

The End of “Community”?: Concepts of Locality and Community before and after the Spatial Turn in Anthropology: A Case Study of the Dublin Docklands

Astrid Wonneberger

Abstract

This paper explores the different approaches and analytical changes of the study of “community” since the 1920s. The major feature in this context is the changing meaning of locality, space and territory. While in many cases locality has lost some significance for the formation of communities, in others a sense of place and valuation of the local remains an important cultural factor of everyday living. This latter aspect becomes particularly obvious in times and situations of transformation of this locality, such as gentrification or other forms of urban transformation.

This case study of the Dublin Docklands, characterised by waterfront regeneration since the late 1980s, brings together both perspectives: the dichotomy and co-existence of a-spatial and territory-based communities. Both old-established dockland communities with very specific relations to their built urban environment and new residents with a completely opposite sense of place are affected by dramatic urban transformations of the waterfront. The case study is therefore a good example to illustrate changing interrelations between people and place and shifting meanings of the local in a globalised era.

Keywords: Space, Locality, Territory, Transformation, Dichotomy, Dockland Communities

Introduction

The concept of community has been “one of the widest and most frequently used in social science” (Rapport 1998, 116), and yet – or maybe because of this – the approaches, emphases and methodology of investigating this social phenomenon have varied greatly. To date, there is still no precise and widely accepted definition of the term (cf. Rapport (1998), pp. 114-117; Hamilton (1985), p. 7; Cohen (1985), p. 11).

While earlier notions of the term “community” saw the concept as irreconcilable with modernity and urbanism (Cohen (1985), p. 11) and were based on the idea of a specific territory, a specific locality, by which the communities were bound together (Welz (1991), p. 33; Wellman and Leighton 1979), later studies shifted away from locality to a-spatial forms of community formation, such as transnational or diasporic communities, also motivated by the “spatial turn” in social and cultural anthropology.

Despite these shifts and despite the fact that in many cases locality, place and territory have lost some significance for the formation of communities, in many others a sense of place and locality remains an important cultural factor of every day living. This latter aspect becomes particularly obvious in times and situations of transformation of this locality, such as gentrification or other forms of urban transformation, as I will demonstrate in this article referring to the dockland regeneration in Dublin.

This contribution will explore the different approaches and analytical changes in the study of “community” since the 1920s. The most prominent feature, in this context, is the changing importance – or lack of importance – of locality, space and territory. I will also show that the term “community” is still widely used in the Irish context and, moreover, that it can still be of great analytical value to analyse social structures in modern contexts. My case study

of the Dublin Docklands¹⁾ will illustrate the complex relationship between place, community and culture. This example of old-established dockland communities, who have very specific relations to their built urban environment, living side by side with new residents with a completely opposite sense of place, brings together both perspectives and illustrates the dichotomy and co-existence of a-spatial and territory-based communities. Both populations are affected by the dramatic urban transformations of the waterfront, the former port area, and both hold their own images of the urban environment and use urban space in different ways. This case study is therefore a good example of illustrating changing interrelations between people and place and the shifting meanings of the local in a globalised era.

Community in Social / Cultural Anthropology

The debate on locality, place and space and their meaning for the construction of group identities has been widely discussed in social and cultural sciences, particularly over the last three decades. This debate can be particularly well followed in the development and discussion of an important concept in social and cultural anthropology: namely the concept of community.

The origins of ethnographic community studies date back to the 1920s, when

1) This article is based on ethnographic fieldwork which I carried out over more than 20 months between 2002 and 2010. I applied various empirical methods including participant observation in the communities I was studying; I collected over one hundred semi-structured recorded interviews, even more informal conversations, network interviews, genealogical data, a consensus survey and over 50 mental maps; I took part in numerous privately guided walks, carried out archive research and took more than 6,000 photographs. Through the close and long-term involvement in the dockland neighbourhoods I became part of the groups I was studying and gained insights in their culture and everyday life which would not have been possible otherwise. I therefore owe special thanks to every member of the dockland communities; without their support, my research and this article would not have been possible.

scholars of the famous Chicago School of Urban Sociology carried out studies of urban, mostly ethnic or migrant neighbourhoods in Chicago. These were considered prototypical “natural areas”, in which an assumed homogeneous population interpret an urban quarter as their given territory and, at the same time, base their solidarity on living in this specific locality. The communities studied were assumed isolated groups of people bound together in a specific urban environment otherwise characterised by anonymity (cf. Welz (1991), pp. 29-34; Kokot (1991), pp. 1-3; Bell and Newby (1971), pp. 91-102).

Over the following decades, researchers went on to study “dying” peasant cultures surrounded by urbanisation, first in Latin America and Western Europe, later in Central and Eastern Europe and all over the world (Bell and Newby 1971). Particularly rural Ireland seemed a perfect setting and a series of Irish community studies emerged during this time (see in detail Wilson and Donnan 2006). The focus of all these community studies was to study the entire community and their culture, just like other classic monographs of ethnic groups. Economic, religious and social organisation, the specific relationship between the groups studied and their natural environment were central topics of investigation. Typical members of the communities studied were relatively immobile in a physical way: They never travelled far from their locality, because notions of community involved loyalty and a “sentimental attachment to the conventions and mores of a beloved place” (Bell and Newby (1971), p. 24). Some scholars even went so far as regarding the solidarity of the members of the communities as a function of their common residence. Communities, in their perception, were in their nature a collective response to their environment (Bell and Newby (1971), p. 33). Thus, the communities appeared as relatively isolated units, perfect units for classic ethnographic research.

Later approaches shifted towards the investigation of collective identities and

common markers for these identities. The role of symbols became an increasingly interesting topic, and this also led to the study of symbolic meanings of place for the construction of identities (Cohen 1985).

The Turn to A-Spatial Communities

During this time and in all these studies, the territorial character of the communities studied was more or less taken for granted, just like in any other group under ethnographic research. Space was only implicitly present, as it had been regarded as a constant factor governing, or even determining, the set of shared actions, values, beliefs, structures that social anthropologists have called “culture”. Culture, community and territory were considered one unit; one was not conceivable without the others. Community only existed if a group of people were localised and shared cultural features (cf. Welz (1991), p. 33; Kokot 2007).

In the 1980s, triggered by a growing interest in migration, transnationalism and globalisation, more and more scholars became aware of the fact that the relationship between culture, community, identity and a specific territory or locality is not as simple as had been previously assumed. It became obvious that social relationships can exceed national boundaries, that identities can be constructed without a reference to a specific place and communities can emerge based on social networks instead of a common physical locality. The concepts of place and space and their relationships with the concepts of identity, culture and community were increasingly being discussed. They shifted away from the focus on spatially bounded cultures rooted in a specific, physical territory towards a-spatial concepts of culture and community. Particularly influential on the debate were the contributions by Arjun Appadurai (1991), Akhil Gupta and

James Ferguson (1997) and Kirsten Hastrup and Karen Fog-Olwig (1997). While Appadurai introduced the often quoted term „ethnoscapes“ to connote deterritorialised spaces of ethnic group identity formation, the latter contested “the field” itself. As an instrument of colonialist “othering”, ethnographic research should refrain from old stationary, territory-based fieldwork and rather study social networks. All these authors rang in “the end of an era” claiming that community and locality are not spatial certainties and that it makes more sense to study social processes of place-making.

The empirical problems that arose are obvious: Is it useful to give up stationary ethnographic fieldwork? How can a researcher study groups that are not localised? What exactly then is our new “field” of investigation? Can we still carry out research in “communities”? What are communities today? By which features are they characterised?

Many scholars turned their attention to dispersed, diasporic communities, and forms of transnationalism. Transnational networks, border cultures and new means of communication in a globalised era were the new themes (cf. Kokot 2007). Other studies focused on a-spatial communities in urban environments. Facing the fact that many immigrant and other social groups are no longer centred in specific urban neighbourhoods, for various reasons, these researchers either focused on a-spatial communities – or “communities without propinquity”, as they are also referred to: groups of people who do not live together and yet share a sense of solidarity and even many cultural traits. In these cases, methods and theories of networks became the focus of interest (cf. Welz (1991), pp. 33-40). Yet other studies investigate the relationships of heterogeneous groups of people who come to live together in specific urban environments. They are interested in, if, why and how a process of community formation can be observed in some cases, while in others different groups

continue to live separately in a confined urban space. Urban environments affected by global transformation processes are particularly interesting fields of investigation for the study of various co-existing types of community formation (Welz (1991), pp. 34-37).

In short, concepts of community have been for a long time criticised for various reasons: for their long-term focus on territory and locality, their reluctance to accept modern, industrialised and urban approaches and the fact that old notions of community were based on old-fashioned structural-functional models, among many others (cf. Rapport 1998; Wilson and Donnan (2006), pp. 17-27). All these considerations led to a growing fuzziness of the term and have led many ethnographers to shy away from community studies and from using this term and concept. Margaret Stacey, for instance, suggested, as early as 1969, avoiding the term community and rather speaking of “local social systems” (quoted in Bell and Newby (1971), p. 49).

However, despite its diminishing academic popularity, community has remained very popular in current usage, with “both practical and ideological significance for people” (Rapport (1998), p. 116). As we will see in the following section, this is particularly true for the Irish context, both in rural and urban environments.

Moreover, even in social sciences the term has never entirely ceased to exist, albeit with new and often diverse meanings and connotations (cf. Rapport (1998), p. 117). However, like so often with key terms, some features can be identified as central to characterise this concept, even if the boundaries remain fuzzy and a more narrow definition elusive. Thus, community usually refers to both a) a group of people with b) complex interrelations as a specific form of social organisation. The group members postulate a solidarity which distinguishes them from other similarly formed groups and thus create a

boundary by selecting certain situational markers. Common aims and objectives strengthen community bonds, particularly in economically or socially marginalized areas or situations of deprivation. Older and narrower notions of the term also include face-to-face relationships and thus follow some form of localised approach.

But the old, contested locality and territory-based notions have re-entered the new debates. The emergence of new forms of nationalism, for instance, demonstrates that locality and territory have definitely not lost all their meanings. Culture, identity and communities remain in many cases based on spatial concepts. Therefore, the term “community” still proves valuable for ethnographic research, if it is advanced from old static notions and adapted to new realities.

The new questions to be investigated are: What effects do global processes have on the local level? What do locality, local spaces and places mean for groups of people as a lived experience? What strategies do people develop to use global trends for their own interests? And what roles do specific places and spaces play in this context, to create culture, identities and a sense of community? How important are locality and place for concepts of culture and community, how are they adapted and how do they influence behaviour?

In the following sections I will give an ethnographic example from my own research to illustrate the complexity of changing relationships between place, culture and community. This example will show what effects global processes have had on the local level, how different territory-based and a-spatial communities adapt and make use of their urban environments. I will also demonstrate how different their relationships with urban space can be; and how diverse the meaning and importance of places and spaces are for the construction and maintenance of identities and everyday living.

Dublin – A City of Communities?

All over Ireland, and in Dublin specifically, the term “community” is everywhere: During my research I frequently read the term as public slogans and in official brochures; it was often used in public speeches, and also my interview partners referred frequently to “community” in their conversations. It very soon became obvious that “community” is flourishing in Dublin. However, what remained unclear was what exactly the term meant. Taking a closer look I found that the connotations vary with different situations and imply different objectives and ideologies. Dublin Bus, to give one example, uses the term to connote the entire population of the city of Dublin, using the slogan “Serving the Entire Community”. More common, however, is the meaning of the term in everyday use. When used by Dubliners in conversations, it usually refers to the residents of specific city quarters or neighbourhoods, such as “the community of Ringsend” or “Pearse Street community” and finds its expression in “community centres”, “community doctors” or “community activities” which take place in these urban quarters and are often financially supported by the local authorities.

However, community is not only a descriptive term for existing groups of people, it has also an ideological aspect. It is perceived as an ideal for Dublin’s future and thus used for policy-making for the future design of the city. Strengthening existing neighbourhoods²⁾ and “community building” are explicit objectives of Dublin City Council, the local government. One of its brochures outlines “a strategic plan” for the city’s next ten years and formulates its visionary goal, which includes the following features:

2) “Neighbourhood” and “community” are in this context used synonymously and refer to both the residents of specific quarters and the urban locality which is inhabited by these people.

A safer city - [...] By taking an interest in our own area, by looking out for each other and by developing a real community spirit we can help create a safe atmosphere in which to live, work and play. [...] A City of Neighbourhoods - Our vision is to create a city of neighbour- hoods which will provide all of us with a sense of place and a voice on local issues. [...] By participating in a vibrant and open local democracy, we can develop a strong sense of community identity, enjoy economic developments and gain an important position in the running of our city. [...] A Rewarding City - Our vision will recognise and reward positive efforts by individuals, groups and entire communities that improve the well being of our city and people. (Dublin City Development Board and Dublin Corporation³⁾ 2002)

This example and many other quotes from official brochures, speeches and documents, indicate the importance of this concept as an ideal for future planning. Due to these exclusively positive connotations, it is not surprising that is also one of the favourite terms of investors and developers to promote new residential areas that are being created in many areas of Dublin. Slogans such as “Spencer Dock will become a vibrant and dynamic community, where business will flourish” and “The Spencer Dock community is blossoming and creating its own unique identity” are good examples and reflect this ideology.

These two examples were taken from hoardings in the Dublin Docklands, currently one of Ireland’s largest construction sites.



Figure 1: Spencer Dock hoarding and slogans in 2003 (photo: Astrid Wonneberger)

3) Dublin Corporation, the local authority, was renamed Dublin City Council in 2002.

The Dublin Docklands, the former port area of Ireland's capital, have undergone fundamental transformations in the last 25 years, particularly within the last 13 years, just like many other waterfront areas all over the world (see for instance Schubert, ed. 2001, Desfor et al., eds. 2011). After the thriving port area of the late 19th century ceased in the 1970s due to technological changes and the introduction of containerisation and mechanisation⁴⁾ in the international shipping industry, the former port area, ware- and store houses, coal and timber yards, gas companies and related industries fell derelict. Since the end of the 1980s and particularly since 1997 the entire area of what is now called "docklands" has been regenerated and transformed, just as many other former port areas all over the world. In charge of the regeneration is the Dublin Docklands Development Authority (DDDA), a semi-state body, which was set up in 1997 and whose term remits in 2012. Old buildings of the area are either demolished or re-designed for new usage. New hotels, residential areas, amenities and infrastructure provide the urban quarter with a new character, from a "dirty old town" to a "world-class city", as the DDDA advertisement campaign in brochures and on hoardings suggests (cf. Wonneberger 2005, 2011).

The question is: What exactly does community mean in the Dublin Docklands? What types of communities live in the docklands area? Do the advertising slogans reflect social realities or are they only an idealised vision as a marketing strategy? And if yes, what social features characterise life in the various areas of the docklands? How do the old-established neighbourhoods differ from the newly designed quarters? The next section will take a closer look at two different types of communities which I identified during my research and which could barely be more different in their cultural, social and

4) On the history of the port of Dublin see in detail Gilligan 1989.

economic profile: The first type are several dockland communities, who consider themselves as old-established and “indigenous” communities in the former port area. The second are the new residents, who have moved to the area since the beginning of the regeneration and who are often referred to as “gated communities”. The visionary slogans quoted above also refer to these residents. To what extent this is realistic will be demonstrated in the following sections.

“Established” Communities in the Dublin Docklands

The most dominant and visible residential population in the Dublin Docklands are several dockland communities, whose residents had depended on port-related economies until the 1970s. These communities were the focus of my ethnographic research. They themselves use the term “dockland community” to describe their neighbourhoods, but it is also an adequate term in the old anthropological meanings of the term, because these urban communities are characterised by close social networks based on daily face-to-face relationships and multiple ties of kinship, friendship and acquaintance.⁵⁾

They also share a close relationship with specific landmarks and an urban space most of their families have lived in over generations. They strongly consider their urban quarter as their traditional, cultural territory, not only because it is full of meeting points, but also because it is full of symbolic meanings. And these symbolic meanings are also important markers for communal identities.

The map (figure 2) shows the five communities in the area of what has been

5) This was not only the result of the qualitative data collected during the fieldwork, but also supported by a formal network analysis as described by Schnegg and Lang 2001. The results have been discussed before (Wonneberger 2009).

defined “docklands”.

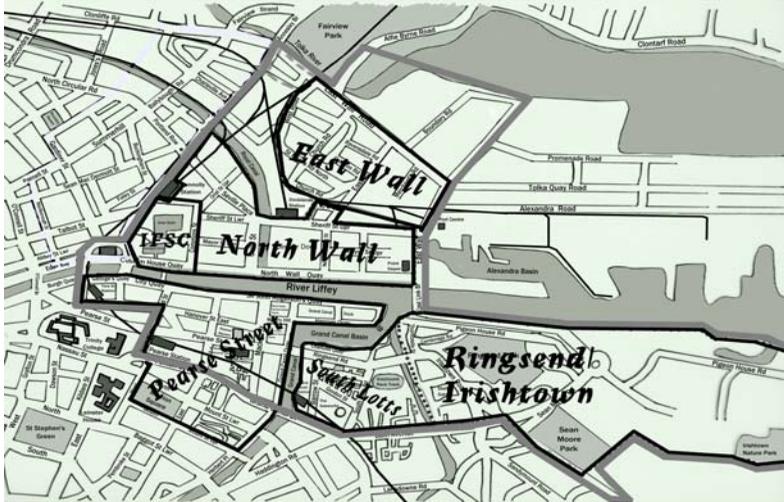


Figure 2: Map of the Dublin Docklands showing the five principal dockland communities and their boundaries as perceived by their residents. The grey line marks the boundary of the “docklands” as defined by the DDDA in their master plan of 1997 (map designed by Astrid Wonneberger).

I will this illustrate this by introducing one of my interview partners, who is a very typical member of one of these communities.

Tony⁶⁾ was born in the Pearse Street community in the mid-1960s to a family who has lived in the area for at least three generations. Despite his leaving certificate, which provided him with a higher level of education than the average member of his community, he worked for a long time in different jobs with frequent stretches of unemployment, before he was employed on a permanent basis in his local community centre. Apart from a few short-term exceptions when he moved to adjacent neighbourhoods in the inner city, he has resided in the Pearse Street area for his entire life. Currently he is living in one

6) All personal names in this article have been changed.

of the new social housing blocks in his dockland quarter.

Most of his social ties are within the vicinity, as a network interview⁷⁾ showed. Both his parents and two siblings with their families live no more than two or three kilometres away. In total, fourteen relatives live close by. He goes regularly to a local bar where he meets friends and acquaintances who also live locally. Working in the local community centre and actively involved in youth work and other communal activities, he is well-known in the area and regularly greeted on the streets. He is also actively involved in local resident association and knows everybody in the social housing block he lives in at least to see. In total, 23 of the 29 persons in his active social network, which he mentioned in his network questionnaire, live locally, and he knows dozens of people he did not list. He barely needs to leave the area, as most of his work and leisure life takes part in this area of about two square kilometres.⁸⁾ He also shows great interest in local history and port-related architecture and enjoys taking photographs of the local landscape. The following interview excerpt illustrates his close relationship to “his” community, urban neighbourhood and localised life style:

I have grown up in the community I work in, the community I give all my time to, the community I want to see developed and grow and I'd like to see my children to grow up in. [...] When I moved back to this area [after a few years in other parts of Dublin], I realised what it was I had been missing. This is what community is about. You step outside your house, walk down the road and say hello to five people by the time you reach the corner. And know who they are, whose kids they are, where the family comes

7) This interview was part of a network analysis on social networks in the entire dockland area. The data are analysed in detail in Wonneberger 2009.

8) The entire dockland area stretches over 5.26 square kilometres, of which about half are inhabited or accessed by the residents (DDDA 1997, p. 26). The sizes of the communities range from 0.5 to 1.3 square kilometres (my own calculations based on DDDA maps and perceived community boundaries).

from and all that. People greet you, you feel safe and secure and you know your way around immediately. [...] It's nice to see the old buildings being kept. They have done well to renovate some old buildings and keep in with the general look and shape of the quays as a whole as they were in the past. [...]. There are a lot of lovely buildings in this area. They should be renovated and kept going [...], because these buildings, regardless of their original purpose, have meaning in local folklore; they feature in stories told by fathers to sons, mothers to daughters, grandparents to grandchildren. They act as landmarks, not only in the stories, but in the real landscape and act like beacons bringing you home from wherever you are.

The cultural importance of specific localities for him and other dockland community residents becomes even more obvious in the context of the current transformation process. In order to fully understand the current debates, however, we have to take a short detour on the history of the area.

Since the decline of manual work on the docks since the 1960s, due to mechanisation and containerisation in the international shipping industry, the residents of the port area who had been dependent on this form of labour, were struck by unemployment. Drugs, petty crime and social problems have characterised the docklands since, and they provided the quarter with the reputation of a “no-go area” (cf. Wonneberger 2008).

This was the situation when the first phase of regeneration of the docklands started in 1987 with the development of a commercial flagship project, the International Financial Services Centre (IFSC) (see figure 1).⁹⁾ Despite the fact that the new offices and amenities for banks and other finance orientated institutions of the service industry were built on a roughly 11 ha site on a former coal yard directly beside the established communities, the ongoing social needs in this area were completely ignored in the planning process. A lot of

9) The development of the IFSC area has been described in detail by various authors from different disciplines. See for instance Moore (2008), McDonald (2000), Malone (1993, 1996).

resentment, frustration and social tensions were the consequence, but also the awareness among the communities that communal political action and protest would be necessary to solve the social problems. Feeling let down by the local government, they took action on a communal basis from the late 1980s onwards. Led by individual activists and supported by local politicians, they set up their own initiatives, such as community resource centres, youth work and employment programmes. This development was further supported by a general shift towards a “partnership-driven, local area development” in Dublin politics (Corcoran 2006; Bartley and Shine 2003).

These initiatives were so successful and the established political and economic networks so powerful that, in the words of one activists, “the communities were having more and more say” and were therefore consulted, when the second phase of the regeneration was being planned. In 1997, when the DDDA and its Master Plan was set up, five representatives of the communities were taken on board the DDDA Council. The policy of the Master Plan 1997 (p. 2) reads as follows:

The Authority’s general duty is to secure:

- i the social and economic regeneration of the Dublin Docklands Area on a sustainable basis;
- ii the improvement of the physical environment of the Dublin Docklands Area; and
- iii the continued development in the Custom House Docks Area of services of, for, in support of, or ancillary to the financial sector of the economy.

The key word here is “social”, which is directed towards the communities and their situation and which obliges the DDDA to support local schemes, such as housing, education or amenities (see for instance DDDA (1997), pp. 24-29).

Despite these efforts, the dockland regeneration remains an economic driven enterprise, and therefore both the extent and the contents of the social measures are heavily debated. The communities are concerned that the DDDA's efforts are only superficial and not sufficient to secure a sustainable redevelopment. Their demands for housing, education, jobs, training and amenities go often further than the existing schemes. In some cases, their arguments were taken into consideration and had a direct impact on local and regional policy. Social housing is such an example. Based on the argument that communities can only survive if the children can afford to stay living in the area, the communities insisted that 20% of the newly constructed apartment blocks in the docklands have to be social/affordable. The local population has the first choice at the allocation. After this "pioneer work", as one activist called it, this also became national law in 1999 (McDonald (2000), p. 36).

In other issues, however, their voices remained unnoticed and a feeling of dissatisfaction with the realisation of the regeneration prevails. Many people are concerned, for instance, that the education schemes are far from sufficient and that the local initiatives are not supported enough. They are also afraid that traffic pollution will be increased with the construction of new bridges and roads, instead of public parks and amenities, and that high-rise will overshadow the low-built traditional housing, to mention just a few of the most prominent debates in the docklands (cf. Wonneberger 2008, 2011; McDonald 2000).

The arguments used in these protest with developers and planners always focus on an ideal concept of community: In short, everything that is considered to support community, the existing community structure as described above, is welcome, as a functioning community is considered to have the potential to solve social problems. Any measure that hinders community formation or destroys the existing networks is rejected. And this debate also concerns territory

and locality as one important aspect of dockland culture and communal identities.

In the course of the regeneration, the docklands were turned into a gigantic construction site with cranes dominating the skyline for years. Except for a small number of listed buildings, the entire former dock-related industrial structures were demolished and gave way to modern office and apartment complexes, hotels and amenities such as parks or campshires, a promenade along the river Liffey. The demolition of old landmarks and the new architectural design are subject of a wide-spread debate among the members of the established communities, and this underlines the both practical and symbolic cultural importance of locality, places and spaces for the established communities.

An anecdote from my fieldwork illustrates this point. When I was at the beginning of my research, I was a complete stranger to the docklands area. In order to find my way around and to get to know places and landmarks culturally important to the local communities, I tried to find and photograph any place regularly mentioned. One of these places was the old gas company site, once one of the biggest employers of the area. However, it was impossible to find this site on any maps, as it had been demolished almost 20 years ago. The entire site has been completely redesigned as a new, mostly residential area, and moreover given a new name, Grand Canal Harbour, but this name was barely used by the local residents, who still talked about the “gas company site”. Therefore I had to learn this local cultural knowledge to know which place they were talking about. Even the old gasometer, a famous landmark which was demolished in 1993, is still referred to as a point of reference, even though it no longer exists. It has certainly retained a symbolic meaning for the members of these communities.

The same occurs with place names, many of which have also been changed during the recent transformation. The communities insist that old names are either to be restored, or that the new names must have some kind of reference to the history of the area and the communities. Some streets and buildings were renamed “Longboat Quay” or “Asgard Road” to refer to Dublin’s Viking past. However, this particular area has never had a Viking history because it was only reclaimed from the sea much later and the Vikings play no role in the communities’ concepts of their history. Therefore, many of them dislike these new names, as they do not reflect the communities’ histories and identities.

Tony even went further with their concerns and heavily criticised the new style of architecture in the docklands:

There is a contrast between the older buildings and the newer buildings. [...] The new buildings look like they are trying to take over the whole thing. They are monstrosities, huge, you can’t miss them. And they are full of glass and steel [instead of the old bricks]. They seem to say, ‘we are so rich and powerful’. [...] They are not trying to blend in with the old architecture. [...] They are not designed for local people. They are for the office crowds in their lunch break. [...] Glass and granite has its place, but I don’t think it has its place here. [...] This building here, on the other hand, has been renovated well and it keeps in with the general look and shape of the quays, as they were in the past. [...] That’s the way to do it: Keep the new buildings in the same size, colour and shape as the old ones in this area. But most of the new ones totally and utterly spoil it! [...] This was an industrial area and it has to retain some industrial look.

This statement does not reflect only Tony’s individual preference, but was an attitude which I found very frequently among members of the old-established communities. The fact that it was so wide-spread shows that it is based on culturally acknowledged concepts of community, communal culture and identities.¹⁰⁾ Their statements represent a general debate between community

10) One of the methodological problems of my research was to identify a cultural consensus among the opinions of my interview partners. In order to check how prevalent the statements of my

members and activists and urban planners, investors and developers on how to design the new dockland quarter. While the former would like to see some of the old style architecture preserved, as it reflects their history and culture, the latter have different views of how to design a world-class city quarter and prefer a modern and international design. Many community members thus criticise the demolition of industrial structures as a loss of the community's heritage and identity, and also the new style of architecture which creates a completely new image, as the photograph (figure 2) illustrates. They see their communities threatened when all these symbolic and historic markers are gone.



Figure 3: Old and new architecture in the Docklands (Grand Canal Dock) (photo: Astrid Wonneberger).

I would like to add that, despite their strong connection to their urban quarter, these communities are of course not isolated units. The residents have

interviewees were within the dockland communities, I conducted a consensus survey, as developed by Romney, Weller and Batchelder 1986 and see also Schnegg and Lang 2008. One of the questions in the consensus questionnaire asked for the interviewee's opinion on the new and old architecture. The majority (21 of the 36 community members interviewed) agreed that they did not like the new glass and steel buildings, mostly because they did not reflect the history of the area.

many relationships outside the area as well. Nevertheless, the Dublin dockland communities are a typical example of communities in the old sense of the term: where group identities are based on specific territories, places and spaces, which have both practical and symbolic cultural meanings.

The New Residents

The second type of dwellers in the dockland area, however, shows completely different characteristics. These are the residents who have moved into the area over the last couple of years during the course of the regeneration, mostly into the new large apartment complexes. Some of these are surrounded and secured by gates that only allow access to residents – hence “gated communities”.¹¹⁾ In the Master Plan, the construction of between 8,000 and 11,000 residential units was planned, 3,690 of which had been finished by 2007 (DDDA (1997), p. 54; (2008), p. 81). Some of the large residential complexes are designed for up to 3,000 new apartments and 6,000 new residents, and in total, they will increase the population by over 20,000 people. In the late 1980s, the area was home to 16,000 people. The number has steadily increased since, to 22,000 in 2008, and a further increase to over 35,000

11) Residential developments surrounded and secured by gates, cameras and other means of security go back as far as the 1850s in the United States, when the elite barred themselves off from the poorer classes. The first middle-class “gated communities” began to emerge in the 1960s and this development was accelerated from the 1980s onwards (Low 2006). In Dublin, gated residential areas were introduced from the late 1980s onwards, when the first private apartment complexes were built and due the economic boom of the 1990s, called “the Celtic Tiger”, property prices increased and enlarged social and cultural gaps. However, as they are considered as incompatible with community formation, these designs were heavily debated for years, including the dockland communities. During the 2000s, the design of new residential complexes was changed in so far as some of the gates were abandoned. However, many residents are still critical towards the design of the new apartment complexes, as it makes contact between residents more difficult than in the old style of housing which has always been very open (Wonneberger 2008, 2011).

residents is predicted (DDDA (1997), pp. 4, 52-54; (2003), p. 40; (2008), pp. 60, 81).

The residents in these new complexes are very different from the old-established dock-related communities in terms of cultural and social features: Again, one exemplary person will serve as a typical example of these dwellers.

Born in South Africa and holding a degree, Terry has come to Dublin in January 2006 to work in the finance industry of the IFSC. She is in her late 20s and had moved to the dockland apartment two months before the interview took place in July 2006. Only two years later, she had already moved out of the area. She is not married and has no children. Her work colleagues and friend with whom she spends her leisure time have diverse national backgrounds and live all over the city. Therefore, they usually meet in the city centre of Dublin. She also keeps close contacts to her friends and family in South Africa. She describes life in the apartment complex and the local area as follows:

No one knows anyone in the complex. I can't tell you anyone who lives in this block, because I have only met one lady in the lift. You don't have a mixing culture or friendly neighbourhood atmosphere. It is literally like 'I come into work, I want a big flat, earn my money and then I want to go.' That is the sort of culture in here. [...] And I have seen only one family with kids in here, and I don't even know whether they were only visiting. It's such a child-free area. [...] Besides that there are only people with no one over 35 or 40 living here, [...] and mostly business men coming to make their money.

Terry is a typical example of the residents in the new apartment complexes. Instead of large families, most of them are singles or couples without children. They are young, mostly between 20 and 35 years of age, they are professionals — they study, or hold a degree, work in the IT — or finance sector; and they are very mobile, which means they move frequently between jobs and therefore

residence. Most of them only rent the apartment for one or two years, eventually moving to the suburbs when planning a family. Their circles of friends and acquaintances stretch beyond the docklands and are scattered all over the city and further, as many of them also have a migratory background. But the vast majority do not know any other neighbours in the apartment complex they live in, so life in these complexes is characterised by anonymity.

The term “gated communities” is a misnomer, as these new residents are not communities in the old sense of the term — therefore I have avoided the use of it. Each individual is a member of various communities, but not within the residential territory. The projections on hoardings promoting the new residential complexes as places for “new communities” quoted above do therefore not reflect the social reality — at least not yet. The situation is changing.

Many new residents are beginning to feel uncomfortable living in the anonymous environment of huge apartment complexes, and many of them are now beginning to look for connections with their fellow residents. However, rather than knocking at their neighbours’ door or talk to them in the entrance hall, they are using the virtual space of the internet as a meeting place.

In 2006, one of these new residents established a forum especially designed for these new anonymous apartment complexes dwellers to get to know each other. These platforms at <http://neighbours.ie> serve as meeting points and facilitate the exchange of information. People introduce themselves as new residents, they ask for tips about fitness centres, offer bikes for sale or ask for advice concerning rental contracts. The virtual space takes over the function of pubs, community centres or balconies - those spaces that are used by members of the old communities to exchange information and establish social contacts. Thus, the virtual space becomes part of the social space of the new residents and helps to create some sense of community.

This idea was so innovative that various local and national newspapers reported and thus promoted this website (e.g. Finneran 2006, 15; Brennan 2006, 20). It has become so successful that in July 2009 the site had over 20,000 members (Neighbours.ie — Fun Friendly Forums for Neighbours 15 July 2009).

These virtual networks are then, in some cases, also extended to the real world, when the internet platform is used to announce common events, such as a “get together night” in a local bar, for instance.

Due to their different social and historic background, the new residents also have a completely different approach to their urban environment, the quarter they live in, than the old community residents. They only spend little time in the area and also have no nostalgic view on the old architecture, as they are not familiar with the area’s history. Their attitude to the new style of architecture and imagery is rather positive. Following statements illustrate this:

I don’t know much at all about the history of this area. [...] I don’t really spend much time here, as most of my friends and the church I am involved in are all on the north side [of the river Liffey]. [...] I can imagine that local people would focus more on a smaller scale, whereas my radius is a lot bigger. [...] I am not used to that [doing everything in only a small area], because I get bored if I stay in the same place with the same people. I like the new architecture. I like the modern buildings. [...] I like some of the old houses, but I don’t like it when the whole area is made of red bricks. [...] I also like that the new buildings are brighter. I prefer the white ones, but I like the glass ones as well. It is nice to see colours especially when the sky is not blue all the time. Red brick and grey sky is even more depressing some times. The plans for this area look impressive.

These differences in terms of locality between the old communities and the new residents can also be visualised by a map (figure 4).

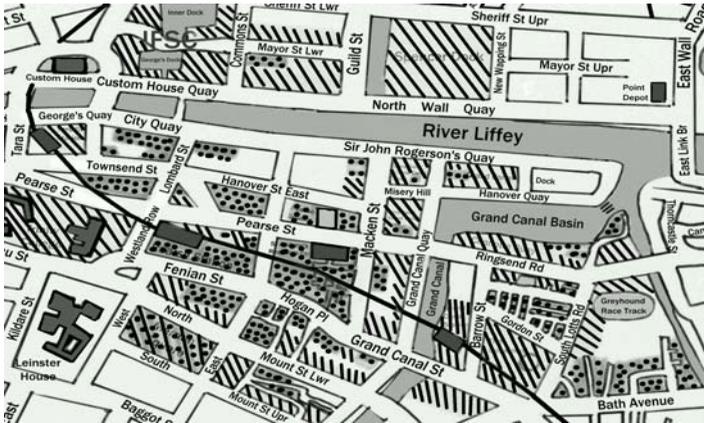


Figure 4: Map of the Pearse Street area in the south docklands showing important places for the established community (marked in dark grey with dots) and the new residents (marked in light grey with stripes). (Map designed by Astrid Wonneberger)

This is a map of the Pearse Street community in the south docklands. I marked all places that were frequently named in interviews and mental maps, or which I had observed as important places during my research. So these are the places that are either frequented regularly or mentioned and thus have a shared practical or symbolic meaning for members of the old established community (marked in bright grey) and for new residents who do not take part in communal activities (marked in dark grey).

What is striking in this map — combined with other data I collected during my research — is that despite spatial closeness, the fact that all residents live in the same area of about half a square kilometre, the places they use are very different. Both types of residents rarely meet or interact. Even such places as pubs, which are common meeting places, are used differently. Most local pubs, regular bars for community members, are not frequented by new residents at all, as they prefer more modern bars. Those that are used by both have different sections: either different rooms for different customers or both groups

just sit at different tables. Community services are only frequented by community members, while expensive gyms or organic cafés recruit their customers mostly from the new apartment blocks.

Dockland Communities	New Residents
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Large families · All age groups · Low education · Blue-collar jobs (traditionally manual forms of labour) · Locally bound · Social networks within locality · Close and emotional relationship with urban landscape and locality · Detailed historical local knowledge · Strong Communal identities based on close social networks and face-to-face interaction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Singles, couples, no kids · 20-35 years of age · High education · White-collar jobs (IT- and finance sector) · High mobility and fluctuation · Dublin-wide and transnational networks · No emotional attachment with urban landscape · No historical local knowledge · No or only slowly emerging communal networks, mostly through the cyberspace; no communal identities

Table 1: Differences between old established communities and new residents in the docklands area.

It is quite obvious that both groups of residents do not mix. There is hardly any interaction between them, a situation that is not compatible with the ideal concept of community as desired by the old established communities. Many community members are therefore worried by this development with “faceless, anonymous people floating around this area”, as one interviewee expressed her concern.

The reasons for the lack of contact between both groups can at least be partially explained by the different cultural traits. As well educated, cosmopolitan and young professionals with often migratory background, the new residents are very mobile and change jobs and therefore residence frequently. Their social networks also reach beyond their residential area which makes a time-intensive social involvement in the local area difficult if not impossible. While the community members almost spend their entire life in the area and at local institutions, the new residents often only sleep at home. As singles or couples

without children and with no senior citizens in the apartment complexes, the old-established community services are not needed by the new residents. Better educated and more affluent, they often prefer different types of food and chose an expensive organic restaurant over the local pub grub, while many community members, living on social welfare or lower wages, do not see themselves to be able to afford these new and more expensive venues. Moreover, as newcomers they have no local historical knowledge and therefore no emotional attachment to the built environment. They prefer modern buildings and bars over industrial heritage and local pubs. This latter aspect is also influenced by mutual stereotypes, which also characterise the relationship between these two groups. Based on the reputation of no-go areas of the 1980s and early 1990s and images of run-down, socially deprived communities with working class background — much of which is based on fact, which is typical for stereotypical images¹²⁾ — many new residents are also afraid to go to local pubs. They find them too dark and the customers too clannish and prefer a more modern, brighter and anonymous place to meet their friends. Many community residents, on the other hand, regard the new dwellers as “first class snobs”, too arrogant to interact with the local communities.

The discrepancy between the social reality and the ideal of an integrated local community has not only been noticed by the local communities and is not only discussed within family and friends, but also addressed in public. The most illustrative example was a play, which was written and performed by a local theatre group in 2004. In “The Runner-In” some local women talk about their

12) As it would lead too far in this context to analyse concepts of stereotypes in detail, I only wish to emphasise that stereotypes are not purely invented but highly selective, overemphasised and generalised images ascribed to other people or groups of people. Thus, though based on a kernel of truth, they do not depict reality in all its diverse facets, but create a new and distorted view which becomes the shared reality and thus cultural feature of a group. See for instance Allport (1954), Lilly (1970), Bochner (1982), Gerndt (1988) among many others.

concerns about the “snobs” and the situation of “them and us”, before they meet some woman from the new apartments and make friends. They conclude that all of them should overcome their stereotypes and not just live side by side, but also interact and profit from each other.

This vision also characterises parts of the local activists’ strategies for the future of the established communities. The new people with new experiences and particularly the new businesses are perceived as a chance for the communities, just like the entire dockland regeneration is perceived as a chance. Therefore, one community organised a “meet-and-greet-your-neighbour”-event in the local community hall, which was explicitly directed towards the new dwellers and businesses. However, the success was limited. While local businesses attended and new economic networks could be established, only very few new residents took part in the event. Therefore, many residents remain sceptical as to whether the new and old residents will ever form one integrated community. In their opinion “real” communities cannot be created over night by developing huge residential spaces. Communities have to grow slowly, they have to have an interest in the local area and other people living in it and spend time there, which is not possible in a world where mobility has become such an influential factor and virtual spaces more important meeting places than face-to-face interaction. Whether the sceptics or the more optimistic people will be right, remains to be seen.

Conclusion

This example illustrates several aspects which have also dominated the academic discussion on locality and community.

Firstly, it becomes obvious that the cultural meaning of urban place and

space can be very different in different cultural groups; and they can coexist side by side. While specific places, a specific territory, are significant markers for local identities for some communities, — on both symbolic and social levels — other groups are socially organised in a-spatial networks, whose ties exceed local boundaries. The Dublin docklands are a locality of different cultural spaces, which only partially overlap.

Secondly, however, these a-spatial communities also need specific places — places to meet, to establish contacts and exchange information. These places are either situated in the real world: in the form of pubs, for instance, but they might be far away from the residential places of the community members. These places can also take on virtual forms and thus be found in the cyberspace. Place and space, localities remain very important to establish social bonds and to serve as common markers for group identities. Spatial relations remain a central variable governing human behaviour and human cognition.

These cultural and social differences can only be fully understood by research on the micro-level. Many disciplines have turned their attention to waterfront development in recent times (e.g. Hoyle, Pinder, and Husain, eds. 1988; Schubert, ed. 2001; Graf and Huat, eds. 2009; Desfor et al., eds. 2011), but they have mostly focused on long-term developments, international economies, the port-city interface and planning strategies, often on a global comparative level. Local urban cultures, the effects of waterfront renewal on local actors, however, have only marginally been studied so far (cf. Schubert (2001), p. 34; Kokot (2008), pp. 7-8). Modern community studies based on long-term ethnographic research provides the useful tool to close this research gap and to provide us with new insights of urban community formation in times of global transformation.

Finally, the concept of community remains a very useful tool to investigate

both “traditional” and new forms of group formation. Ideas of community are at the core of many notions of group identity, and symbolic or territorial borders mark the boundaries of these communities, even if communities have never been so neatly bounded and isolated as many ethnographers liked to believe. Notions of locality and community have turned out to be very complicated, but this is a good reason to continue to study their relationship.

For all these reasons, I would like to argue in favour of continuing research of the complex relationship between locality, culture and community. To deny the meaning of space, place and territory for the construction of identities in the modern world does not do justice to many realities. The relationship has certainly changed though. New forms of communication and new spaces have added or substituted old means in some cases, but again not in all. To find and investigate these new relationships between locality, culture and community is the new challenge of social and cultural sciences.

Despite all criticism and changes, the concept of community has served us well for a long time, and will continue to do so. Ethnographers should and will continue their focus on localities and communities, even though the emphasis has changed from static, territory-based notions of the term towards social networks in all types of institutions. Community remains a very useful concept in social sciences, with both territorial implications and for groups that are bound together by other means of cooperation, even though, I would like to add, for those a-spatial communities specific meeting places are also important, even if these are virtual spaces.

I would like to finish off with a thought formulated by Hastings Donnan and Thomas Wilson in 2006 (pp. 115-116). They referred to the Irish context, but I think their statement can and should be generalised:

Anthropologists worldwide... have been distracted from examining the politics of place because of the insistence that we can no longer study communities. These notions are misplaced; the politics of identity, a principal theme in anthropology today, are also the politics of community, and both are about the politics of place... no ethnographer does community studies in Ireland anymore. But most anthropologists in Ireland study people in particular places and spaces, in socially meaningful localities in which our hosts and respondents often have clear notions of community, or perhaps even the multiple communities in which they reside, work and play. 'Community' as an organising principle continues to be a salient factor of social, economic and political life in Ireland today, as it is in other places in South Asia, Europe and North America where we have done research. As such, 'community' must continue to be considered in any ethnographic analysis of culture and society, wherever anthropologists do research.

As such, community remains not only a popular term outside academia, but also a useful analytical tool for ethnographic analysis, and there is no end of community in sight.

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