



Centre for Local
Economic Strategies

local work

case study

Wherever I go, there I am. But where am I?

Author: Patrick Hanfling, Community Engagement Development Officer, Manchester City Council. (0161) 234 4093

Editor: Victoria Bradford, Policy and Information Researcher, CLES (0161) 233 1927

The term Sense of Place was introduced to me in 1999 in my first year of work at Auckland City Council, New Zealand.

The Community Planning Group had started work on a Sense of Place policy¹ which:

- Explored the meaning of Sense of Place;
- Investigated Auckland's Sense of Place;
- Investigated how to understand and sustain Sense of Place;
- Outlined principles for enhancing Sense of Place; and
- Identified a process for incorporating Sense of Place principles and philosophy into public places.

¹<http://www.aucklandcity.govt.nz/auckland/economy/urban/docs/sense.pdf>

The Auckland work outlined Sense of Place as being people based. A place is made up of people and their many different perceptions and experiences of the location. It is about the connection between people and place and what happens there. Everyone experiences and interprets a place in different ways as individuals and groups of individuals. A person's cultural background, interests, lifestyles and personal experience all influence sense of place, as does the city's natural and built environment. It is the combination of the physical environment and personal experiences that forms Sense of Place.

Sense of Place was defined partly as identity. Identity helps to distinguish places and cities. It helps people to establish their own understanding of place and cements ownership of that place.

Sense of Place was identified as a changing experience and a combination of past, present and future. Sense of Place is seen as people move about a city and a place. It could be an entire area, a building, a street, a park, a pub or a junction. Our experiences of a place can change. In turn, our sense of place changes. Personal attachment, belonging or identity with a place is established over time, making it vital to understand the past.

Sense of Place for the Auckland work, was made up of four elements:

1. Personal (our background, emotions, memories, customs, ideology)
2. Natural (our landscape, views and parks)
3. Built (buildings, streets, pathways, shops and pubs)
4. Social/Cultural (activities and events, culture and religion, relationships)

Finally, one of the most important aspects to note about the Auckland work is that Sense of Place was seen as unique to individuals, while also being something that can be supported.

This research was used in the development of planning, urban design and management of places. The principles were built into the strategic development of the city and to initiatives supporting sustainability.

Manchester is a bag of Revels

*"It's an assortment of different sweets and chocolates, all different shapes and sizes. You're not sure what you are getting until you have eaten them and it takes time to become familiar with what each one might be"*²

² Feedback from a participant in a Sense of Place workshop, 31 January 2006 discussing "If Manchester was a sound, plant, vehicle, or chocolate bar, what would it be and why?"

My current role is Community Engagement Development Officer for Manchester City Council and the Manchester Partnership (LSP). This involves advocating for the development of inclusive community engagement across the city. In particular, this involves the development of the Manchester Community Engagement Strategy and actions to achieve the aims and objectives that it sets out.³

One of the aims of the strategy is the development of community cohesion through community engagement. A Community Cohesion Working group has been set up to progress actions for this area of the strategy.

Through the experience of Sense of Place work in Auckland, I suggested that this approach could be a tool to develop community engagement in the city and to increase our understanding and approaches to community cohesion.

A workshop was run in October 2005 with City Council Officers and organisations that we work with (such as the Community Network for Manchester exploring the concept and whether or not participants thought it was worth developing. The overwhelming answer was yes.

In January 2006, we started the Sense of Place project.

There are two parts to the Sense of Place and Community Engagement project.

Part 1:

Development of a Sense of Place framework for Manchester that offers:

- Definitions of what Sense of Place is;

³ To download a copy and see other work under the strategy, go to www.manchester.gov.uk/bestvlaue/engage

- Showcases Sense of Place within Manchester; and
- Shows how Sense of Place can be used as a tool for community engagement across the city.

The framework will act as an update for the Community Engagement Toolkit, showcasing the different community engagement techniques used within the project and the learning from this.

The framework will be a way of connecting community cohesion, identity and place with community engagement. It will be a resource to use in regeneration programmes, all Council departments, the Voluntary and Community Sector and within ongoing initiatives such as regeneration and community development.

Part 2:

To facilitate joined up community engagement working through the Framework's development approach. Sense of Place will be a theme to connect Council departments, partners and the Community and Voluntary Sector's community engagement work. The aim is to encourage partnership working, frame community engagement in a context of joint understanding and build joint projects in an ongoing way after the Framework is completed. The Framework will be a catalyst for ongoing work.

Community Engagement in understanding Sense of Place

The framework will be developed through a number of ways including:

- Sense of Place workshops
- Community Arts workshops
- Devolution of budget to Community Radio across Manchester to run programmes

exploring Sense of Place within Manchester

- Community Comics
- Music programmes with young people
- Arts events
- Questionnaires
- Design workshops with young people
- Using information gathered through our partners, such as the '0161' and 'Black Is' projects run by Urbis.

We are using different methods to show how our understanding of Sense of Place is developed through community engagement with different groups of people. In this sense, we will showcase it as an approach to engage with communities and a philosophy to bring to the planning and development of engagement and service delivery.

Community Engagement is vital in understanding a Sense of Place. It is the tool through which people have a voice and can communicate how they feel about a place, what they would like to see happen and how they can be involved.

Community engagement is a way of understanding what makes places unique and meaningful to people, to ensure ongoing ownership of a place and incorporating that into service delivery, urban design, regeneration, planning and projects that support communities and individuals.

To this extent, understanding and implementing Sense of Place principles through community engagement also helps to develop social cohesion and social capital.

Themes from the Manchester work

So far, the findings have given rise to the following themes, which are surprisingly reflective of the New Zealand work.

Roots/Routes

Sense of Place has been related to the roots of a tree (roots) and also in the sense of journey (routes). Participants have said that Sense of Place can develop over time, but also that it can happen quickly (in a few months) and that this then evolves.

Participants said that service providers have a role in understanding and supporting this. A lot of feedback has placed emphasis on the need for officers and service providers to understand where communities come from, how they got there, the social norms and traditions that they bring, but also the culture, stories, songs and experiences that can be built on at a local level.

This is strongly related to culture both from newly arrived communities, but also the changing of neighbourhoods over time. A number of responses have highlighted the need to work with communities to understand who is arriving in communities, where they come from and why, before they arrive.

Belonging

People have also strongly associated Sense of Place with belonging and identity, which can be felt and fostered, but not necessarily created. This is related to feedback about long-term engagement and relationship building with the Council, and partners, as a priority and to feedback of results, changes and developments.

Respect

It is important to foster respect for others. People related their experiences of arriving in the

community and having stones thrown at them because they looked different. We all have a responsibility for our place, how we behave and to address certain behaviour.

Choice

Sense of Place was related to both areas that people choose to live in, but also where people have arrived not so much out of choice, but necessity, and have grown to feel at home because of community spirit and belonging.

Change

The Council and others involved need to be aware that changing the city impacts, both positively and negatively. Understanding the effects of change on people (through for example regeneration) and actually factoring this into work, was identified as important. Older people have suggested that city change can affect them a lot and there would be scope to explore this further.

Journey

Sense of Place is seen so far to develop over time and change with different circumstances. To this end, it can sometimes be hard to foster, but the feedback is that officers, professionals and service providers need to really learn about the place and space, its history, the culture there now, and where they have come from. It was felt that while this does change over time because communities aren't static - ongoing dialogue through community engagement can help professionals to understand this dynamic and to plan/work within it, more.

Efficient Services and support

For a number of people, sense of Place is fostered through good, efficient services (street cleaning, parks and open space development for example). People's Sense of Place can be enhanced by these core services of the Council and any improvement in these services was strongly reinforced.

Family, friends and networks

Family was seen as an important factor in Sense of Place, for many people, however this can also be extended to local schools, universities and maintaining links to these.

Time

Sense of Place is not necessarily related to the time spent in an area. People who have spent a short time in an area can have just as strong links (or even stronger) to areas and place, and can have a real commitment to get involved with their local community.

Community based development

Community events and initiatives that support many people getting involved are seen as a way of fostering Sense of Place.

Transport

Many respondents have related Sense of Place to transport (both positive and negative experiences). Buses in particular. Public transport (for example the trams, buses and trains) may be a point for community engagement and Sense of Place can be fostered. For example, a group of students in Manchester have explored the Shude Hill transport interchange and how it could be developed to have more meaning for people, and to reflect their journey more.

Passionate Policy and the Journey of Change

For social policy to be successful, I believe it must be developed with real heart behind it. As policy makers we must believe in what we are doing and be passionate about it. We must also be aware of how people, communities, cities and societies change. What may work in one area with certain people may not work down the road with a different set of people. There are no absolutes and no one answer to every situation.

As policy makers and people who encourage change, we have to be aware of change and how it affects people. We need to remember that asking a question one way will get certain responses, but asking it a different way can give a whole different set of responses.

When it comes down to it, I'm a public servant. I'm paid to advocate for engagement, and encourage and support professionals working with communities to change. And the Sense of Place work is a process for building enthusiasm for change and development. With this approach we can challenge assumptions made of communities and of community engagement. Through the approaches we have used, we have got honest and heart felt responses. From this, I have a responsibility to take the information and use it in the best way possible to encourage change across the city, to make services better and to make the city better for people.

For the Sense of Place work to get off the ground, it needed wide spread buy-in and participation. In the same way, for the Manchester Community Engagement Strategy to be successful and to enable change, it must have wide spread buy in. The Sense of Place project reinforces the messages of the strategy but also creates a way to achieve its aims and objectives in different ways.

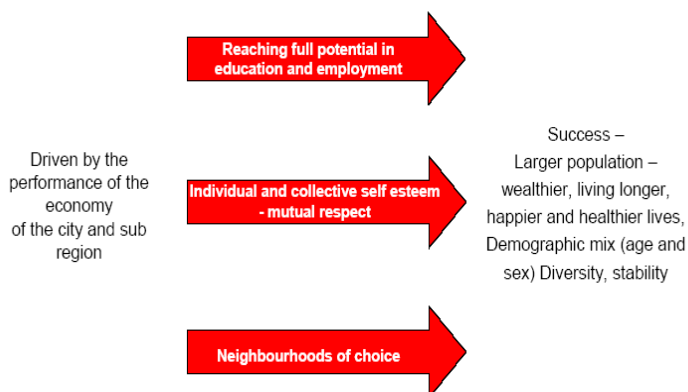
Practical use: Strategic and area focused working

Sense of Place factors, principles and philosophy can and have been used in service delivery, regeneration, understanding communities and community cohesion. Manchester's Community Strategy 2006 – 2015 sets out the vision for a world-class city and how success will be achieved. As a result, over the next decade, the city, region and sub region will continue to grow economically and support a larger,

wealthier, happier and healthier population. All actions by service providers, working together, is work that will enable children and adults to reach their full potential in education and employment. Neighbourhoods will be created where people choose to live and remain. Individuals will have pride in themselves, their neighbourhoods and their city and demonstrate their respect accordingly. An illustration to demonstrate this is known as the three spines diagram (see below).

Sense of place is an integral part of the third spine – Neighbourhoods of Choice and it has a strong representation in the other two spines, particularly in the development of respect in communities.

Manchester – A World Class City



Manchester has five regeneration projects, which focus on regeneration at a neighbourhood level. The Council also has a system of Ward Co-ordination, to ensure services delivered at a neighbourhood level reflect local need.

Sense of Place consultation provides an ideal framework for discussions at a local level and the case studies are a good platform to build from, especially in the ongoing development of inclusive community engagement.

In October 2006, The Academy for Sustainable Communities included a best practice case study on

Manchester's Sense of Place project. They identified the project, its principles and approach as a way of planning and engaging with intercultural communities. This noted Manchester's Sense of Place approach in:

- Creative thinking, lateral connections, effective networking
- Bringing together unusual combinations of people, skills and plans, to leverage each component to end up with much more than the sum of the parts
- Brokering, facilitating, and managing deals between very different stakeholders in all aspects of sustainable communities

Sense of Place can be a tool for engagement and can also be combined with other engagement techniques such as community media, or workshops to engage with a range of communities such as young people. Sense of Place can be used as a way of approaching communities and discussing related services – such as regeneration, parks, leisure services and how these connect back to place.

The information gathered using Sense of Place has been used specifically by services. For example, community radio station, All FM, has used Sense of Place to contribute to community cohesion discussions at a strategic level. Whilst work with young people exploring Sense of Place, has been used in the development of district youth forums; for exhibitions within the Urbis gallery; to develop ongoing work in Moss Side and also potential partnership work with Ward Co-ordination. The community arts work in Refugee Week is being used by MARIM (Multi-Agency for Refugee Integration in Manchester) in their advocacy work for refugees and asylum seekers. Meaning that Sense of Place can relate to community cohesion by bringing different

communities and individuals were bought together.

Where to next on this journey?

The Manchester Sense of Place framework will be printed in April 2007. It will be accompanied by an action plan to support its implementation and ongoing development.

The framework is not seen as being the answer to everyone's sense of place nor will it be used to tell people what their Sense of Place is or should be. The framework will change and it will be updated. The themes will be a guide to developing new ways of working and used to advocate for new approaches to community engagement and to develop existing practices.

The case studies of how we have engaged with communities and the tools used will be part of the ongoing community engagement skills development under the Manchester Community Engagement Strategy.

The Sense of Place Framework 2007 will be available for Consultation throughout March, April and May. For more information about this project and work under the Manchester Community Engagement Strategy or to view a copy please feel free to contact **Patrick Hanfling (details on first page)**, Hopefully we could help develop Sense of Place work in Manchester and broader across the country.

Local Work is one of a series of regular policy reports produced by the Centre for Local Economic Strategies (CLES). CLES is a not-for-profit think doing organisation, consultancy and network of subscribing organisations specialising in regeneration, economic development and local governance. CLES also publishes Bulletin, Rapid Research and bespoke Briefings on a range of issues.

Centre for Local Economic Strategies & CLES Consulting

Express Networks • 1 George Leigh Street • Manchester M4 5DL • tel 0161 236 7036 • fax 0161 236 1891
• info@cles.org.uk • www.cles.org.uk