



How can communities tackle neighbourhood stigma? A record of the workshop discussions held 7th November 2017

Background

This event was hosted as part of the 2017 ESRC Festival of Social Science. The aim was to facilitate discussion about ways of tackling neighbourhood stigma and to create an open space to share experiences and knowledge. In particular, it sought to address the question - what strengthens and impedes action to address area reputation?

The event was attended by a range of delegates including residents, practitioners and researchers with links to Local Trust, Big Local partnerships and People's Health Trust. Also attending were local authority and public health professionals, as well as community organisations and those with a local and national policy perspective.

This report is a record of attendees' feedback given during the workshop. It is based upon notes recorded during the group discussions and plenary sessions. It does not include a write up of the speakers' presentations. These slides are available on request.

How is area reputation understood?

During the workshop discussions, attendees provided a range of views on this topic:

- Need to distinguish between the different ways areas are perceived: which include:
 - ◊ what residents think of where they live
 - ◊ residents' perceptions of how others living or working outside an area view it
 - ◊ actual perceptions held by those who live or work externally.

- Area reputation is selective as you don't get the full picture of an area (it often depends on who is telling the story).
- Perceptions are also linked to the amount of pride that people have in where they live.
- Residents living somewhere with a poor reputation may 'internalise' negative portrayals, dampening local aspirations.
- Quite often, others do not recognise residents' pride in the place where they live. There is a need to focus on what is happening within an area rather than drawing what might be unfavourable comparisons with other areas.
- While some residents may be aware of an area's reputation; others may not know what the external perception of an area is.
- Externally, reputations come from perspectives of those who do not know an area well and are also formed when people make assumptions based on externally produced information (for example information in a planning document about an area).

Quoted feedback from attendees

'Often depends on who is telling the story and what they want to advocate'

'Context of conversations play a big part in how people talk about or describe reputation. It can be positive or negative.'

The impact of reputation

Attendees highlighted a range of ways that reputation could impact affected areas and the residents living there:

- It could cause frustration in an area and result in residents internalising negative perceptions. It could affect self-worth at all ages, including younger residents.
- Reputation was also suggested to relate to how much control people felt they had over decisions in an area. This included whether people felt their perspectives were taken seriously and valued by others.
- In the experience of one attendee who worked in a school, local newspapers were far more likely to print negative than positive stories and this was immensely frustrating when trying to raise awareness of positive stories in the local community.
- Economic impacts might include difficulties around selling houses, or low house price. Conversely, it was suggested this might result in people moving to an area for cheaper housing.
- Area reputation could also influence the provision of services in an area (e.g. if the police will not go to an area) and the amount of funding and resources to which an area had access.

What is the role of the media?

Attendees gave different perspectives on the role of the local media. In some areas, there was a high circulation/readership of regional newspapers but other areas had a very low readership. It was felt that social and web media also needed to be considered for their effect on reputation (e.g. trip adviser). The role of national media in shaping coverage in some areas (e.g. portrayals in TV shows) was acknowledged.

Tackling area reputation

It was evident from the discussion that tackling reputation is complex. The examples below are not recommendations for action from the event, but offer some suggestions from attendees' experiences about ways of improving reputation.

An emphasis needs to be placed on efforts to address reputation being driven by residents which focuses upon **community's assets** rather than deficits.

The need to **work together to address reputation** was indicated. Strength can be gained from residents in an area having something in common and also by involving local groups and agencies.

Linked to this, agencies have a duty to ensure that **residents' voices are present and heard** in council and other decision making processes.

In external communications about the area:

- ⇒ Focus on positives of the area in public communications
- ⇒ Consider press coverage of good events and access to press writing support
- ⇒ Share more widely the positives about the area – e.g. its history, heritage

Employing an agency to develop an **identity and associated brand** for the area was one example of how an area had attempted to promote more positive images.

Word of mouth can be an important way of sharing positive messages but trust and relationships are also a key part of word of mouth being an effective transmission mechanism.

Young people are the future, so a focus on changing **young residents' internal perceptions** of themselves and their area could be crucial in changing the area's reputation organically.

Changing signage in an area that could be perceived as unwelcoming by both residents and visitors such as 'keep off the grass' and 'no ball games'.

Finally, the issue of stigma and mental health was raised and whether learning from **challenging stigma** associated with mental health can be translated into challenging place-based stigma.

The challenges of reputation

This section draws attention to some key challenges raised by attendees in efforts to tackle reputational issues.

- Changing practices and ethos of agencies in areas where there is top-down control by external agencies.
- It shouldn't be assumed that residents want to be involved or engaged in the same way in trying to challenge area reputation.
- There may be a lack of public or shared spaces in communities that make it harder for residents to come together to challenge area reputations.
- Ways in which people are diverse (e.g. age, language, ethnicity) may lead to different dimensions of stigma
- There is a need to recognise and value the diverse ways in which people live their lives – not doing so could be a barrier to challenging area reputation
- Issue of transient communities. Any efforts must not be reliant on individuals – who might move out ?
- Many groups play a role in creating, maintaining and changing area reputation — are we clear about whose responsibility/ability it is to change stigma?
- In challenging negative area reputation it is also important not to lose sight of the 'real' challenges faced by residents.

How to find out more

If you would like copies of workshop presentations and materials please contact the organisers (see contact details below).

The following briefing considers examples of resident led action as part of the Big Local programme: '*How are communities tackling negative reputations of local areas?*' An update from the *Communities in Control* study (Oct 2017) - it is available [here](#)

Getting involved

If you would like to take part in continuing discussions about this topic, you can sign up to a [facebook group](#). It aims to be used as a space for discussion and sharing of ideas beyond the workshop about ways of tackling area reputation. If you would like to sign up to this page, please email Nicola Brian: nicola.brian@peopleshealthtrust.org.uk

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