English urban geographies. The paper explores how the elective coming together of often ethnically diverse others, over time, in places, to do leisure 'things' meant these organisations could work as generative spaces of social interaction and shared practice through and in contexts of urban difference. The paper concludes that putting conviviality as 'connective interdependencies' into dialogue with community as 'being in common' develops their sociological and explanatory power and counters the reductions and limitations that are associated with both concepts.

Key words

community, conviviality, social practice, interdependency, connection, place

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Introduction

The concept of conviviality has increasingly preoccupied 21st century approaches to analyzing and understanding the contemporary social relations of urban multiculturalism. Although conviviality has longer roots in sociology (Illich 1973) and anthropology (Overing and Passes 1982) it is Gilroy's (2004, 2006) application of the notion to the cohabitation of multicultural populations that has led its take up in multidisciplinary approaches to urban heterogeneity. In contrast to super-diversity (Vertovec 2007), a concept which has emerged alongside conviviality and also attends to rapidly changing populations, conviviality has been concerned with situated social interaction and difference rather than the proliferation of diversities within and between migrant flows. Building on longer established examinations of race, identification and social relationships (see for example, Jones 1986; Hewitt 1986; Gilroy 1987; Back 1996) discussions of conviviality around ethnic difference have emphasised the ways in which multicultural populations manage processes of cohabitation through messy and unstable contradictions in which resentments and resilience characterize 'unruly urban multiculturalism' and precarious modes of living together (Gilroy 2006; Karner and Parker 2012; Amin 2012; Vertovec and Nowicka 2014; Wise and Noble 2016).

This expanding work with the notion of conviviality has been both exciting and contested. The concept has bumped into and been interchangeably used with a variety of other notions related to understanding how informal social life gets lived in contexts of difference - so not only super-diversity but also civility, cosmopolitanism, urban encounter have all featured in debates about contemporary urban communities. Conviviality has both benefitted from and been limited by these convergences. It has benefitted as a concept in ascendancy that now has a tenacious hold in sociological responses to the

phenomenon of intense levels of cultural difference which are lived in close proximity; and it has been limited by accusations that it fosters an overly utopian or celebratory drift which overstates the transformative potential of habitual social interaction and marginalizes structural inequalities and the harms of racism (Valentine 2008, Clayton 2009; Vertovec 2015; Valluvan 2016). The perceived danger is that in contexts of increasing urban heterogeneity, the notion of conviviality, with its attentiveness to the interpersonal and its positive associations, slides away from its radical emphasis on uneasy and fragmented negotiations between connected others towards more familiar integrationist values in which difference is sanitized around contact and the hierarchies of cultural difference are flattened out or obscured.

In this way conviviality has become a little stuck, bogged down in demands that it delivers on, or at least evidences meaningful interaction and transformative potential, as well as responding to concerns that it marginalises issues of multiple subjugations and power relations. This paper contributes to more recent efforts to think conviviality through this impasse. These efforts are visible in for example, Hiel's emphasis on the need to give attention to the space between the polemics of welcoming and being hostile to difference; in Wise and Noble's (2016) suggestion that conviviality is an orientation towards shared lives lived through difference and in Valluvan's (2016:) argument that 'as opposed to being a concept which simply names everyday practices of multi-ethnic interaction, conviviality speaks uniquely to a sophisticated ability to invoke difference whilst avoiding communitarian, groupist precepts'.

These developments fit with a wider, but recently renewed sociological interest in the processes, practices and things that connect people (see for example, Askins 2016; Studdert and Walkerdine 2016; Brownlie and Anderson 2017; Keleman et al 2017;)ⁱ and with this in mind we aim to develop earlier the work (Neal et al 2018) bringing conviviality and community together and examining what might be productive co-constitutive ground. This may, seem at first reading to be a rather perilous undertaking

given the ways in which community has been endlessly enrolled into discourses of nostalgic loss, exclusive practice, diversity management approaches and the governance demands of assimilationism, cohesion and conservative multiculturalism (Fortier 2008; Karner and Parker 2012). However, our interest is in engaging in the radical interpretations of communities of collaborative practice and community as shared commons and a culture of urban practice that has recently emerged (for example Blokland 2017; Studdert and Walkerdine 2016ab).

In this context of a rethinking of the value of community and of developing an analytic of conviviality we examine the ways in which an alignment of the two concepts, which share affective content but also an emphasis on practice, might productively capture the complex and precarious phenomenologies of contemporary urban multiculturalism. Orientated in this way the paper uses qualitative data from a two year, research projectⁱⁱ exploring urban multiculturalism to examine how membership of, and relationships within, a variety of social leisure groups in three different English urban geographies involved exchanges across ethnic difference as well as affinities to (rapidly changing) localities. Our focus on social leisure organizations was part of a wider engagement with everyday social lives in places. Sociology has a well-established interest in social leisure groups and their role in social relations (see for example; Elias and Dunning 1986; Putnam 2000; Neal and Walters 2009; Morgan 2009; Lake 2013; Spaaij et al 2014) and, finding a space between the exclusionary and inclusionary interpretations of social leisure organisations, we examine how they may work as participatory sites generating un/easy place-making, emotive social connection and embodied collaborative practice in broader processes of conviviality in which difference was simultaneously significant and subsumed into a shared sameness.

The paper begins by outlining some of the ways in which the notion of community is being rethought in urban sociology and indicating how this approach to community as ‘continual activities’ (Studdert and Walkerdine 2016ab) and ‘culture and practice’ (Blokland 2017) has overlaps and even converges with understandings of conviviality as an ongoing, unstable

category of social interdependency. The paper then details the design and methods of research project before going on, with the help of empirical data, to explore the ways in which putting community (understood as shared commons) and conviviality (as empathetic difference) into dialogue might be productive for developing non-reductive sociological approaches to contemporary multicultural urban formations and social interactions.

New community thinking, interdependency and conviviality

Brownlie and Anderson rightly observe ‘sociologists have long been concerned with supportive social relations’ (2017: 1223) and the ongoing tensions between community’s troubles (Amit 2002; Urry 2000) and the concept’s continuing appeal (Mulligan 2015) might have some explanation in the way community works as a potent short-hand and as a compelling narrative of what it means to be human - and to be social (Wills 2016). Working as an imaginary but also through materiality community is able to variously incorporate (though not be dependent on) places and locations, practices and habits. There is an affective, emotional content to community, its apparent ability to explain what connects us to others (even as it excludes some), that gives it continuing relevance, a particular adaptability and a ‘constant appeal’ in academic, political and popular discourse. As Blokland (2017: 8) argues ‘community continues to manifest itself in the details of everyday life’. She goes on to suggest that while there has been a shift away from the old ‘decline of community’ narrative towards concerns with elective belonging and personal social networks this sublimates rather than replaces community’s relevance to contemporary social relations. In the suggestion that we think of community as ‘culture’ and as ‘urban practice’ Blokland argues that while ‘community is not local [nor] simply a matter of personal networks [...] and we can experience belonging on many different scales’ she emphasizes that ‘we perform community through daily urban practices, through these practices we develop shared experiences and shared symbols (2017: 29).

Interpreting community as connective and communal urban practice in this way fits with a wider rethinking of community offered by Studdert and

Walkerdine (2016ab). In an indictment of sociological work on community to date, they argue that there has been over attention paid to what ‘community is’ and a lack of attention to ‘*how it works*’ (2016a: 617). Drawing on Hannah Arendt’s work, Studdert and Walkerdine outline an approach to community in which there is a shift from the state/individual dynamic towards sociality and a ‘re-emphasis on the communal, that is the action of communing, and through this, upon relationality and sociality as primary for social analysis’ (2016a: 613). This repositioning of community as process and practice, or as Ben Rogaly (2016) puts it, community as ‘a verb rather than community as a noun’ pushes community away from being a geographically or socially bounded category of identity and axis of belonging towards community being about a sociality of interdependent necessity.

This is the point powerfully made by Wills (2016) when she observes ‘the necessary social relationships on which we depend’ mean that, ‘human beings can never be outside community and without community, we would die’. This is community written as a primary, interdependent sociality rather than the imagined, aspirational, bounded or selective community which is more familiar in sociological thinking over the last few decades. Instead of any defensive notion, there is here an urgency about the work community does in the context of the rapid transformations, shifts and demands of contemporary urban environments, which are defined by their cheek-by-jowl differentiations and complexities rather than neighbourhood based homogeneity.

Neither Blokland (2017) nor Studdert and Walkerdine (2016) directly discusses the concept of conviviality. But their unravelling of community into an understanding of it as sociality and action brings this rethinking of community into closer orbit with conviviality by unmooring it from fixed categories of inclusion or exclusion, of being lost or being found, identification, conformity, resilience, governance. Instead it is defined through uncertain, unstable interdependent practices of sociality and communing in being. The definitions of conviviality offered by Gilroy (2006) and Amin (2013) have similarly put practice and unpredictable interaction at their heart. For example, Gilroy (2006) draws attention to the ‘unruly’ qualities of

conviviality as well as to how ‘racial, linguistic and religious particularities do not – as the logic of ethnic absolutism suggests they must – add up to discontinuities of experience or insuperable problems of communication’. For Amin (2013) too it is the ‘habitual negotiation’ of difference that forms the basis of what conviviality is.

In the same way as discussions of conviviality have been absent from the rethinking about community discussed above, so community has been either largely absent or, at any rate, not been an explicit focus of comparison or convergence for those working on conviviality. Some of this reticence might reflect what Blokland (2017) argues has been the marginalization of community within contemporary urban sociology. Community’s seeming limits and its long history of conceptual and political contestation means that it has increasingly become replaced by notions of attachment, belonging, home, networks. It is striking that the overlaps reflected in an emphasis on interdependency and interrelationships have not been more directly explored, although it is possible to see this process beginning to develop (Amin 2012; Wise and Noble 2016; Neal et al 2018). It is in this context of the shared ground inhabited by the new thinking around community as a state of ‘being in common’ and about conviviality as processes of constant negotiation that we suggest productive thinking about the ways in which connective social interactions take place and emerge across and through the thrown together difference that is urban multicultural.

What we highlight from this comparative dialogue is how difference is managed differently through convivial approaches as community is experienced as urban practice, as a concrete social interaction. Recognising that ‘people cannot do without each other’ (Blokland 2003: 208), conviviality brings into focus and privileges the processes of ‘how we work things out between ourselves’ (Erickson 2011: 124 in Freitag 2014: 376). This ‘working out’ is done in contexts of social harms, inequalities tensions and strain. Gilroy (2004; 2006), Karner and Parker (2012), Back and Sinha (2016) and others have all variously drawn attention to the ways in which conviviality shapes those urban localities that are characterised by racialised divisions but

where cultural differences can be negotiated and translated through social interaction. This entangled tension-transformative dynamic challenges the normative, superficial associations of conviviality with ‘positive contact’ while at the same time foregrounding the possibilities of informal social interaction and a wider ‘civic ease’ (Amin 2002; 2012) within complexly different and differentiated populations living in proximity (see also Back and Sinha 2016).

Much of the subsequent work exploring conviviality in urban environments has tended to share this focus on situated capacities to manage and the generative possibilities of the informal interactions. Research has examined grounded encounters of difference amongst heterogeneous populations sharing particular urban localities and spaces (e.g. Wilson 2011; Hall 2012; Wessendorf 2014; Vincent et al 2018) and explored the ways in which those interactions have created dispositions, skills and competencies to navigate and engage difference in place (Wise 2005; Noble 2009; Neal et al 2018).

It is this conceptual capacity to acknowledge and capture the unpredictable inconsistencies in experiences of and responses to urban multiculturalism that sets conviviality apart from conformist interpretations of community in terms of bounded groups - as well as from related public policy discourses of cohesion or integration - and lends it a particular explanatory power. Given that intensifying and evolving formations of multiculturalism characterize most contemporary urban environments it would be, as Heil (2014) urges, ‘too simple to qualify people’s behavior towards others who are different as either civil or not’. This warning orientates us to Valluvan’s (2016: 206) suggestion that the ‘interesting question [...] is not whether conviviality characterizes most contemporary interaction [...] but rather, what features are constitutive of convivial multiculturalism when it is indeed manifest, and in turn, how is it substantively distinctive from the ideals of coexistence formalized by integration’.

It is in this context that we seek to extend and thicken conviviality’s meanings through the emphasis that the rethinking around community puts on social

interdependency - as Wills (2016: 642) argues ‘community is about reciprocal social relations rather than being an exterior ‘thing’. In prioritising interdependencies and mutualities we examine how conviviality not as a descriptor of the ‘fleeting encounters’ of quotidian urban life but rather as the social interactions and connections, that emerge through wider projections and dispositions shaped by resource and constraint but also filtered through senses of place, proximity and practice (Bottero and Crossley 2011, Rogaly 2016; Valluvan 2016, Wills 2016).

In what follows, we turn to focus more directly on the role of social leisure organisations. Such a focus makes it possible to explore their established and participatory social life, in which acquaintance, interaction and social connection are purposively and consciously sought, expected and maintained (Neal and Walters 2009). Bringing community and conviviality together as a frame through which to understand social leisure organisations plays to their uncertain, in/exclusionary dynamic and moves discussion of conviviality much more directly and explicitly into the spaces of connective social life and away from a focus on young people and away from ‘in-passing’ urban landscapes and the anonymous public spaces that define them, such as markets, buses, parks, streets and cafes. Social interactions in these semi-formal leisure organizations are exchange orientated, creating extended familiarities and interdependencies which demand engagement across difference in ways that go (or always have the potential go) beyond co-existence or difference-at-a-distance (Wessendorf 2014). Before returning to consider some of these issues in depth, we next outline the project from which the empirical data are drawn.

The project – methods and research design

The project is based in three different geographies that reflect evolving multicultural formations in contemporary urban England. The project selected the North East London Borough of Hackney as a geography of super-diversity; Milton Keynes, a 1960s built new town city in South East of England is a newly multicultural area; and Oadby, a small, affluent town on

the edge of the Midlands city of Leicester is rapidly developing as a largely affluent, socially mobile, multicultural suburb.

These case study areas represent some of England's most dynamic and diverse populations. Between 2001 and 2011 Hackney and Milton Keynes were amongst the UK's top ten fastest growing places with their populations increasing by 20% and 17% respectively (Hackney Borough Council 201; Milton Keynes Council 2014,). The ethnic composition of both places also changed between 2001 and 2011 with Hackney's history of ethnic diversity intensifying and Milton Keynes' black and ethnic minority group increasing. Although Oadby's population growth was much more modest, between 2001 and 2011 it was amongst England's fastest changing places in terms of its ethnic composition, particularly reflected in the rise in the proportion of the population (to 20%) who identified as Indian (ONS, 2013).

Our research methods involved a triangulated combination of qualitative approaches to facilitate as much as possible a multi-textured understanding of social worlds. We worked with an ethnographic sensibility: members of the research team participated in social leisure groups in each of the areas. Our way of getting involved included taking part in the social leisure organisations. We recorded our observations through field notes, attempting to reflexively capture the minutiae of encounters, activities and interactions happening around us and in which we ourselves were involved (We have written elsewhere about our relationships with these geographies and with our participants, Neal et al 2015; Bennett et al 2016). Alongside this participatory approach we also conducted a series of individual and group interviews with members of the social leisure organisations. Through the individual interviews we were provided with a sense of participants' biographies; the ways in which they ethnically identified themselves and their experiences of the leisure organisation to which they belonged as well as their interpretations of the places in which they lived.

We invited participants to take part in group interviews based on the social leisure organisations of which they were members. These group interviews opened up interactive and collective conversations about social life,

multicultural places and engaging in shared activities. In total we conducted 32 one hour individual interviews and 12 two-hour group interviews with an ethnically, socially, age and gender diverse participant population. The interviews were all recorded, fully transcribed, read and then iteratively and thematically coded, for patterns and singularities, by hand and by using NVivo software.

Figure 1 details the social leisure groups with which we worked. The groups were diverse in terms of their activities, structures and meeting places. We purposively sought to work with those leisure groups whose activities would be likely to have a broad appeal across social class and cultural difference. No individual group was expected to be representative of gender or ethnicity but each group was embedded within the particular geographies of the project. Some of the social leisure groups were long established, like Oadby Sports Club and Woodside Football Club, while Rectory Running Club has been meeting for less than a year.

Figure 1 Profile of project's social leisure groups [to go about here]

As Figure 1 shows that some of social leisure groups, like Hackney's Creative Writing Group (perhaps against expectations) had the most ethnically and socially diverse membership of all the groups. In part this reflected the London borough's history of migration settlement and its often intense levels of ethnic and social difference but it also reflected the particularities of the group – (see below). Other groups were not as diverse and some were dominated by a particular ethnic group, gender or social class. Again the nature of these group populations were reflective of the geographies of places. So the Woodside Football club in Milton Keynes and Milton Keynes gardening club had some socially diversity, were gendered in terms of particular activities (football mostly male and gardening mostly women) but the membership of both groups was white British. In Oadby the membership of the Coffee Morning club was almost all South Asian and middle class. While the Sports Club in Oadby was more ethnically and gender mixed it was also predominantly middle class. Our social leisure groups ranged in size

with between five and eleven members and the members all knew each other to varying extents, from established friendships to group-associated acquaintance. Geography and place were central to the project design and to the identities, membership and social relations of the social leisure groups in the project and in the next section we consider how conviviality and community were imagined and concretised through the pluralities and dynamics of place in the context of social leisure groups.

The relationships between place, community, conviviality and social leisure groups

Locality and neighbourhood has traditionally tended to frame the ways that community has been imagined, ‘found’ and understood. However, as Blokland (2017: 12) makes clear rethinking community as a set of ‘public doings’ counters the traditional spatial roots of community analysis as ‘it may but does not have to find its anchoring in neighbourhoods’. Yet Studdert’s and Walkerdine’s (2016ab) emphasis on ‘what community does’ rather than ‘what community is’ has resulted in those who work with a new community lens (for example Studdert and Walkerdine 2016b; Rogaly 2016; Swann and Hughes 2016 all use place-based research in their work) having a ‘focus on both the presence and particularity of social relations in place’ (Wills 2016: 646). Similarly, explorations of conviviality in the UK and internationally have also tended to be heavily placed and mostly in ‘big’ urban geographies such as London, Sydney, New York, Singapore (e.g. Wise and Velyutham 2009, 2014; Hall 2012; Vincent et al 2018; Wessendorf 2014, Valluvan 2016).

While our focus is on the co-productive relationship between convivial practice and plural, micro place-making processes we also suggest that interconnectivities and shared life are grounded and situated within place (Massey 1991, 2005). So, for the participants in the project being part of a social leisure organization invited – and involved – an active relationship with place. It was clear that involvement in all of the social leisure organisations in the study worked through place and, for their members, reinforced senses of being in particular places. The distinct place identities and multicultural formations of Hackney, Milton Keynes and Oadby marked each of the groups.

This was sometimes implicit - the Sports Club in the affluent, suburban multicultural setting of Oadby was described by Jodie (a white British woman), as being ‘reflective of the overall community *here*’ while the social difference in the membership of Hackney’s Writing Club was explicitly linked to the notion of Hackney as a space of particularly successful multiculturalism. So, for example, Jessie (a white British woman) commented on how the Writers Group had ‘a really good range of Hackney people’ and Howard (a white British man) explained, ‘*it’s just what Hackney is about, just getting people together from different backgrounds*’. Place is working in iterative ways here shaping the nature of social leisure groups but these organisations also having their own role in making up places. The structure and rhythms of social leisure groups are designed to generate repeated encounters with others as lives briefly touch in the same space at particular points of the week or month, as individuals meet up, play matches, run along tow paths together or read their stories to others.

Emma (a white British woman) describes this routine in talking about the Running Group ‘*it’s just like on a Monday, go and do running round and chatting with somebody about something half sensible for an hour*’ and the shared familiarity of the Running Group members was emphasized by Alise (a white Latvian woman) ‘*there’s a pattern, you would see faces, familiar faces, it wouldn’t always be the same face week in week out but you know them*’. Some groups like the Sports Club in Oadby and the Football and the Gardeners Groups in Milton Keynes involved committed members who participated regularly and over long periods of time while others like the Running Group in Hackney involved members who met up on looser, more casual terms. But a recurring pattern in members’ narratives was that being involved in leisure organisations facilitated a social and a place-based relationship. There was a materiality to these processes of ‘being with’. The place-making capacity of conviviality begins with a space to meet, bringing people together for at least a moment. Some of the social leisure groups - Woodside Football Club in Milton Keynes or Oadby Sports Club – had buildings and facilities that have been used by members over generations (see

Figure 1) and lent the organisations a visibility and a particular longevity of presence in the localities. This manifested itself in the connections and length of participation. Imran (a British Asian man) for example joined the Sports Club in Oadby because his brother was a member and Jodie had also joined because her mother and brother were members and went on to explain that 'I think the family atmosphere is partly due to the fact that people join and stay for quite a few years'.

Other social leisure groups did not have long histories or their own buildings and facilities and instead using different semi/public spaces where individuals felt comfortable to gather, such as public libraries, community halls and pubs. Despite their differences these meeting spaces were integral to the success of the organisations and the social relationships of their members. The public library, where the Creative Writing Group meet was seen as key to making the group accessible and inclusive. For Muna (an African-Caribbean woman) the library gave the Group a particular democracy, '*I think maybe that's part of the reason why we get so many different people attending [...] in a library setting you feel welcome (laughs) – whether you are or not, you just feel that this is yours to be used*'.

While the library contributed to a comfort and confidence as an inclusive space, being part of the group in which membership was free of charge also shaped its identity. As Jessie explained, 'if you had to pay for that group you'd probably get a nice sort of coterie of middle class people and it would *never, never be as diverse as it is whereas you've just got a fantastic range*'. The materialities of meeting spaces and the costs of participation shape the character and membership of social leisure organisations. But the extent to which people seek out and take part in what Emma describes as 'really local, really easy' social leisure groups to 'do things' and to feel locally and socially connected reflects the ability of social leisure organizations to generate a compelling 'being with' sensibility.

For Nirmal (a British Asian woman) not only does involvement with the Running Group mean that it is 'weirdly disarming [to be] exercising

alongside each other and maybe running does make people more reflective' but she values the way that participating in the Running Group provides her with a place sensibility, 'I think *there's definitely pockets of, like, talk about "our community", [...] which make people feel maybe a bit more rooted*'. Individuals might not meet outside the group nor do they always stick around for lengthy socialising, but the group is made because members return each week or month for more interaction that becomes meaningful for the individuals' sense of place. In these accounts it is possible to see the ways in which participation in social leisure organisations is productive of a place-based 'being with' formations of sociality and mutualism. These are social relationships in which other, culturally different members can vary from the familial and close friendships to perhaps the most common 'not quite friends but more than strangers' social relation – something akin to Morgan's (2009) acquaintances.

While the social interactions within the leisure organisations enabled connective place-making experiences they also provided a space for wider reflection on place and the tensions and contradictions with it. For example, Emma described an experience in which she was identified as being out of place, a guy [described by Emma as an older black Caribbean man] ran after me and started calling me like 'white trash', and telling me to 'go back to Kensington'. Emma goes on to explain that she felt she was being seen as *representing something that he didn't like in Hackney, whether it was colour, whether it was class*'. Some of Emma's story is very specific to social changes taking place in Hackney in which socio-economic polarization, gentrification and cultural difference are a key characteristic of the borough (see Neal et al 2018) but Emma's vignette - and her recognition of its race and social class dimensions - speaks to conviviality's insistence that they are lived in by different and but also differentiated others. Just as conviviality shapes senses of place, place shapes conviviality and the ways in which encounters and interactions are experienced.

Place is integral to the life of social leisure groups. They are formed and come together in places but place was also present in ongoing, plural and co-

productive ways. In another example of the uneasy place-social leisure group relationship came from the Creative Writers Group in which the Group's facilitator, Tristan, (an African-Caribbean man) recounted how he had set the group a writing exercise on the 2011 riots that had taken place in Hackney and this ended up in 'an extremely animated discussion, with people standing up and telling others off'.

The tensions that discussion of the riots provoked within the group relate to Emma's narrative in that these are stories that both emerge from the translation of wider structural forces into everyday life. That the differently positioned members of the Writing Group managed to negotiate their contested interpretations of the 2011 riots would seem to reflect a convivial disposition to muddle through the tensions between group members as well as a commitment to each other. This returns us to the emphasis that both conviviality (Gilroy 2006; Wise and Noble 2016) and new community thinking (Blokland 2017; Rogaly 2016) have given to doing and to action. What is also striking in Tristan's account is the collective desire to be writing that drove the capacity of the group to manage social strain that the riots discussion generated and it is this doing-connective-social relationship that we now consider.

Social leisure organisations and embodied mutuality - conviviality and collaborative practice

Empirical explorations of formations of community (Neal and Walters 2008; Wills 2016) and conviviality (Wise 2005; Noble 2009; Vincent et al 2018) have tended to focus on the labour, competencies, dispositions and practices required to make them meaningful. Not surprisingly, the activities that were the basis of social leisure organisations, were formative in prompting the social interactions within the groups. The process of participation for creating mutual engagement has a well-established place in community theorizing (see earlier discussions) and the 'loss of community' arguments regularly equate lost community with the decline of collective social practices (see Putnam 2000 for an obvious example of this). While not wanting to rehearse these arguments nor bonding-bridging social capital debates, we would nevertheless

suggest that there was an iterative process in which participation in social leisure activities generated exchange and connection.

Unlike Putnam however, our research found a collective ‘doing orientated’ social life. For example, Najdah (a British Asian woman) a member of Oadby’s Coffee Morning Group was part of a number of leisure organisations and other civic networks as well as the Coffee Morning Group explained, ‘I love what I’m doing here [*in the Group*] I’ve done a lot of voluntary stuff [...] I feel as if I’m giving back to the community, trying to bring communities together’. Najdah was not unusual in the degree to which she participated in semi-organised local social life and it was possible to see how the diversity of the urban environments of the project were part of the appeal of collective practices. As Kathleen from the Creative Writers Group in Hackney explained, ‘I think everyone brings such different stories to that group and there’s nothing [*else*] I do where there is such a huge mixture of people [...] you know ages, backgrounds, ethnicity, everything’. The ‘extra-social’ potential of being brought together through shared practice amongst group members was widely recognised by participants. Imran described how the activity of a social leisure groups provide a starting point for connection ‘there’s obviously a common interest between each member [...] regardless of what club [...] you’ve got that in common [...] you’ve already got something that you can talk about’. For Bea, a member of the Milton Keynes gardening club, the gardening related activities of the group were important but it was what might lead from these that, ‘it connects you with the people, you’ve all got a common interest, but then you talk about all other things then, from that’.

The proximities and interdependencies of bodies in a shared space engaged in shared activities give rise to a wider ‘being together’ as well as the ways in which, ‘contrary to the assumption that beliefs drive actions [...] actions often lead to new beliefs’ (Singh 2013: 190). Being part of a social leisure group involved group members being aware of a mutual relationality and of being with (different) others. For example, for Imran, as with Kathleen, it is the Club’s inclusive openness that is important – he says it is ‘a nice sort of

friendly, amenable club - but he also comments on it is also being a site of mutuality where *'everyone's interlinked'*. Imran's observation has a wider resonance across the social leisure groups where a focus on collaborative activities often focussed on bodies or materialities could displace and subsume difference. In their work with an ethnically diverse group of young women in a community art group Askins and Pain (2011) also comment on the ways in which the materialities of the tasks led to interaction and social bonds and in research in ethnically diverse primary schools Vincent et al (2018) similarly found that particular chasing games and children's collecting 'crazes' worked as powerful connectors across difference in schools. In our study the various activities of the groups – playing tennis, running, making coffee and writing – worked in similar ways, creating dialogic opportunities and connective environments in which the significance of difference was either diminished or directly productive of exchange. Describing the process through which practice slides into a shared, collaborative endeavour Kathleen from the Writers Group explained the importance of how, *'[w]e're set the same task [and] we've all got very different life experiences that we bring to the same task and that creates really interesting conversations and things'*. Kathleen's identification of a productive intersection between sameness and difference evokes convivialist capacities to engage with difference as both an ordinary but still significant everyday experience.

We suggest that social leisure organisations can present micro environments in which the abstractions of social interdependency and 'being with' get to be translated into collaborative exchange and practice. While the Creative Writers Group was task orientated these tasks involved significant levels of talk and subjective participation and the Oadby Coffee Morning group had a similar focus on conversation and exchange. But the other social leisure groups we worked with involved embodied practices that were often not discursively based. Outside space, football pitches, tennis courts and related objects (balls, racquets, plants and seeds, running shoes) involve forms of being together shaped through the act of running, playing football or tennis as well as wordless exchanges between individuals but participation in these activities facilitated durable connections within and beyond the activities.

The social leisure groups were sites where people chose to connect with others and, even if that is only to ‘do stuff’, this involves a ‘communal being-with’ - often in contexts of difference – which is significant. Alise who suggested that people participate in the Running Group but because ‘*there’s* definitely a social element to many of these kind of initiatives like walking groups or whatever. Because people, they have like a bond or something [...] they meet, they form new friendships and then they want to catch up and see how they are doing.’ It is the mutualising focus on the ‘rules’ of shared tasks, conversation, play, running that can facilitate commonalities and connections as Alise observes and which, in Kathleen’s and Imran’s accounts, thrive in contexts difference.

This is not to overclaim cooperation and diversity or underclaim tensions and exclusive homogeneity that may characterize and occur within social leisure organisations. As we noted earlier in the paper there is a strong body of research which explores and evidences the racisms, social closures and hierarchies of leisure organisations and practices (Spaaij et al 2014). Rather, it is to draw empirical attention to the possibility that more ‘open-ended subjectivities’ (Singh 2013: 191) can emerge through the ways in which urban social leisure organisations work as settings which animate shared practices but also condense the ‘being with others’ premise of both conviviality and more recent community thinking. They can become participatory spaces in which those that belong to them recognize and work in contexts of ethnic difference generating connections that are not necessarily always straightforward or non-conflictual but evidence a wider being-with commitment and the unpredictable interdependencies of conviviality.

Conclusions – developing a ‘being in common’ conviviality

In the paper we have focussed on grounding the relationship between place as plural and practice as ‘communing’ to explore more abstract debates about social connection. In this context we have sought to contribute to develop the meanings and interpretations of the concept of conviviality through reference

to rethinkings of community from ‘noun to verb’, from ‘what is community’ to ‘what work does it do’. In this approach community is a condition of thick - but always plural, hybrid, inter-relational - sociality (Studdert and Walkerdine 2016ab). We explore and extend this conceptual thinking to understanding the nature of empirical social interactions within social leisure organisations in urban, multicultural environments suggesting that these are micro settings in which community as a verb and the connective content of conviviality become particularly relevant and potently evidenced. In returning to the question of what connects us the particular benefits and value of putting conviviality into dialogue with community can be understood through three distinct but interrelated achievements.

First, in linking conviviality with community it elevates conviviality to the same sociological status and space that community has occupied. This is significant as it nudges conviviality away from a description of contact or the ‘nice’ encounters that can happen between culturally different others (important as these are) and it underlines its conceptual seriousness as the most relevant analytic for comprehending contemporary formations of interdependent urban multicultural. And as Valluvan (2016) argues there is a political (and policy) urgency in developing conviviality’s meanings given the normative dominance of the concepts of integration and cohesion. Second, bringing conviviality to the repositioned community debates strengthens the attempts to renew community by moving it away from a groupist identity or as a narrative of a bounded thing that ‘is joined’ or has been ‘lost’ or is ‘lacking’ (Wills 2016) to a focus on community as a continuous acts of social mutuality and a ‘being in common’ (Blokland 2017; Studdert and Walkerdine 2016a,) because conviviality insists on an engagement with race and racialized cultural and social difference. ‘Being with’ has to involve negotiating the partialities, contradictions and conflicts that conviviality signposts as co-present with exchange and openness. And third, incorporating rethought community as an ontological ‘being with’ and as urban practice to the debates about conviviality enhances and visibilises a broader mutualism and the collective urban social interdependency that are at the core of Amin’s

emphasis on ‘habitual negotiation’ and Gilroy’s emphasis on ‘unruly conviviality’.

Our suggestion here is that the conceptual and productive layering between a (rethought) community and a (connective) conviviality can be empirically glimpsed within the social life of urban social leisure organisations and the ways in which these may work as sites of sustained, grounded and projected connections to others and to places. What was notable about all the social leisure organisations in the three different geographies is that they were already present. We did not find a shrinking of informal social life but instead the project was able to engage with existing active social landscapes of ‘people relating to each other and being open to new relationships’ (Wills 2016: 648). We have argued that choosing to be part of a social leisure organisation goes beyond bringing people together through a shared interest and location. The data drawn on from the organisations offer evidence of the ‘being with’ ontology of reworked community alongside the ‘working through’ of social and cultural difference. Aspects of this are summed up in Imran’s description of how in the Club ‘*everybody’s willing to be social, talk and do whatever it is for everyone else who’s a member*’. While this may be a ‘bubble world’ reciprocity, enabled and underpinned by the space of the club itself and the badge of membership, there is a sturdier resilience hinted at in Imran’s words which articulate the necessity of a disposition or ‘an orientation’ (Wise and Noble 2016) (seen for example in Imran’s reference to willingness) to commune and to the precarious processes of conviviality. This blend of precarity and commitment is similarly present in Eddie’s (a white South African man and member of Oadby Sports Club) observation that, ‘the truth is people have different cultures and *you’re more comfortable with the people you’re familiar with and so you will mix with those people. You’ve got to be quite mature to just go in without having met different people before and just be yourself, it’s very difficult [...] but I think Oadby is pretty good really*’.

We conclude with Eddie’s and Imran’s practice based accounts of how to routinely live these complexities because these illustrate how a radical reclaiming of community as being in common and an extension of

conviviality's meaning to a multicultural urban mutuality offers conceptual - and political - space for accounting for and responding to social relations that are stratified, often conflictual, occasionally transformative and always interdependent.

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Table

Figure 1. Profile of project’s social leisure groups

Place	Social leisure groups	Key features
Hackney	Running Group	Meets weekly in a pub by park and canal: no membership fee; women only; younger age range; ethnically mostly white British and white European but some South Asian origin members.
	Creative Writing Group	Meets monthly in the public library; no membership fee; gender mixed, very age mixed; ethnically diverse membership including white British, Black African, African-Caribbean and Irish members.
Milton Keynes	Woodside Football Club	Members meet weekly or more; has a club house and grounds; members pay small membership fee; membership profile is gender and age mixed and mainly white British.
	Gardeners Group	Meets weekly in a church hall and/or at designated gardens/trips; small memberships fee; gender

		mixed; member mid and older age; ethnically all white British.
Oadby	Oadby Sports Club	Members meet weekly and more frequently; has a club house, tennis courts and grounds; membership fee; gender mixed, ethnically diverse membership including white British, South Asian and Black African.
	Coffee Morning Meet Up Club	Meets weekly in local community hall; small refreshments contribution; members all women; ethnically members all South Asian origin and mostly Muslim; age mixed within mid to older age range.

ⁱ This can also be seen in the 'Identity, Community and Social Solidarity' theme of the British Sociological Association's 2018 Annual General Conference held at University of Northumbria, UK.

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