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Conviviality by design: the socio-spatial qualities of spaces of intercultural urban encounters

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Abstract

This paper presents findings from a mixed-method research project which explored use of outdoor spaces and social connections in Bradford, a post-industrial city in the north of England with a highly ethnically diverse population. Data was collected through micro-scale behavioural mapping of public spaces (analysed using GIS), and both on-site and in-depth interviews. The integration of these methods allows a focus on intersectional identities and social values for everyday conviviality situated in different typologies of public open spaces (parks, squares, streets) in city centre and suburban neighbourhoods. The analysis offers nuanced insights into the socio-spatial aspects of conviviality: patterns of activity by diverse users, situations in which encounters are prompted, and the implications of negotiating differences in relation to perceptions of self, others and the environment. We discuss the relevance of the urban public realm for shared understandings of diversity, qualities of visibility, lingering and playfulness, and the importance of threshold spaces. We discuss racialised and excluding experiences and how these relate to mobility and territorial patterns of use, specifically with relation to gender. The paper highlights the connections between findings on intercultural encounters with urban design practice, with implications for wellbeing and integration in ethnically diverse urban areas.

Keywords Public open space, Migrants, Ethnicity, Gender, Mapping

Introduction

Many of the pleasures and challenges of living in cities is the nearness of difference. It is in the public realm - pavements, squares and parks - that the everyday qualities of life in ethnically diverse contexts are made visible and audible. Migration is experienced in the present, and sometimes marked as gradual changes from a more (but never totally) homogeneous past. Politically, the impact of migration on cities and urban society is recognised as a cultural, democratic and economic good by

most, while also recognising some of the tensions that can arise at both local and national scales. This paper contributes to a special edition questioning how intercultural experiences, perceptions and values shape the field of urban design, what information is needed and what action should to be taken. This issue is specifically concerned with social inclusion, and within this broad area we employ a theoretical lens of intercultural conviviality, which allows a focus on mundane, and mostly un-pre-meditated ways in which people encounter and respond to each other in urban environments characterised by population diversity (Wise and Noble, 2016).

In this paper we present findings from a mixed-method study in order to better understand how individual and collective values inform use of urban public space. Our methods integrate data from detailed mapping of public open space (POS) use, analysed alongside in-depth resident interviews. We contribute additional insights to previous ethnographic studies on migration and place in sociological and geographic fields, while also offering a more novel perspective of using these to inform priorities and recommendations for urban design theorists and practitioners. The findings have relevance for ambitions supporting wellbeing (linked to the ease of spending time outside), integration of new migrants (linked to developing a sense of belonging in local place) and community integration (a shared connection and respect across diverse sectors of a located community).

Across different academic fields there is growing attention to the problems and potentials of living with migration diversity and population change in urban public open spaces in terms of recreation patterns, perceptions of otherness and belonging, and responses to different ideas of normality (e.g. Wise and Velayutham, 2009, 2014; Darling and Wilson, 2016; Mehta, 2018). Clearly there is relevance here to urban design. Public space theorists have long advocated the importance of social interactions in public spaces, and offer valuable situated methods for analysing public spaces (Jacobs, 1961; Gehl, 1971; Whyte, 1980; Carmona *et al.,* 2010). However, interpretations of the social role of public spaces sometimes overlook the complexities of experiences of encountering diversity and socio-spatial inequalities, particularly in ethnically diverse disadvantaged communities (Zavestoski and Agyeman, 2015). There can be a lack of in-depth understanding of the intricacies of patterns of everyday use among people from diverse backgrounds, which can lead to simplistic and sometimes

stereotyped assumptions about the inclusive nature of public spaces. In practice this can unwittingly result in exclusionary processes, and sometimes increases social tensions (DCLG, 2009; Rishbeth *et al.*, 2018).

Research in the fields of sociology, anthropology and urban geography has contributed to understanding and theorising of mundane intercultural interactions in public spaces (Amin, 2002; Clayton, 2009; Wessendorf, 2013; Wise and Velayutham, 2014; Neal *et al.,* 2015). However, these research projects have rarely explored the designed qualities of these places, a focus on inquiry which is usually beyond the scope, interest and expertise of these disciplines (Rishbeth *et al.*, 2018). These omissions require the perspective of urban design, applying methods of enquiry which can critically investigate the spatial and material qualities of outdoor encounters, and with the potential to suggest recommendations for practice. This paper specifically focuses on the implications for urban design[1], but includes findings of relevance to planning and policy makers.

This paper presents findings from a mixed-method research project focusing on public open spaces in city centre and suburban neighbourhoods in Bradford, UK. Bradford is a post-industrial city in the north of England, with a metropolitan district of population size 500,000 (BMDC, 2017). It is a city with a long history of migration, including nineteenth and early twentieth century Irish and German-Jewish, post-war Polish and, in the 1960s and 1970s, sustained migration primarily from Pakistan recruited to meet labour shortages. More recent migration trends have been from central and eastern Europe, South Asian, African and Middle Eastern countries who have migrated to Bradford as international students, economic migrants, refugees and asylum seekers. It is currently one of the most ethnically diverse cities in the UK with 17% of the population born outside of the UK (2011 census) and 85 languages spoken. However - and typical of many towns and cities in northern England - the majority of the population is white British (64%) or of Pakistani origin (20%).

[1] Given the focus of this journal, and for the clarity of the writing, we use 'urban design' to refer to practice relating to urban public space, and recognise that this also includes work by landscape architects, architects and public space managers.

Less typically, the political relevance of Bradford relates to two days of rioting in the Manningham neighbourhood in 2001, discussed primarily as a conflict between these two groups (Ouseley, 2001). This unrest was seen as indicative of the problems of ethnic segregation, and directly informed the analysis of different communities leading "parallel lives" (alongside but fundamentally segregated) in an influential report known as the Cantle Report (Home Office, 2001). This oft-repeated stereotypical analysis of Bradford's ethnic population has been exacerbated by a stigmatisation of Muslims in general after UK events related to homegrown terrorism and ultimately informed the government's anti-extremism Prevent strategy (Home Office 2011). Bradford is also a city with significant economic challenges informed by the collapse of traditional industries, dis-investment and the UK-wide impact of austerity with many neighbourhoods scoring highly in terms of households experiencing multiple deprivation (Kidd and Reeves 2016).

This paper gives an insight into Bradford people and places through investigating uses and experiences in public open spaces characterised by ethnocultural diversity, and explores the social, spatial and temporal dimensions of everyday intercultural encounters. Our methodological approach interrogates findings from GIS behavioural mapping of different urban open space typologies (spatially specific at detailed scales) with both informal on-site and pre-arranged in-depth interviews. The latter explored participants' experiences relating to outdoor activities and social connections in outdoor urban spaces using a narrative approach. By analysing both sets of data relating to sites we gained nuanced insights into spatial proximity of difference, daily and weekly rhythms of presence and activities, and how the physical form of spaces shapes positive and negative interactions. Going beyond a purely sociological analysis, we finish by proposing priorities for POS design and management.

Ethnocultural diversity and the dynamics of mundane experiences of place

The significance of studying intercultural encounters does in part reflect the premise that contact between people of different ethnocultural backgrounds can promote tolerance, integration and reduce conflict (Allport, 1954; Hewstone *et al.*, 2007). This underpinning has had significant implications on discourses and policy approaches of community cohesion and integration particularly in the UK

planning system (CIC, 2007). However, debate continues regarding the significance of urban intercultural encounters in mediating sustained intercultural dialogue and meaningful contact.

The notion of 'conviviality', as used to discuss social qualities with relation to urban public space, has gained traction over recent years, and it is useful to provide an overview of various interpretations and nuances of this term, as well as acknowledging criticisms. Valentine (2008) notably argued that banal and fleeting interactions in public spaces often do not translate into wider changes in inter-group relations of different races and ethnicities, and that processes of marginalisation and entrenched inequalities shaped by histories of power relations are not fundamentally changed by mundane contact (see also Matejskova and Leitner, 2011; Selim, 2015). Amin (2002) proposes that there should be *realistic* expectations of urban public open spaces as places that create possibilities for intercultural learning. "Living together without strong expectations of mutual empathy" is possible (Amin, 2012, p. 75), where understanding of difference happens through "habits of negotiating shared space" (ibid, p. 70–71). Proximity and a shared normality are relevant, suggesting meaningful encounters are more likely to happen in "micro-publics" where "prosaic negotiations with difference through intimate proximity take place and are often compulsory and necessary" such as educational, leisure and work places (Amin, 2008; Back and Sinha, 2016, p. 524).

These discussions also raise the challenge of defining 'meaningful'. Wilson (2016) gives a more ambitious expectation which explores the meaningful in the mundane: finding 'meaning' in encountering as being "about joy, wonder and animation — about encounters that can disrupt, shake or surprise" (Wilson, 2016, p. 10). This leads to an understanding of "meaningful contact" as something that encompasses the effects of encounter across (and because of) multiple places and repeated times (Wilson and Darling, 2016). This argument has informed our ontological position for studying intercultural encounters in public open spaces: encompassing different ways in which urban encounters are meaningfully experienced and talked about, and how this reflects or shapes conviviality. We draw on understandings of conviviality as "at ease with difference" (Wise and Velayutham, 2014, p. 407), recognising the contexts of inequality but allowing for an everyday making of "practice, effort, negotiation and achievement" (Wise and Noble, 2016, p. 425). As such,

we align our research enquiry to that expressed succinctly by Nayak "the value of 'light brush' encounters in the making and remaking of a progressive sense of place, where difference constitutes the new norm" (2017, p. 291).

The qualities of conviviality and difference with relation to urban places is reflected in a range of academic lenses, all with slight difference of emphasis: from the "throwntogetherness of place" (Massey, 2005), developed reflections of "everyday multiculturalism" (Wise and Velayutham, 2009) and an ethos of "commonplace diversity" (Wessendorf, 2013). The mundane enactments of these across a range of public and semi-public spaces such as parks (Cattell *et al.*, 2008, Clayton, 2009; Neal *et al.,* 2015), markets (Watson, 2009; Koutrolikou, 2012), streets (Cattell *et al.,* 2008, Powell and Rishbeth, 2012; Koch and Latham, 2013; Hall, 2015) and community gardens (Rogaly and Qureshi, 2013) has led to a rich body of research offering sociological descriptions of how these places are used and valued. Collectively they highlight the value of diversity, and the way in which semi-prescribed activities can shape an "easy sociability" (Watson, 2009). Though density and proximity can often be positive (for example in markets) the wider spaces of urban greenspace can also provide a non-demanding 'intercultural togetherness' that is suggested to support a sense of local belonging (Peters, 2010; Peters and de Haan, 2011; Rishbeth and Powell, 2013; Neal *et al.,* 2015).

In exploring intercultural dynamics it is important to also recognise tension and conflict, "locally generated patterns of commonality, circumvention, and estrangement" (Vertovec, 2015, p. 246). Across a range of scales, from neighbourhoods to benches in a park, different public spaces can become associated with an absence of encounter or with negative associations. Vertovec (2015) suggests the term "room without walls" referring to the "carved-out" spaces within larger public open spaces as reflecting spatial practices based on identities and underlying "dynamics of power and influence" (p. 214). Groups that appear dominant within these are usually perceived as homogenous by age, language, ethnicity and/or gender and sometimes by migration status (Noussia and Lyons, 2009). In diverse neighbourhoods, the "visual, physical, and legal accessibility of public spaces [can contribute] to salience of racial-ethnic categories and stereotypes and provoked intergroup antagonism and racially charged territorial behaviour" (Britton, 2008, p. 443) and can influence the way

individuals and groups navigate through the city (Clayton, 2009, 2012; Koutrolikou, 2011; Nayak, 2017). In this paper we seek to explore some of the implications of these socio-spatial practices in relation to neighbourhood and city centre spaces; and to understand how habits and tactics of using public spaces shape and are shaped by perceptions of self, others and the environment.

While this body of research offers useful accounts of social patterns of use and interaction in public open spaces, it is often limited in the spatial specificity that has potential to inform debates within urban design (Rishbeth *et al*., 2018). Perhaps surprisingly, this is also a weakness in urbanism approaches for ethnically diverse contents, which tend to focus on social policy rather than understanding and improving day to day experiences of spending time outdoors. The Intercultural Cities initiative by the Council of Europe (2016) is exemplary in demonstrating the social potential and public good that is shaped by migration, but has limited engagement with the practice of urban design. In the UK, and under various guises and terminologies, a range of 'community cohesion' strategies (Cantle, 2016, provides a fascinating recent history) are developed primarily at the institutional level and lack an ambition with regard to local environmental quality. We suggest, therefore, that development of research and practice on public open space for diverse societies needs to be led by urban designers and researchers within the field of urban design, not as a niche interest but as a core ambition. As Madanipour (2007) argues "we cannot think of an urban design for a culturally homogeneous majority that needs to be adjusted to incorporate the needs of cultural minorities. We have to talk about a sensitive urban design that tries to understand who it is working for and what needs it is addressing" (p. 145). It is imperative to ask relevant questions of form, use, representation and inclusion, and investigate these with the skills of the discipline: spatial analysis, social investigation and a clear understanding of temporality and the dynamics of place change. This analysis of public space use and values in Bradford contributes to the debate.

Methodology and methods

The priority of our methodological approach was to ensure equal weight and appropriate integration of spatial, social and temporal qualities of place, and to also understand these from the point of view of the city's residents. Our primary focus was on how conviviality and social difference might be

experienced within an urban setting: the street-scale, the playground-scale or the park-scale. Combining both mapping and interview data supported the rigour of our enquiry and specifically our ability to analyse the relationship of built form to social experiences. Spatially, this required a mapping process that recorded with appropriate precision how people inhabit these places and the relationship of this to build form: the choice of one bench over another, proximity to water features or roads, and distribution of different user groups. Socially, it required understanding resident experiences, understanding both the joys and the tensions of spending time outdoors in the city. In terms of temporal qualities, we needed to understand different paces of change: daily and weekly rhythms of use, and longer stories of migration, settlement and the growth (or disruption) of community feeling.

The research focus implied the need for a case study approach, but one with sufficient complexity to address different typologies of urban space (greenspace and streetscape), and different residential contexts (city centre and suburban, with different histories of demographic flux). Though we were interested in specific recreational locations (a square, a park) we argue that open space research is prone to treat these in isolation. We therefore selected for analysis three spatial clusters (Fig. 1) which offered contrasts in terms of demographic profiles and urban typologies.

- Cluster one: the city centre, including City Park, a large plaza with an extensive water feature (the mirror pool), a small square adjacent to the market, commercial streets.
- Clusters two and three: Manningham and Horton residential areas are both located on the fringes of the inner city, both including larger destination parks nearby to smaller playground greenspaces, residential and local shopping streets.

Four methods were used within the overall research project: behavioural mapping of specific sites, in-depth interviews, policy analysis and a responsive participatory exercise. In this paper we focus on the first two of these. Lived experiences and situated knowledge were central to our research questions, and so we prioritised a qualitative frame at data collection, analysis and interpretation, ensuring that the narrative data was not merely used to “sprinkle vignettes” in conclusions primarily reached by quantitative means (Hesse-Biber, 2010).

Fig 1.

Stage 1. On-site: behavioural mapping, observations, short interviews.

Behavioural mapping is an established method to gain understanding of detailed use of a range of settings: parks (Low *et al.,* 2009), social interactions in public spaces (Metha, 2009; Goličnik and Ward Thompson, 2010; Elsheshtwy, 2013), urban public realm (Gehl, 1987; Whyte, 1980) and playgrounds (Cosco *et al.,* 2010). Though often presented as a quantitative method (Zeisel, 1984), developments in GIS applications (Geographic Information Systems) offer the potential to combine high levels of precision in location plotting with many layers of personal data and iterative open observations. Piloting and developing a 'qualitative GIS' approach (Cope and Elwood, 2009) allowed us to incorporate two key dynamics important within migration and place studies: 1) intersectionality of identity and 2) temporality.

Mapping was carried out in seven locations (major and secondary public spaces, city centre streets), using an on-site paper base map of scale 1:100 - 1:500. Drawing on Zeisel's (1984) classification matrix, each person/data point was then digitally coded with regard to the actor (age, gender, ethnicity), activity, social connection (group, solo), social interactions (meetings, incidental conversations) and locational interactions (bench, play equipment, water body).

The mapping process of observation and notation is by necessity contested, working through the tension between attention to nuance and to the requirements of categorisation. Age characteristics were assigned to four codes (child to older adult). The assigning of ethnicity was essential to the significance of the research, but also undoubtedly the most problematic and with multiple limitations. As reflected by Neal *et al.* (2015) when undertaking a study of multiculture in UK parks "The allocations of ethnic categorisation felt like an engagement, not so much with a new world of super-diversity and complex multiculture, but with an older parochial world of reducing people to racialised sets of other identification" (p. 467). It is important to acknowledge what is 'not known' and allow the

wider research project to contextualise the act of mapping a specific place and time. A system of dual broad and detailed coding was used: an initial code of white / Asian / black / not identified, with the option of allocating a more detailed code when information was clearer (for example, linguistic information or an on-site interview). Detailed categories included South Asian, Middle Eastern, African- Caribbean, Eastern European and East Asian.

Temporality was recorded and critiqued through three methodological strategies. At the mapping stage, notes were made of peoples' movements: along the paths, towards or away from the water body. Secondly, comparisons were made between activities at different times of day and week. Thirdly, the observational data was supplemented with interview data.

The purpose of the 27 short on-site interviews was to provide a connection between the observational mapping process and the in-depth narrative interviews, and to gain initial contextual information: purpose of the visit, frequency of use, ethnic background and length of residence. Participants were approached on-site with the request for an informal discussion about their visit. Researcher fieldnotes were also often made on or near the fieldwork locations. One researcher (Ganji) was responsible for all on-site observations and interviews, herself a Bradford resident, familiar with the local mix of people and rhythms of life.

The behaviour mapping included 86 observation sessions across seven sites and resulted in 5951 different person/data points, then geo-referenced into GIS (ArcMap interface). Plots were generated that represented use of each site with regard to difference across one characteristic (e.g. age), that focused on intersections of personal identity (e.g. south Asian women and age), or combined an identity characteristic (e.g. gender) with regard to a range of activities (e.g. sitting, walking, playing) (Fig. 2).

Fig. 2.

Stage 2. In-depth narrative interviews

Pre-arranged semi-structured interviewing was used to access residents' stories of intercultural encounters and to explore perceptions of difference, (in)tolerance, stereotyping and conviviality.

Thirty participants were individually interviewed all living in the cluster neighbourhoods or using the spaces on daily basis. Interviewers were mostly conducted face-to face in indoor semi-public locations, three by telephone. To include non/low park users, we supplemented on site recruitment, with contacts gained through researcher participation in local activities and through snowballing methods.

The interview participant profile was as follows:

- Gender: male = 18, female = 12.
- Ethnocultural backgrounds (first and second generation): Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Indian, Sri Lankan, Lebanese, Polish, African-Caribbean, white British, Cypriot, Romanian, Iranian and Syrian.
- Thirteen interviewees were born outside the UK, of which two were refugees and three were university students.
- All interviewees were adults. Fifteen were under 40, twelve were 40-70, and three over 70.

The interviews were structured around four phases: cognition, grounding, recall and exploration, and reflection (May, 2001; Mason, 2002; Willis, 2005). Interviewees were asked about their local area, daily activities and the significance of outdoor activities. In 'recall and exploration', participants were asked to remember interactions with someone ethnoculturally different to them in an outdoor environment - one memory with a positive feeling and one with a negative feeling. Prompts were used to clarify the location (spatial and temporal qualities) of these interactions, and to explore the significance of the participant's own feelings. By discussing specific memories, we aimed to steer participants away from more general reflections on prejudice and inclusion, and thereby to reduce the likelihood of the answers providing a 'socially acceptable face' rather than honest answers (Savin-Baden and Van Niekerk, 2007)sh

Analysis

A 'thematic analysis' framework was used to explore the data and develop findings across the different methods of the research, an iterative process allowing the influence of both "theoretical and

epistemological commitments" (Braun and Clarke, 2006). ARC map software was used to interrogate different layers of spatial data, enabling us to analyse the relevance of intersections of personal identity. First, a broad scoping phase produced some key overviews relating to gender, ethnic background and age for each site. Subsequently, the findings of the in-depth interviews, researcher observations and the emerging of 'significant narratives' (e.g. from existing literature and theory) were used as a steer for selecting and generating plots which gave specificity to these, for example of the use of locations by young people, or how users from a shared ethnic background use a place at different times of day. The analysis of narratives from the interviews used NVivo to generate codes, including stages of refining, review and revision.

Clarifying intentions and limitations of scope

The combination of methods - detailed plotting (with attention to intersections of identities) and narrative interviews - allowed us to address some of the limitations of using each of these methods in isolation. As with any research, choices in scope shape the emphasis of the findings and discussion. Crucially, the aim of our research was not, primarily, to delineate differences in use of public open space between specific ethnic groupings. While the mapping process required working with elements of ethnicity coding (as discussed above) our research questions were not underpinned by a theoretical position of category driven ethnic difference (as historically common to leisure study research, for discussions around this see Shinew *et al.*, 2006). Foregrounding of boundaries between ethnic groups is problematic given the multiple ethnic identities, and diversity within these, in a city such as Bradford. As far as possible, the reporting of our findings gives specificity to individual experiences, activities and identities. We have stated when common patterns emerge, for example that a specific place is more frequently used by members of a particular ethnic background. However, in the main argument developed within this paper, these findings were primarily used as appropriate context to our core question of qualitative understandings of intercultural encounters with relation to urban public outdoor space.

Socio-spatial qualities of everyday conviviality

We turn now to the findings of the research regarding the relevance of encounter across these different forms of urban public space, exploring some of the connections between designed public space and the experience of everyday life in an ethnically diverse city. Our mapping allowed us to analyse how different activities are located close or distant to others, but did not specifically record interactions. The interview data was therefore vital to understand how people perceive other users, which encounters are notable, and how experiences of place are shaped by memories and social values. We turn first to qualities associated with conviviality, and secondly those which are associated with social tensions.

The symbolic value of situated diversity

We define situated diversity as the overlapping in one place of different activities and the presence of people of multiple ethnocultural backgrounds, echoing Massey's (2005) notion of "throwntogetherness". With different degrees of intensity this was evident in Bradford across all the observed and narrated intercultural encounters, with the data mapping allowing us to compare user diversity at different locations across the city.

The City Centre Cluster (City Park, Shopping Streets and Oastler Square) had the highest diversity of users with relation to ethnicity, more than half of the observed population were from non-white ethnic backgrounds. The highest diversity of recreational and social activities, both in terms of user groups and type of activity, was observed in City Park (Figs. 3, 4), with the lowest being in the playground in the Manningham cluster. The presence of refugees and asylum seekers was notably lower in the larger suburban parks.

Busy public spaces with many different rhythms of movement such as City Park, shopping streets (especially in the city centre) and larger public parks all support a complexity of function that gives opportunities for encounter: lingering, people-watching and playing. The interviews allowed us to understand better how this diversity is perceived by residents, and the value for conviviality that happens 'in passing'. For Cathy[2], living in a street where her family were *"the only British people"*,

[2] all in-depth interview participants were given pseudonyms.

"bumping into" the *"Pakistani"* and *"Afghani"* neighbours on local streets was a routine part of living in the multi-ethnic neighbourhood of Little Horton. For others, these fleeting interactions were experienced along paths in public parks such as Lister Park and Horton Park (the two larger parks in suburban clusters) (Fig. 5). "People feel they have something of a license to speak with others" when they share spaces of activity and proximity (Anderson, 2004, p. 18). Conviviality is mediated by the characteristics of the designed space and also management practices, supporting a perception of safety, a mix of functions, and diverse and intersecting movement.

Fig. 3.

Fig. 4.

Another aspect of this quality is the relationship between the atmosphere (emotional and symbolic) of a mixed activity space which can increase the potential for intercultural conviviality. Our interviewees enjoyed places which allowed for different activities, and which felt inclusive to people of different colour, culture and class. Participants' expressions such as *"melting pot"* and *"mosaic combination of nationalities"* and *"the place got different things going on"* describe favourite public spaces such as the City Park and Lister Park, and indicate their symbolic importance as spaces of multiculture. Diversity is seen as integral to the character of the space (Amin 2008). This sense of diversity as a known and familiar aspect of space can support acceptance, possibly even expectations, of conviviality. It is this characteristic that starts to shape a meaningful understanding of what intercultural places can offer – not just co-presence of diversity but approachability across diversity.

Fig. 5.

Visibility and lingering

While one quality of spaces of everyday conviviality is the visibility of different others and activities, we also need to consider the social dynamics between people using these spaces. The mapping data gives some useful context of the physical form of places where individuals and groups hang out, and indications of who (gender, age and ethnicity) are draw to these spaces of gathering. Focusing on the daily pattern of City Park also gives a useful insight into the relevance of temporality. Non-white

users were often mapped while sitting and observing activities within and near core activity spaces such as play facilities and water features. In City Park, during the less busy times, non-white male users (individuals and friendship groups) were seen sitting on the benches clustered near the 'shore' of the Mirror pool. As the park usage peaked during midday hours, the density of female users, south Asians in particular, became higher around the pool, while male users retreated from these spaces and mainly occupied the large planters/seating areas around the periphery of the space (Fig. 6). Non-white users (black African-Caribbean, South Asian and other Asian) were often recorded while socialising in peer groups, with the outer benches commonly used as a gathering point for asylum seekers and refugees. White users were more likely to be engaged in drinking and eating near to retail edges. Later in the day, the outer benches often were appropriated by groups of teenagers.

Our findings support previous research that defines people-watching as a form of passive social interaction (Gehl, 1971) and suggest that in ethnoculturally diverse contexts non-verbal interactions (visual, aural and physical proximities) play an important part in practices of active engagement with strangers. City Park can be described as "an arena where diverse social groups and social classes appear together in a highly structured way, segmented by space and time, yet intermingling and interacting on the same site" (Low, 2000, p. 23, referring to a plaza in Costa Rica). For relative newcomers to Bradford, this location more than any other in our study offered an acceptable and pleasurable place to hang out, and by observing people and activities, gaining a local familiarity. The physical affordances of this space support social connection – somewhere to sit and something to comment on - affording a low-key entry point for engaging in public life, and, for some, a chance to informally practice language skills through incidental conversation.

Observation of people and activities is not only a distracting way to pass time, but can also be a means of acquire and process new knowledge through observing the habits of others' activities and behaviours (Powell and Rishbeth, 2012). Some participants discussed how verbal interactions and exchanging of stories happened while spending time in parks, and again spatial affordances were important: provision of spatial structures and features (soft and hard) such as benches, steps, planters, sittable edges and grassed surfaces which are located for microclimate comfort and orientated to have

a good vantage point towards activity. Jameela, a refugee from Syria who had recently arrived in Bradford with her children, told us how an incidental conversation in the playground at Lister Park helped her feel welcome.

"*You can meet so many people […] we met one I think Pakistani or Indian […]. She was with her children she came to us they talked and asked: 'Where are you from? When did you come? If you need any help?' They were really nice to us."*

In terms of intercultural connections, it is also important to develop a sense of whether this has a more sustained (possibly 'more meaningful') potential outcome, exploring recent research which suggests that "active contacts" can occur as a consequence of these "passive contacts" (Moulay *et al.,* 2017, p. 62). Our research did find evidence of incidental encounters in outdoor public space developing into extended intercultural friendships: two men Iyaad and Nelson talked about the repeated nature of their chats in City Park, Oastler market and at the bar on weekends, and Cathy's connections with other women on her street. It does happen, though by and large it is not the norm, and we feel it is important not to overclaim here. However, many interviewees in the research underlined the importance of loose local ties (Young Foundation, 2012). Many were proud to talk about the ways they had initiated or been part of informal conversations with strangers or acquaintances, seeing here social possibilities. Not necessarily friendship but an "important positive precursor" (Phillips and Robinson, 2015), and relevant to supporting a sense of situated diversity.

Fig. 6.

In-betweenness

Passing through and threshold spaces offer proximity of people and activities. Compared to formal public open spaces such as parks, the mapping data showed that the density, diversity and convergence of people and activities were higher in in-between spaces such as the shopping street intersection, street corners, entrances to the market and the shopping centre (city centre cluster, Fig. 7). Most of the intercultural encounters offered in the interviews demonstrated a quality of in-betweenness. Spontaneous conviviality requires people to feel relaxed (secure mentally and

physically) and also open to the un-expected. Our findings suggest that the likelihood of starting verbal exchanges is supported by spatial in-betweenness (e.g. thresholds, edges and points of convergence, Dee, 2001), and by temporal in-betweenness (Fig. 7), giving further support to Aelbrecht's identification of 'fourth places' (2016). This we term as brief times of momentary recess (waiting in the bus stop, riding on the public transport or sitting for a break), and in situations of passing-by in spaces of leisure and on streets (Cattell *et al.,* 2008). The qualities of these places and times— allow for bridging connections (Putnam, 2000) through a shared identity or interest, often momentary (but not necessarily superficial). Stevens (2007) suggests that thresholds can engender a 'social liminality' that softens the norms of an indifferent civility and invites people to be more open.

Fig. 7.

We recorded this across different scales of planning and design. Marshfield park and playground was created in a boundary area between two deprived neighbourhoods, and additional funding was sought to provide a linking pedestrian bridge[3]. Due to this location and attention to permeability this facility has become a point of connection between residents of the two areas.

Our findings suggest that spatial planning for 'social in-betweenness' can help shape a sense of common experience, especially when there are patterns of regular visiting.

"It is like a common ground when doing something similar. So, when my kids are in the park [Lister Park], I am talking to people" (Irfan, British Pakistani father).

The elective nature of these spaces (no-one *has* to be here), of shared activity and pleasure supports a sense of social solidarity which can make initial intercultural connections more likely (Neal *et al.,* 2015). We suggest that these experiences often occur through everyday habits and in spaces that allow for a positive tension between safety and risk, the familiar and the unknown (Kloek *et al.,* 2013). For a group of young Pakistani women, jogging and walking around a pre-determined loop in Lister Park was a chance for momentary conviviality: *"We pass each other we make a joke, and we laugh it doesn't matter. Man, woman, everyone."* The repetition of passing others meant that a loose visual

[3] Funding from New Deal for Communities Fund and Neighbourhood Renewal Fund

familiarity can be established. Suzanne (a white British woman), who was a regular runner in Lister Park and Horton Park, discussed how through the act of running and establishing herself as a *"runner"*, she found a time and place of intercultural equality.

"No matter what diversity you are from you are a runner and everybody's identity is a runner [...] and it doesn't matter where you come from and that is one of the few times when this happens. There is an equality across all of us [...]"

Details at the design scale can also shape the possibility for connection. The visual permeability of terraced houses, something Burrell (2016) interprets as "architectural affordances", can enable a sense of openness and everyday friendliness.

"*In a terraced house you don't have an actual private open space you kind of live in a group space"* (Soraya, a young British Pakistani woman).

Conviviality within these spaces is experienced through the acts of neighbourliness such as "*taking neighbours' parcels"* and sometimes evolved into extended intercultural familiarity when thresholds (front yards, steps and frontage pavement spaces) are routinely used for hanging out (Vodicka, 2019, records similar in a Sheffield location). The comfort and ease by which these are appropriated dependent on the specifics of physical form of these spaces and boundaries.

Playfulness

Findings from the mapping demonstrated that in the residential clusters play spaces attracted the most diverse populations in terms of age, gender and ethnicity. A higher density and duration of stationery activities among older adults was recorded near play and activity spaces (associated with child supervision) and specifically mapped to generous provision of benches.

The analysis of both the mapping and the interviews demonstrates ways in which play triangulates intercultural conviviality and the benefits are experienced intergenerationally. We found this not only in playgrounds and park-based sports facilities, but also in the city centre spaces through busking, art performances and interaction with the water (Fig. 8). City Park, with the extensive shallow Mirror

pool, was especially valued for enabling playful activities which supported conviviality, and also because of regular organised events. “Play frames escape from social convention and the exploration of new possibilities” (Stevens, 2007, p. 51). Ali, an older Lebanese man, explained that when spending time in City Park he usually sat on the seats near the fountains, as seeing children playing was an ‘ice breaker’ for initiating conversation.

“If I am sitting alone and if I am sitting next to anybody if I find somebody alone […] by the water fountain […] if there are women or men with the children sitting, I break the ice and I introduce myself and because they have kids you can easily start the conversation. We can say ‘kids are enjoying themselves in the water’.”

Playgrounds were spaces where parents had opportunities to extend encounters with ‘familiar strangers’, for example other parents recognised from outside the school or nursery. For Khatun, a Bangladeshi Muslim mother, Marshfield Playground in Horton was a space with opportunities for conversations which developed into friendships.

“I think she was from Somali […] and her daughter attends the nursery that my son attends. They were friends before. We never got to meet each other before. Whenever we saw each other we used to say hi and bye […]. It was nice to find out about how long has she been living in Bradford for and where she was coming from. It was like knowing about that person because you always see people walking and you always want to know where they come from. It was quite nice to know about her.”

Fig. 8.

For some of the younger male participants, the most significant intercultural experiences in their life were gained through informal sport. Two recent migrants, discussed a greenspace on Horton Road which (mostly in summer) they used for a range of different activities. Nima, an Iranian refugee regularly played football here with a group of other young men from a diverse range of backgrounds, and recognised the value for himself in terms of confidence and sense of wellbeing.

"*That place is my favourite because it's free. I could never play football in Iran for free […] I can't emphasise more on how this place, how being in this place made me from an isolated person to a sociable person."*

Our findings supplement previous research by Clayton (2009) but additionally offer an insight into the intergenerational outcomes of play in neighbourhood green spaces and parks, highlighting that the benefit is not only for younger children. In particular, the relatively low-barrier participation in play facilities can promote migrant's 'psychological adaptation' by helping to develop opportunities for loose social networks, and through this to improve holistic wellbeing (Stodolska *et al.,* 2017; Wise *et al.*, 2018; Rishbeth *et al.,* 2019).

Socio-spatial qualities of everyday tension

Experiences of encounter are not always benign, and dynamics of discomfort, exclusion and tension also have socio-spatial qualities. When conflated with understandings of intercultural identities, these can have negative impacts on attachment and belonging between people and places. In explicitly asking about participants problematic experiences, we discovered a broad range of ways in which the behaviour of other people in public spaces impacted on an individual's sense of being marginalised or feeling unsafe. The intercultural dimensions to this were sometimes (but not always) stated.

In identifying 'problem' spaces, the complexity of identities and spaces within the study means that it is difficult to give a coherent picture. The mapping data highlighted some absences relating to ethnic background, specifically related to park use,

Men and women from black African-Caribbean communities were much more likely to use city centre precincts than suburban parks, and (in proportion of local demographics) were under-represented in parks and playgrounds (an exception was in Marshfield Park). The majority of organised Park Run[4] participants were white, and it is likely that both ethnic background and middle-class identities are reflected in this pattern of recreation. However, participation in self-organised walking and exercising peer groups, usually during week days, were a regular way in which South

[4] www.parkrun.org.uk

Asian women used Lister and Horton Parks. Also regarding residents from South Asian backgrounds, we recorded a higher presence and longer duration of young adult male groups compared to female young adult groups in the larger parks. However, in city centre spaces their presence was more balanced by gender.

Some of these patterns of differences we were able to explore through the interviews, some remain difficult to interpret. One challenge of interpretation and analysis is complexity. There was an unevenness about where tensions of diversity were experienced, and temporal dimensions (histories of places, times of the day, week and season) impacted on the extent of discomfort or dissociation. Even the civic spaces of the city centre, though highly valued by many, were experienced by some as spaces of anxiety and exclusion. Negative experiences of intercultural encounters were described differently by different interviewees. Gender dimensions were more frequently mentioned by female participants, while experiences that were explicitly associated with racial and ethnic differences were more often mentioned by male participants.

Dis-association with park environments

Tensions around park use are commonly shaped by the demographics of the local population. Many of the residential neighbourhoods in Bradford have a high percentage of South Asian residents. The higher visibility and representation of (specifically male) South Asians in the social and physical landscape of these neighbourhoods appears to have particular implications for two other groups: female users of different backgrounds but mostly young or white, and male or young male groups from white eastern European backgrounds.

A couple of participants pointed to inter-ethnic tensions between the younger "*eastern European and the South Asian males"* in Lister Park. Irfan said that the locality of Lister Park "*in the heart of Manningham and Heaton, which is 80% South Asian"* impacted on power relations and on claiming a shared sense of ownership over the park. A Polish adult man referred to these experiences as a reason to choose another park, further away, where he felt less different from other users since there were "*more white people"* there. Within play areas and sports facilities, territoriality was related to

seemingly conflicting claims on these spaces, and the limited availability of spaces for different user groups. The perceived territorial behaviour of the older children and teenagers, who were usually from a Pakistani background, was sometimes mentioned by parents who were annoyed by these groups playing ball in play areas for younger children.

For most women, positive perceptions of personal safety are a fundamental prerequisite for spending time in parks. Conflations of a male dominated public realm with poor levels of maintenance means that they are much less likely to visit. Overflowing bins and rubbish in Marshfield Park was interpreted as "*an impression of not a safe place to go"* (Khatun, a Bangladeshi woman), and the removal of flower beds in Horton Park (due to budget cuts) implied a municipal withdrawal leading to improper use: "*that's the place where people find it difficult and that's the place where you find drinkers congregating and as you can see the graffiti's there."* (Cathy, white British older woman). Women still use these parks, but employ temporal and spatial 'tactics' - only for certain purposes, at particular times, and in specific social settings.

Uncomfortable experiences of mobility

Our findings showed that descriptions of intercultural tension were often connected to passing-by and vehicle-pedestrian encounters within neighbourhood streets. Places where these encounters were often observed and recounted (and personally experienced by the researcher during fieldwork) were along the main streets in Horton and Manningham neighbourhoods with a higher number of retail and food shops. A number of female participants discussed times when their sense of gender identity was heightened, and which required them to find ways to negotiate different practices and routes. This led to discussions of the 'car culture' predominant in some neighbourhoods in Bradford,

"Bradford has its own driving culture and you find that they have their own rules and anywhere you can park you do park and you get big Asian groups gathering in and out of their cars which can get threatening in its own way" (Leila, British Indian woman).

Experience of men in and around cars is perceived by many women as connected to a multitude of environmental detriments – noise, littering, traffic safety, air pollution – but also extends to a

gendered narrative of encounters between mobile men and less mobile women. Soraya, a young British woman of Pakistani background, talked about how she now tried not going out alone and changed her dress as a result of harassment.

"If you are out walking down the street, you will get someone opens the car window and says 'Hi, beautiful' and 'can I have your number?' And this kind of attention I don't want."

She associated these instances with the car culture of South Asian men (Husband *et al.*, 2014), mainly 'Pakistani' or 'British Pakistani' and sometimes 'white European'. Being in a car appeared to give men a sense of freedom and relative power to initiate an encounter with no respect to 'mutual openness' (Goffman 1963), a problematic asymmetrical form of connection.

Ambitions for intercultural approaches in urban design

This paper set out to offer a spatial distinction and specificity to common sociological understandings of diversity in urban public open space, and a more reflective and nuanced understanding of intercultural encounter to common urban design understandings of 'places for people'. We turn now to the significance of these findings in terms of informing an ambition and a practice of intercultural urban design, first proposing some broad principles, and then recommendations.

From visibility to lingering.

While the public realm tacitly offers a visible representation of local population diversity, through our comprehensive sampling of use of specific spaces we were able to examine who is where and when, and who feels able to "take up space" here. This is not only about passing through "habitually travelled pathways" (Vertovec *et al.,* 2015) but using public spaces, especially urban greenspaces and squares, as resources for spending leisure time, and for socialising with friends and family. Being able to use nearby outdoor places for recreation and respite is consistently linked to physical and mental wellbeing (Cooper *et al.,* 2014) and therefore has policy relevance for public health initiatives. To want to stay somewhere longer it needs to feel safe and pleasurable, reflecting Neal *et al.*'s (2015) discussion of 'elective leisure' as providing a low-key form of social solidarity, the unspoken connection of a mutual choice to spend time in a nice place, indicative of an everyday multiculture.

Within larger parks, activities and features that allowed for lingering and easy participation were important, but so too was the need for the site as whole to be well maintained and be perceived as a safe place.

From fleeting to meaningful.

Diverse collective use of public open space does not provide an ambitious definition of intercultural urbanism. For this we need to address levels of connectivity, how spending time outside is to enable different and less prescribed social connections.

Our findings contribute to debates on fleeting or meaningful encounters (Valentine 2008; Wise and Velayutham, 2014; Neal *et al.* 2015; Wilson 2016; Piekut and Valentine 2017), and support also a non-binary interpretation of encounters that can be both fleeting *and* meaningful, as expressed by a number of our participants. Experiential qualities of place are intrinsic to this as the located nature of memories of friendly encounters can incrementally build a sense of comfortable belonging in particular places or areas within the city. We show the importance of playfulness within the urban realm, especially for children and young adults as a resource for joy, and how this provides intergenerational opportunities for conviviality, a "license to speak" (Anderson, 2004). We suggest that these can be especially important in supporting the integration of recent migrants.

Understanding intersectional influences on association and disassociation

We came to this research with a desire not to be naïve about potential tensions, sometimes serious and sustained, of living in a city with high ethnic diversity, especially when shaped also by population churn and the impact of poverty. Repeatedly contextual experiences of place were shown to be highly relevant (Vodicka, 2019), with interviewees talking less about negative encounters and more about places which were unwelcoming, or where they felt marginalised.

Wilson (2011) suggests that addressing social dynamics of "spaces of public mobility" can "open up new lines of enquiry and ways of thinking about" public spaces and everyday intercultural encounters (p. 646). Our findings contribute new perspectives on the relevance of mobility across different scales, within parks and across urban neighbourhoods. We found that use of residential streets was

particularly problematic for some of our interviewees, and social dynamics were informed by intersections of gender and ethnicity. Females were more likely to talk about these spaces as problematic for pedestrians. Their descriptions of being on the receiving end of harassment from male car drivers and passengers gives an important insight into the role of car mobility as representative of status and power, it seems particularly within the Asian community (Husband *et al.,* 2014). Away from the street, park spaces can reflect patterns of claim-making or perceived claim-making, with some discussion of experiences of marginalisation in these spaces (especially for women and white eastern European males). As shown in other research individuals and groups employ avoidance tactics to minimise conflict in their own use of the city (Philips *et al.,* 2007; Clayton, 2009; Powell and Rishbeth, 2012). The inequality inherent in these practices is multi-faceted and cannot be addressed through design issues alone, but we suggest the urban design profession needs to be more assertive and intentional in raising awareness and activism around the right to the city relating to intersections of gender and ethnicity (Agyeman, 2012; Rishbeth *et al.*, 2018).

Three priority recommendations

In proposing recommendations, and with awareness of an international readership working and researching in many typologies of urban areas, we start with a caveat regarding the context specific nature of action. We do not claim these recommendations are unique to urban contexts with high ethnic diversity – they are not 'novel' in this respect. However, and as illustrated by the findings of this paper, they take on particular importance within these locations, and therefore might inform priorities for local financial investment. They are, to a certain extent, provocations for testing and reflection, and hopefully may spur future debate on 'what works', alongside other papers in this special issue.

1. Maximise the potential of thresholds and edges for observation, paying close attention to both the ergonomics and social dynamics of everyday life. Benches and other opportunities to sit were vital for enabling conversation (echoing Rishbeth and Rogaly (2018) ethnography of a London square) and so too were the mundane practicalities of sharing within a residential neighbourhood: the passing around of parcel deliveries, the frustrations of public transport or

the time spent looking after children. The ease of in-between encounters can be mediated by the spatial arrangements of buildings (e.g. orientation of the front doors), comfort of sitting for longer periods, configuration of benches for incidental conversations, and enabling seated views onto busy spaces as means of low-key participation. A positive micro-climate (sunny, sheltered) is particularly important to newcomers adjusting to northern European temperatures.

2. Provide local high-quality play and 'pick-up' sport facilities. Our findings demonstrate that these provide opportunities not only places for young people, children and their carers, but more broadly support everyday connections between people from different ethnic groups (see also Wise *et al*., 2018). Investment is particularly important in urban contexts with a high population of families with younger children, with the 'Born in Bradford' study giving a comprehensive overview of the benefits (and specific barriers) of using accessible and pleasurable greenspace for the health outcomes of very young children and their parents (Cronin-de-Chavez *et al.*, 2019). Consideration should be given to locating these in edge zones between neighbourhoods to support diversity of users. Opportunities to 'design in' playfulness into city centre environments, reflecting the ethos of the 'child in the city' initiative[5] and exemplified in our case study by the affordances of City Park, was shown to be highly beneficial, not just for children but in supporting intergenerational contact.
3. Fund maintenance and ensure open space managers have training in intercultural communication. Low levels of park maintenance (a common outcome of austerity driven budget cuts in the UK (Nam and Dempsey, 2018)) were especially instrumental in shaping a negative framing of the public realm, supporting findings from leisure research (Askins, 2004; Jay and Schraml, 2009; Peters and de Haan, 2011; Kloek *et al.,* 2013; Stodolska *et al.,* 2017). Though cleanliness and perceptions of safety are important (as Cronin-de-Chavez *et al.*, 2019 shows, especially for families with young children) supporting engagement and high use also has a more strategic dimension. Management practices that loosely facilitate or allow

[5] www.childinthecity.org, www.thecityateyelevel.com

a wide range of activities (e.g. playing in the water, ball games, drinking, smoking) while ensuring safety and tolerance were highly successful at enabling higher levels of appropriation and diversity of 'park practices'. Mediation approaches can be successfully used to managing different expectations (Barker, 2016, discusses this as "mediated conviviality") in comparison to the detailed rules and punitive sanctions traditionally governing park use, and require a socially-aware approach to skill development for on-the-ground staff.

Conclusion

The findings of this extended case study of the people and public spaces of Bradford allow us to assert some qualities of intercultural city living, and how these both steer and challenge urban design practice. Despite the on-going presence of tensions (often related to broader dynamics of power, presence and poverty) our conclusion is clearly focused on the positive potential of high-quality public space as a resource to support engagement, conviviality and the gradual development of a shared sense of belonging. To reclaim the urban realm for meaningful social inclusion means practical commitments to supporting many ways to participate (with particular attention to intergenerational characteristics), ensuring that the form of designed space allows for comfortable lingering, and not compromising in the imaginative management of these places. To 'embrace diversity' is to support social messiness and complexity within a framework of properly public open spaces, welcoming an easy appropriation by diverse families, friends, not-yet friends and all the others-who-belong-here.

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