# Liveable Cities

Future cities: visions from Birmingham & Southampton

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# Research context

- Over half of the world's population now live in cities
  - trend is accelerating
- 'Urban advantage' in terms of health, creation of knowledge, art & wealth
- 'Collective effervescence' of a city

# Research context

- Contrary to this, crowded city more polluted & crime ridden

- What do people desire for future cities?

# Liveable Cities Project



- 5 year EPSRC funded research programme

- 4 universities (UCL, Birmingham, Southampton, Lancaster)

- Interdisciplinary focus – engineering, ecology, psychology, sociology, economics, governance

- Vision
  - To transform the engineering of cities to deliver **wellbeing** within the context of **low carbon** **living (80% reduced)** and **resource security** through developing realistic and radical engineering that will lead to liveable cities of the future

# UCL aspirations research

- Aim – to assess city dweller aspirations for future cities
  - What is their content and do they match or clash with wellbeing and low carbon agendas?
- 3 case study cities
  - Birmingham
  - Southampton
  - London
- Method
  - Samples matched for age, gender, SES, ethnicity & place of residence
  - Interviews conducted in respondents' homes between April 2013 & April 2014

# Methods – interview procedure

- Grid Elaboration Method (GEM)(Joffe & Elsey, in press)
  - Combination free association task & exploratory interview
  - Respondents asked to fill in blank grids in response to prompt:
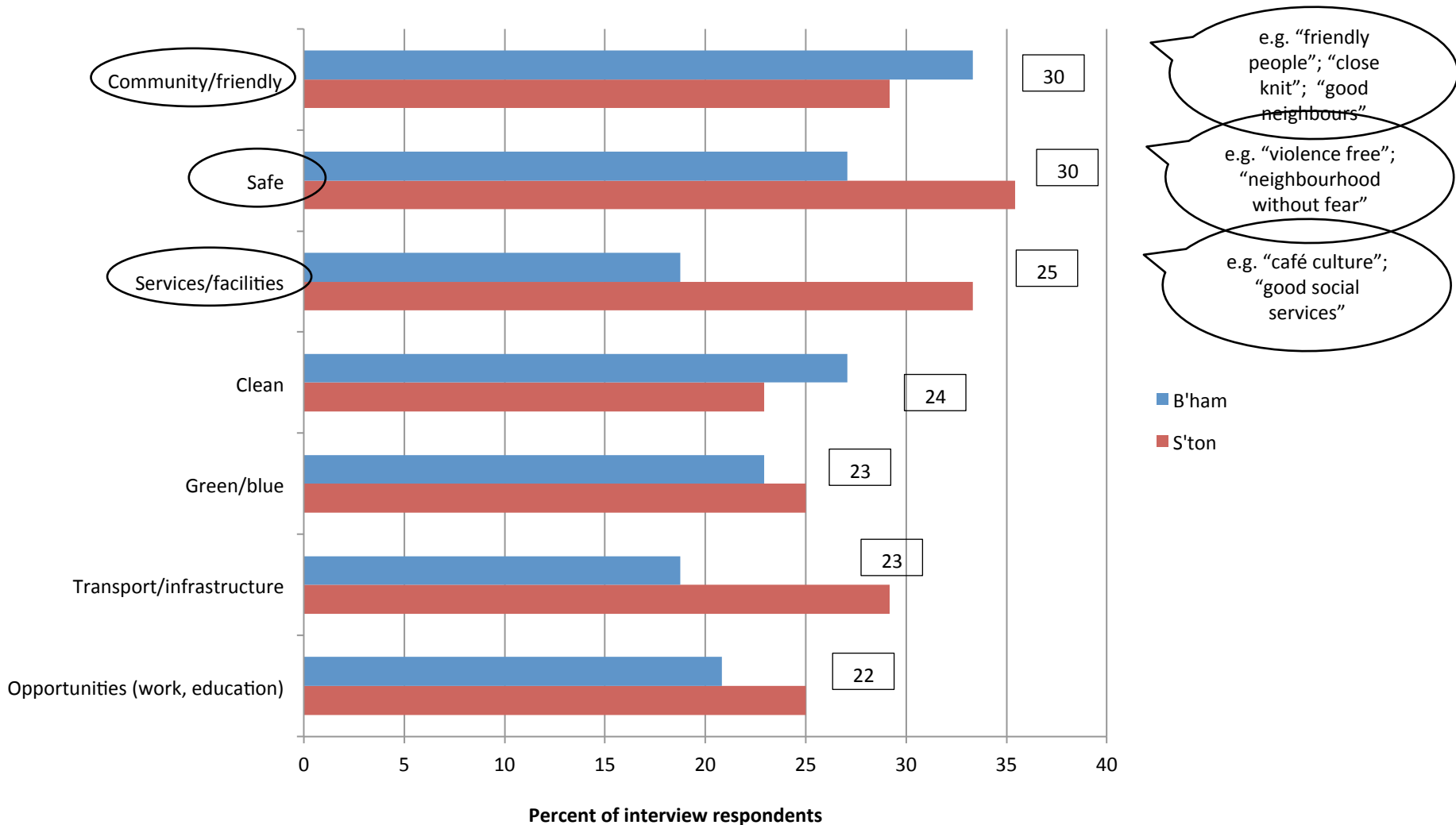  - Words and images that show the 'kind of city aspire to live in'

**Instructions:**

I am interested in the kind of city you would aspire to live in the future. Please write or draw the different words and images that show this in the boxes below. Please give only one thought/image per box.

| 1 | 2 |
|---|---|
| 3 | 4 |

# Results – free associations

**Liveable Cities**

36

| 1 | 2 |
|---|---|
| Not too crowded. Space to be yourself. | Friendly people. |
| **3** | **4** |
| Lots of shops and amenities. | Somewhere hot near the sea. |

| 1 | 2 |
|---|---|
| WHERE POVERTY IS ERADICATED | ONE CAN WALK THE STREETS IN SAFETY |
| **3** | **4** |
| WHERE NEIGHBOURS GOT ON WITH EACH OTHER. | WHERE LOCAL/NATIONAL GOVERNMENTS DECIDED TO GOVERN FOR THE PEOPLE |

Female, 55-67, lower SES, White, Birmingham

Male, 55-67, higher SES, White, Southampton

# Birmingham and Southampton
# free associations for cities of the future



Percent of interview respondents

e.g. "friendly people"; "close knit"; "good neighbours"

e.g. "violence free"; "neighbourhood without fear"

e.g. "café culture"; "good social services"

- B'ham
- S'ton

# Results - interviews

| BIRMINGHAM CODES | |
|---|---|
| **Code** | **Percentage** |
| cities - emotions/feelings - negative | 83 |
| cities - comparisons - now vs. then | 73 |
| cities - emotions/feelings - positive | 71 |
| cities - comparisons - here vs. there | 69 |
| cities - physical aspects of the city - layout/scale | 69 |
| cities - services - appeal of facilities/services | 65 |
| cities - community - friendly | 58 |
| cities - stigmatisation - derogation of societal groups | 46 |

| SOUTHAMPTON CODES | |
|---|---|
| **Code** | **Percentage** |
| cities - comparisons - here vs. there | 94 |
| cities - emotions/feelings - negative | 83 |
| cities - comparisons - now vs. then | 71 |
| cities - emotions/feelings - positive | 67 |
| cities - physical aspects of the city - layout/scale | 65 |
| cities - services - appeal of facilities/services | 58 |
| cities - stigmatisation - derogation of societal groups | 58 |
| cities - safety - crime | 56 |

- Unprompted, people conceptualise cities:
  - Emotively
    - aspects of a city that evoke positive/negative feelings
  - Spatially
    - comparison between where they currently live and elsewhere
  - Temporally
    - comparison between then and now

# Analysis of interviews

- These conceptual, higher order concepts (space, time, emotion) structured much of the other interview content

- Five prominent categories - physical & social aspects - of the kinds of cities people aspire to live in:

| BIRMINGHAM & SOUTHAMPTON CODES | |
| --- | --- |
| **Code** | **Percentage** |
| cities - physical aspects of the city - layout/scale | 67 |
| cities - services - appeal of facilities/services | 61 |
| cities - stigmatisation - derogation of societal groups | 52 |
| cities - safety - crime | 50 |
| cities - community - friendly | 48 |

Physical

Social

- Will give sense of respondents' subjective visions

# Physical aspects of cities

- Appeal of **smaller** cities
  - **Friendlier**, **safer** with **less hustle and bustle**
- Aspiration for **cities to 'feel' small** irrespective of literal size:

  *"I mean it just **annoys me** sometimes **living in a city** ... there's **so many people** there, sometimes they're rude and they're **pushing** and **shoving**.  ... if you go into a **smaller city** or like a little town or a village they're all like **nicer"*** (Female, 18-35, lower SES, White, Birmingham)

- **Tension** between desire for **smallness** & for **more space:** cities too claustrophobic, for some
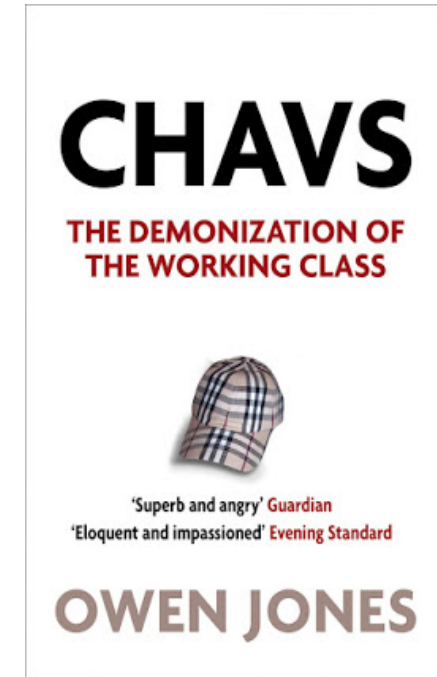
# Physical aspects of cities

- Cities as **providers of an array of services and facilities** - (e.g. shops, restaurants, theatres, museums)
- **Barriers** prevent utilisation/ enjoyment of them:

*"Yes I do buy it [The Times Newspaper], the advantages of subscribing is **I get all these offers to the theatre** and so on, yeah **fantastic** but most of the offers relate to places like theatres in Shaftesbury Avenue or wherever else, very **rarely outside of London**, hardly ever in Birmingham and therefore of **no benefit to me at all**"* (Male, 36-54, higher SES, White, Birmingham)

# Social aspects of cities

- Cities linked to **erosion of British values** felt to have declined over time
  - **Derogated societal groups** seen as responsible
  - Associated with **anger, fear and disgust:**

**CHAVS**
**THE DEMONIZATION OF THE WORKING CLASS**

'Superb and angry' Guardian
'Eloquent and impassioned' Evening Standard

**OWEN JONES**

*"I **hate and detest the dirty aspect** of the city. I can't bear graffiti, I can't bear litter, I can't bear dog poo, I **can't bear scutty people** who don't keep their properties nice ... I hate all that. ... I really, I really dislike the grubby, scutty people **who make the place untidy and unpleasant** for the rest of us."* (Female, 55-67, higher SES, White, Birmingham)

# Social aspects of cities

- Importance of **good neighbours** and the desire to live in **cohesive, friendly communities**
  - associated with **happiness warmth and safety**
- Over time **sense of community eroded**:



*"a lot of **people** are **quite hostile** or they don't want to say hello to you or they're just looking at you like why is she smiling at me. ... It's like everyone's **just interested in themselves** and their own world's now, **it's not a community anymore** ... people just seem really, really hostile and unhappy.  ... Everyone's just rushing everywhere, nobody wants to talk to anybody, I suppose it's **becoming a bit like London"** (Female, 18-35, lower SES, BME, Birmingham)

# Social aspects of cities

- Threat of crime perceived as more prevalent
  - **need to protect children**
- Reflections on what life was like when younger:

*"I'd like to think that the city we lived in was secure. I'd be **much happier** feeling that me and my family are **living in a secure place** where the crime rate isn't so high, where there wasn't a drug problem ... which my kids don't see because, you know, **our kids don't play out on the street**. I was allowed to when I was a kid but things were different then. ... People did leave their door open and **times have changed so much"** (Male, 36-54, lower SES, white, Birmingham)

# Combining the physical and social: a summary



- People want from future cities:
  - 'feel' small
  - strong sense of community cohesion
  - feel safe
  - easy to get around
- Also want green/blue spaces and good access to a range of services/facilities

# At a more conceptual level:



- Temporally, 'good old days' favoured over value-eroded, community-destroying present

- Spatially, people as likely to love as to hate their own cities



- Emotively, busy, noisy, derogated groups contribute to illbeing while close knit communities engender wellbeing

# Implications for liveable cities

- How do city dweller visions of future cities match or clash with high wellbeing and low carbon agendas?

- **Wellbeing**
  - Wide appeal of **friendly** and **safe** cities with a **strong sense of community**
  - A key way to wellbeing is **connecting** - sense of community enhances connectedness

- **Low – carbon**
  - There is **major mention** of the **appeal of green** *and* **blue space**, associated with health, exercise, wellbeing and relaxation though not with low carbon living

# Next steps



- Fine grained analysis on demographics and different city visions – may be that the city represents 'collective effervescence' for some; unbearable noise and bustle for others

- London free association and interview analysis