Diverse neighbourhoods and feeling at home: what makes sustainable and just communities?

Project Outline
This project focuses on people’s experience of neighbourhoods in post-Covid 19 times. The ‘lockdowns’ of the last three years represented enforced immobility and generated new experiences of local neighbourhoods. Little is understood about the evolving meaning of neighbourhood and community in these times. In the context of current UK government agendas – namely Levelling Up and Inclusive Britain - that emphasise the need to address inequalities between places and build cohesive, resilient and sustainable communities, it is important to understand how local places are perceived and experienced, and what they mean for people’s sense of belonging, wellbeing and feelings of home.

It has long been asserted that places where we feel at home are where there are ‘people like us’. Indeed, people tend to cluster residentially along lines of class, race, age and other aspects of identity. Recent evidence suggests that neighbourhoods are becoming more diverse (mixed) in some regards (e.g. ethnicity) but less mixed in others (e.g. class, age). The project will examine what homogeneity (or sameness) and heterogeneity (or diversity) mean for sense of place.

This project will draw on ideas of place, home, segregation and social justice to investigate what makes socially just and sustainable communities by addressing the following questions:
1. What constitutes ‘feeling at home’ in a locality?
2. Are local neighbourhoods becoming more homogenous (along intersections of class, ethnicity, age)?
3. In what ways does ‘feeling at home’ matter for individuals and communities?

Methodology
This project will adopt a mixed-methods design, combining census and survey analysis with place-based qualitative case studies. It makes timely use of 2021/2022 Census data for England/Wales and Scotland and new data from the Evidence for Equality National Survey (EVENS).

Research Questions 1 and 3 will draw on qualitative work in local communities, the location of which will be determined as part of the research design. Over the course of a year you will use a variety of approaches (e.g. interviews, focus groups and/or participant observation) to explore how people experience neighbourhood, mixing, and feeling ‘in place’ or ‘at home’ in the selected localities. Additionally, research question 3 will be addressed using survey data (EVENS and Understanding Society). Research question 2 will additionally make use of detailed geographical detail in census data to map neighbourhood mixing along multiple lines of identity (including class, ethnicity and age).

Project Timeline
Year 1: Reviewing the literature to refine the research questions and identify the specific contribution of the doctoral research. Designing the methodology, selecting the case study/studies for qualitative data collection and obtaining data access and ethical approval. Development training. Participation in Research Group activities and School postgraduate events.
Year 2: Quantitative analysis and qualitative data collection and analysis. Initial writing up. Development training. Participation in research conferences.

Training and Skills
Training and skills development will follow the Vitae Researcher Development Framework and will include:

- Data science for social questions (census and survey analysis)
- Qualitative data collection, analysis and management
- Research design
• Project management
• Event organisation
• Academic writing and editing
• Creative science communication

**Supervisory Team**

Professor Nissa Finney. Nissa has published and taught widely on ethnic inequalities, residential mobility and housing, neighbourhood change and segregation. Nissa has led the EVENS Survey, data from which will be used in this project. She has supervised a number of PhD students on these topics in the UK and elsewhere using census, survey and interview approaches.

Dr Ale Boussalem. Ale is a social and cultural geographer working on the intersections of race, gender and sexualities and their spatialisation. He is a qualitative researcher with experience using interviews and participant observation as methods of data collection.

You will be a member of the Population & Health and GOSSIP Research Groups with the School of Geography and Sustainable Development, and also a postgraduate affiliate of the Centre for Population Change (CPC), the Centre on the Dynamics of Ethnicity (CoDE) and the GEDI project, benefitting from the expertise and networks of these projects.

**References and Further Reading**


Boussalem, A. (2021). When the spotlight is always on the neighborhood: LGBTQ people from a Muslim background deconstructing imagined borders in Brussels, Belgium. Sexualities, 0(0). [https://doi.org/10.1177/1363460720986932](https://doi.org/10.1177/1363460720986932)


