

Study report:

Typology of citizen-run neighbourhood websites

a study of the social impact of citizen-run online
neighbourhood networks and the implications for local
authorities

part of the
**online
neighbourhood
networks** *study*

2010

the
Networked
Neighbourhoods
group

Networked Neighbourhoods

The Networked Neighbourhoods group works with communities and organisations using technology-based approaches to strengthen neighbourhoods and create opportunities for the more efficient delivery of public services. We develop innovative projects that make a difference on the ground as well as providing leading edge research.

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Online neighbourhood networks study Typology

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(See last page for complete listing of the *Online neighbourhood networks study* materials)

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Typology

Introduction

The citizen-led local online ecosystem is becoming richer and more varied. Understanding the impacts and implications of the sites within this ecosystem requires some framework against which each one can be calibrated and understood.

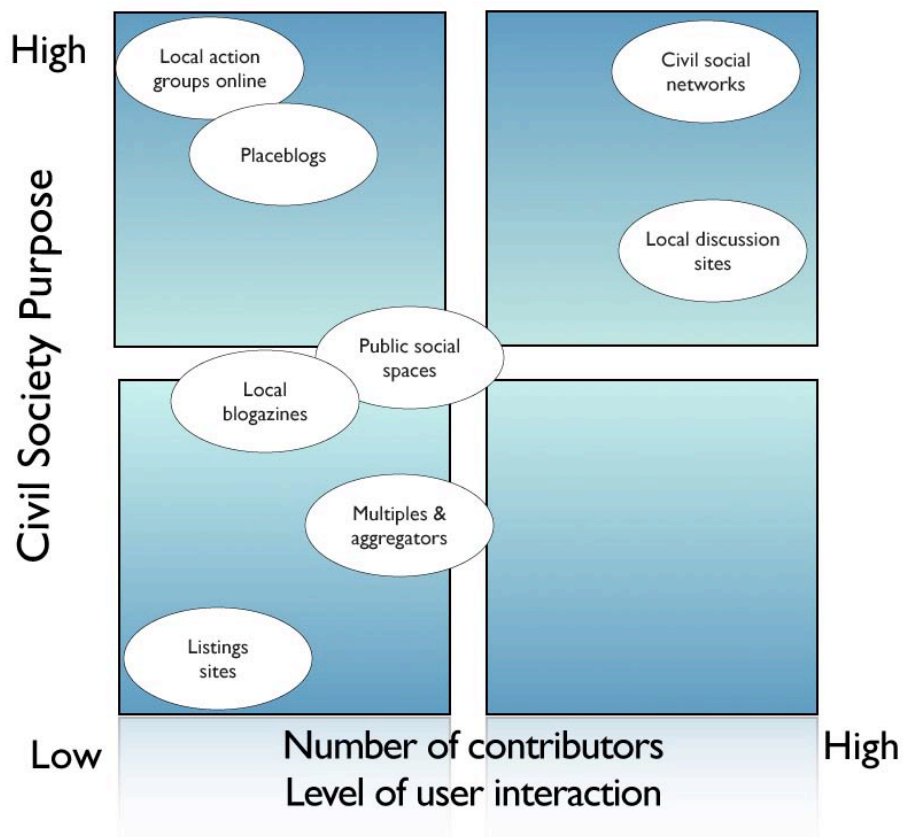
This paper presents the first version of a typology to describe the variety of citizen-led local internet spaces. Whilst the primary focus of the London study is citizen-led webspaces, this typology would be incomplete if it did not include some that are owned by commercial organisations.

From our review of approximately 160 local sites in London we have identified eight types. Six of those can be described as citizen-led sites, typically set up with a civil purpose. The remaining two types are run on a commercial basis.

These are early days in the development of neighbourhood websites. As our research review indicates, there have been very few studies of specific local sites and the movement barely registers in the local government world. Many sites are growing and changing rapidly. It follows that any classification has to be subject to ongoing revision. Our intention here is to facilitate further study and development by providing a language against which each site can be assessed and described.

Overview: High level model

The eight types are presented below on a four block model. The vertical axis represents the perceived level of civic purpose underpinning each site; the horizontal one shows the breadth of contributors and the level of interactivity for each type.



The diversity of neighbourhood networks often makes it difficult to slot each example neatly into a single category. However our intention is not to provide the means for forensic classification but to offer some categories which can be used to articulate the differences between various local websites.

Type 1: Civil social networks

Civil social networks are designed to encourage discussion and interaction between local people with both a civic and social purpose.

They can be built on a range of platforms from traditional forum software to newer style social networking platforms. The range of content varies with the sophistication of the software.

Some are restricted to discussion forums only. Others include a broad range of content including events listings, photos, videos and static information pages.

Key features are:

- Often formed out of a specific local issue and tend to maintain a keen eye on place-shaping whilst also encouraging lighter social interaction.
- Wide range of content types.
- Members can contribute to most parts of the site (with the exception of static information pages).
- Members can interact with each other (both openly via comments walls on member pages and by private messaging).
- The highest profile feature on civic social sites tends to be a discussion forum.
- Often a significant proportion of material added by the site "editors".



Example

[Harringay Online](#) (Social network based website)

Type 2: Local discussion sites

There is a significant overlap between local discussion sites and civic social networks, but discussion sites tend to be more focussed on connecting locals to make social connections and share knowledge about an area. There is less purpose around improving a neighbourhood.

Most local discussion sites are built on one of the forum software platforms.

Key features:

- Highly interactive, with a focus on sharing local knowledge about local services, property, events etc.
- Most highly social type of local network, often developing a strong sense of group.
- Usually have a seam of civic social purpose, with exchange of information around crime, planning etc., but less frequently used as platforms for local place shaping.
- Lower levels of editorial content pages than civic social networks.

The screenshot shows the homepage of the Stroud Green forum. The header includes the site name 'stroudgreen' and navigation links: Home, Community, Local Business, Other Discussions, and About. A user is logged in as 'Guest'. The main content area is titled 'All Discussions' and shows a list of recent posts:

- [Sticky] Book Club Meeting - 26th April**: Category Local discussion, Started by haanabfluyen, Comments 15, Last comment by Mirandota, Last Active 2 days ago.
- Good band needed for party in June**: Category Local discussion, Started by Misscara, Comments 6, Last comment by flembo, Last Active 1 hour ago.
- Dry cleaner**: Category Local discussion, Started by Jenow, Comments 14, Last comment by Arkady, Last Active 12 hours ago.
- Zebra crossing Florence/Tollington**: Category Local discussion, Started by diou, Comments 58, Last comment by Cat, Last Active 17 hours ago.
- Childcare in Stroud Green**: Category Local discussion, Started by lattle, Comments 19, Last comment by bueman, Last Active 22 hours ago.
- Sainsbury's is coming to Stroud Green Road - Woody's is going!**: Category Local discussion, Started by DoreenW, Comments 64, Last comment by toscat, Last Active 1 day ago.
- Best Coffee in Stroud Green?**: Category Local discussion, Started by Kate Jones, Comments 71, Last comment by toscat, Last Active 1 day ago.
- Mike Caffe**: Category Local discussion, Started by Jenow, Comments 22, Last comment by ShaunG, Last Active 1 day ago.

On the right side, there are several featured sections:

- In the area**: Check out local pubs, shops & restaurants. [Find out more](#)
- Politics**: MP's updates, council news & latest planning applications. [Read the latest](#)
- Buy stuff**: Badges, Mugs, T-shirts and other rubbish. [Get shopping](#)
- Photos**: All things halfway between Crouch End and Finsbury Park. [Browse photos](#)
- Events**: [View events](#)

On the left side, there is a 'Welcome, Guest' section with a sign-in form and a 'Feeds' section with an RSS link. At the bottom left, there is an advertisement for 'Hornsey Physio Clinic'.

Examples

[Stroud Green](#)
[East Dulwich Forum](#)

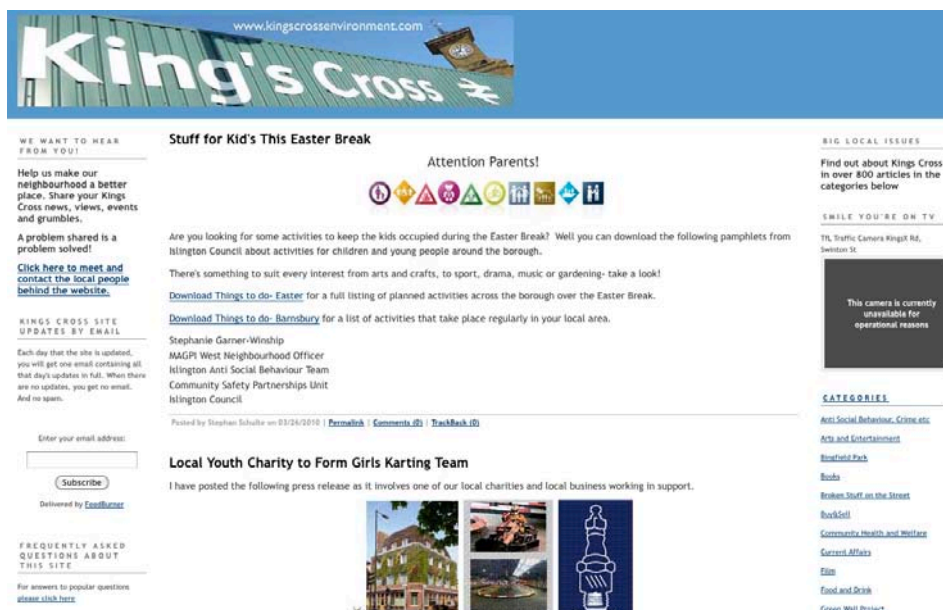
Type 3: Placeblogs

Placeblogs sites are set up by a single person or small group of people to report on local stories at a very local level. There is often a strong purpose of driving local change through shining the light on issues of local concern.

Placeblogs are not designed primarily for user contribution and interaction, but the busier sites do attract a significant number of comments.

Key features:

- Publish articles about local cultural activities and other local happenings to inform and build sense of place.
- Make use of [citizen journalism](#) to identify and investigate stories about local issues that affect the quality of residents' lives.
- Some user contribution through commenting, but user interaction restricted by platform design.



Example

[Kings Cross Environment](#)
[Brockley Central](#)

Type 4: Local blogazines

Local blogazines are similar to placeblogs, but the focus is less on local news and more on lighter neighbourhood profiling and local human interest approach. There is less direct support for community action and holding local politicians to account.

Local blogazines are very often run by just one person or by a very small group.

Key features:

- Carry a mix of local human interest stories, items about local businesses, history and some news.
- Use stories to improve perceptions of an area.

Friday, February 26, 2010

Oh Moll she lives in Deptford Town

Jeffery Farnol (1878-1952) was an immensely popular novelist in the first half of the 20th century, famous for his swashbuckling romantic tales set in Regency England. Though born in Birmingham, he grew up in Lee at 6 Duvville Road. His brother recalls him flying kites on blackheath, and later enrolling at the Goldsmiths Institute at New Cross, London S.E., to study in the 'Life Classes' of the Painting School, three nights a week. As he found success he bought a house of his own in Lee, in 1912, at 71 Eltham Road. Later he moved to the South Coast.

In my search for South London folk songs, I came across this section of his 1921 novel Martin Conisby's Vengeance. The scene, which features a politically dubious battle aboard ship with a 'vile blackamor', includes what appears to be a sailors song about Deptford:

presently I heard the scrape of a viol somewhere beyond the bulkheads that shut me in and therewith a voice that sang, the words very clear and distinct:

Oh, Moll she lives in Deptford town,
In Deptford town lives she;
Let maid be white or black or brown,
Still Moll's the lass for me;
Sweet Moll as lives in Deptford town,
Yo-ho, shipmates, for Deptford town,
Tis there as I would be.

With this singing I thought to hear the heavy thud of an unshod foot on the planking above my head, and setting my teeth I gripped my knife in sweating palm. now (and to my despair) came the singing again to drown all else, hearken how I would:

Come whistle, messmates all,
For a breeze, for a breeze
Come rise up, messmates all. For a breeze.

Twitter
Transpontine now has twitter: <https://twitter.com/transpontine>

Recent Comments

On Mar 27 Peth commented on peckham experiment:
"There was also a radio programme BBC about 4 years ago. Ironically there is a scheme currently..."

On Mar 26 garymcq commented on peckham experiment:
"The Central Office of Information released a film about the Pioneer Health Centre in 1947. It's..."

On Mar 26 legend commented on mods in south london:
"I worked at the Glenlyn Ballroom 1963-4. Very nice for dancing drinking and bingo. Jimmy Tippett..."

On Mar 24 Peth commented on peckham experiment:
"Yes a visionary idea. My memory from reading the book is of people talking about the swimming pool..."

On Mar 24 Peth commented on peckham experiment:
"Yes, a truly visionary idea. People remember the swimming pool being filled up every day, so that..."

Powered by Blogger

Transpontine History Map

Example

[Transpontine](#)

Type 5: Public social spaces

Profiles set up on Facebook or Twitter for sharing information about areas and often light-hearted chit-chat about an area.

Key features:

- Strong focus on events, restaurants and other social resources.
- Some local campaign related content.



Examples

[Mitcham \(CR4\) \(Facebook\)](#)

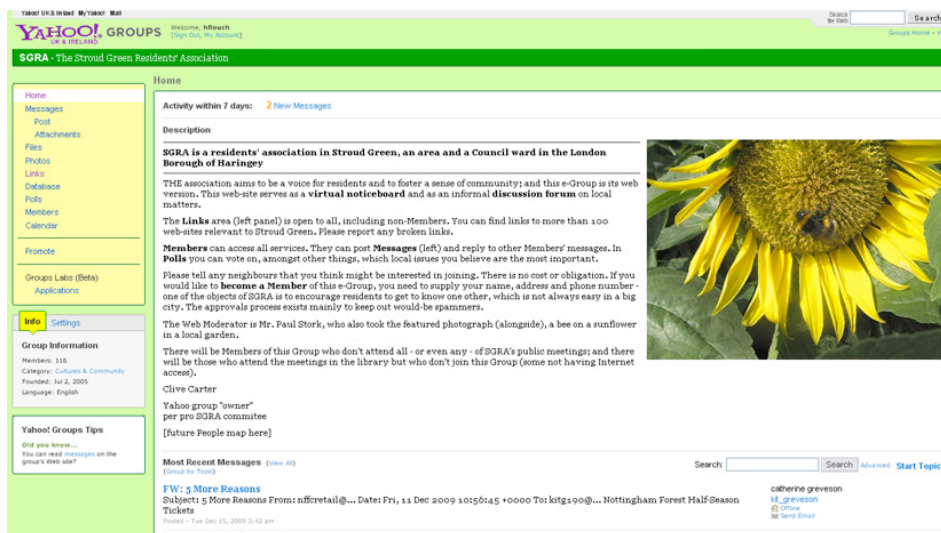
[Whampstead \(Twitter\)](#)

Type 6: Local action groups online

Local action groups are increasingly creating online spaces. Groups include residents' groups, friends of parks groups, tenants groups and environmental groups.

Since the web spaces created by these groups are extensions of work they do in the "real world", there tends to be less focus on design of content. In many respects the webspace replaces the old newsletter. Content tends to reflect the group's function, although since the time and cost investment in publishing is low these sites often publish bulletins from a range of groups within the community/resident circle.

Many are set up as a Yahoo group or as a static digital notice board.



The screenshot shows a Yahoo! Groups page for 'SGRA - The Stroud Green Residents' Association'. The page layout includes a top navigation bar with 'Yahoo! Groups' and 'My Yahoo! Mail' links. Below this is a sidebar with navigation options like 'Home', 'Messages', 'Post', 'Attachments', 'Files', 'Photos', 'Links', 'Database', 'Polls', 'Members', 'Calendar', 'Promote', 'Groups Labs (Beta)', and 'Applications'. The main content area features a 'Home' section with 'Activity within 7 days: 2 New Messages'. A 'Description' section explains that SGRA is a residents' association in Stroud Green, London, and serves as a virtual noticeboard and discussion forum. It includes details about the Links area, membership rules, and a list of members. A photograph of a sunflower with a bee on it is displayed on the right. At the bottom, there is a 'Most Recent Messages' section with a search bar and a 'Start Topic' button.

Examples

[Stroud Green Residents' Association](#)
[Barnes Community Association](#)

Type 7: Local digital news (Commercial)

Local Digital News sites are hyperlocal news sites designed to report on local issues. Often established with a civic purpose, these sites are distinguished from citizen journalist sites by their commercial nature. Often they will go beyond merely reporting the local news and will include forums.

There are several local digital news groups now operating in London. Recently Associated Northcliffe Digital (part of the Daily Mail family) has started to set up its People sites.

The screenshot shows the homepage of the London SE1 community website. The header includes the site logo, a search bar, and navigation tabs for News, Forum, Classifieds, What's on, Visiting, Living, Food/Drink, and About us. The main content area is divided into several sections: Local news headlines, Features, Latest news & links via Twitter, and a News Map. The Local news headlines section features articles such as 'UK's biggest hydrogen fuel cell installed in Blackfriars Road', 'Sexual assault in Walworth: police appeal for information', and '£35 a night Tune Hotel coming to Waterloo instead of easyHotel'. The Features section includes 'The team from The Team wins Better Bankside pancake race' and 'World record for Star Trek costumed characters set at Millennium Bridge'. The Latest news & links via Twitter section displays a list of tweets with timestamps and links. The News Map section shows a map of the area with various points of interest and a 'Local news on a map' section below it. The footer includes a 'Welcome...' message and a brief history of the site.

Examples

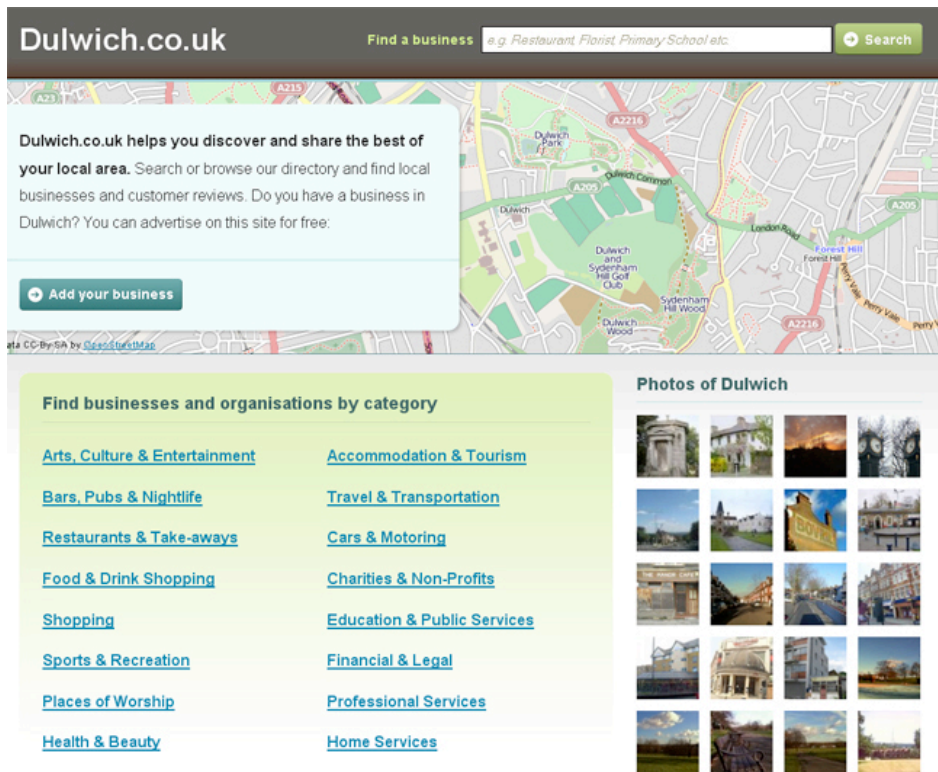
[Se1](#)

[Neighbournet sites](#)

[AND People](#)

Type 8: Multiples & listings (Commercial)

Sites in this category are aimed primarily to generate revenue through listing local businesses, services and events. Some are old fashioned flat listings. Others include elements of user content in the way that review sites like Qype do. Some sites that are part of a network are developed within a template provided by the network owners.



Examples

[Wimbledon Visitor](#)

[Dulwich.co.uk](#)

[My Village](#)

[Your local London](#)

Appendix: Content by site type

	Civil Purpose						Commercial	
Content item	Civil Social Networks	Local Discussion Sites	Place-blogs	Local Blogazines	Public Social Spaces	Local Action Groups online	Local Digital News	Multiples, Aggregators & Listings
News - Planning & other local developments - Crime - Local businesses (openings/closings) - Local Events - Local people – achievements etc - Other community news	✓✓	✓	✓✓✓	✓	✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓
Discussion - Chit chat - Civic action	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓	✓	✓✓	✓	✓	✓
“Magazine” content - Civic Society - Local History - Image/video content - General interest - Restaurant reviews	✓✓		✓✓	✓✓✓	✓	✓	✓	
Local Information databank - key council contacts - how council services work / how to get things done with the council - Police, health & other services - Local travel - others	✓✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	

Appendix: Content by site type

Content item	Civil Purpose						Commercial	
	Civil Social Networks	Local Discussion Sites	Place-blogs	Local Blogazines	Public Social Spaces	Local Action Groups online	Local Digital News	Multiples, Aggregators & Listings
Self-selecting micro-groups	✓✓							
Events listings - Civic Action - Entertainment	✓	✓✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓✓
Recommendations - local trades / professions - local restaurants - Dentists / doctors etc	✓✓	✓✓					✓	
Listings - Business Directory - Jobs - For sale / going free	✓	✓					✓✓	✓✓✓

KEY	
	None / little
✓	Low level
✓✓	Some
✓✓✓	Key feature

Guide to materials in the online neighbourhood networks study

- 1 *Online neighbourhood networks study* short summary (4 pages)
- 2 Introduction, background and extended summary
- 3 Online neighbourhood networks study (Main paper):
 - Section 1: Social capital and cohesion
 - Section 2: Supportive and negative online behaviour
 - Section 3: Empowerment, civic involvement and co-production
 - Section 4: Relations with councils
 - Section 5: The future for citizen-run neighbourhood websites.
- 4 Council survey report
- 5 Guide for councils to online neighbourhood networks
- 6 Videos (Part of the Guide for councils)
- 7 Network timeslices
- 8 Research context
- 9 Online neighbourhood networks typology
- 10 Local broadcast media

part of the
online neighbourhood
networks *study*

by
the
Networked
Neighbourhoods
group

on behalf of



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