

White paper

# Mudlarking in the social ecology of cities – breaking the public policy impasse

Global Peter Drucker Forum  
November 22, 2019

By Martin Ferguson







Cover image: Keith Vaughton, *'Big City Reflection'*.

Inside cover image: Martin G, *'London Eye'*.



**I'd like you to imagine  
for a moment...  
we are standing on  
the banks of the River Thames.**

We are going 'mudlarking' - combing the shore - to discover British experience of how place-based leveraging of social ecologies is changing the fortunes of people and their city environments and how cities are breaking the public policy impasse of recent decades that has allowed the wellbeing of significant parts of their places to be forgotten, to be placed in the 'too difficult' box.

It's a rare privilege for this mudlark to have time to step out of a busy schedule and take time to pause and reflect. For two days, 21 - 22 November, he attended his first Global Peter Drucker Forum in Vienna.





The Power of Ecosystems - Managing in a Networked World presented a theme that challenged the orthodoxy of rational, economic man to open a debate about harnessing social ecologies to generate value. In the widest sense this brought corporate responsibility into sharp focus.

Speakers stressed the role of the private sector was not first and foremost to create short-term profits and returns to shareholders; rather it was to cultivate the long term wellbeing of society and the planet, with a focus on stakeholder value. In other words, we all have a stake in the sustainability of our world and the communities in which we live, and the products and services that we produce should all serve their needs in a responsible and ethical way. Put simply, no-one will make a profit out of environmental, economic and social collapse.

This was refreshing to hear in a forum attracting senior executives from around the world, although one could not help thinking that many of them come from organisations for which these aspirations are far from reality.

This mudlark had been invited to contribute to a session on Cities as social ecologies. Chaired by Gabriel Joseph-Dezaize, Editor-in-Chief - Harvard Business Review France, together with Cécile Maisonneuve President - Fabrique de la Cité and Thomas Madreiter Director of Planning - City of Vienna, we explored the proposition that cities are perfect ecosystems to produce innovation in services and, if so, how can we shape a better future?

Cécile presented three key problems facing cities: climate change, social and cultural accessibility - affordable housing, and people having a voice in decisions affecting their lives. She cited examples such as the 'liveable and sustainable city' of Singapore, and the focus on people fulfilling activities in Pittsburgh, where development of self-driving cars is centred on mobility and access, not on the technology or modes of transportation. Both of these examples are built on strong foundations - ecosystems - of trust.



Source: *Life and labour in London*. Charles Booth's London, available to: <https://booth.lse.ac.uk/map/14/-0.1174/51.5064/100/0>. This historic map depicts what was considered demographically notable in 18th century society.



The need for change in cities in view of climate crisis provided Thomas with an argument for using planning as an enabler to address climate change locally, both mitigating effects such as prolonged periods of extreme temperatures and reducing the contribution of city ecosystems to global climate change. The trigger for innovation, he said, came from bottom up participation, bringing conflicting thoughts into the open and creating acceptance and ownership by starting with the problem to be solved.

From the present to the past, our mudlark stepped back in time to the late 18th century. One misty morning, he described running into a gentleman by the name of Charles Booth! Booth explained how he was on a journey to map Life and Labour in London. Reflecting later, our mudlark understood this as an early example of revealing the social makeup – the social ecology - of a city.

Using these visualisations, Booth would help to break the public policy vacuum existing at that time in addressing poverty, leading to 20th century government interventions - retirement pensions, decasualisation of labour and free school meals for the poorest children.

Jumping forwards to today, our mudlark observed many of the signs of that same impasse in addressing inequality and poverty that Booth exposed in the latter part of the 18th century. These include:

- › a ‘new normal’ of perma-austerity, with unsustainable rises in demand for services that were conceived for different times and that now struggle to cope;
- › mega changes in expectations and erosion of trust, driven in part by new technology, but also the rapid decline of old-world power paradigms;
- › a legacy of industrial age thinking, leadership, government and public service provisioning;
- › environmental degradation and climate change;
- › rapid and unpredictable demographic changes that challenge patterns of cohesion and identity;
- › an economy that isn’t working for significant numbers of people; and
- › persistence of hard to solve, ‘wicked problems’



What responses could our mudlark uncover to this contemporary impasse? As a geographer and social scientist, he explained his renewed interest in the social ecology of places. Taking us on a short exploration, our mudlark left the River Thames to venture a 'stone's throw' into East London and then north to Manchester.

In East London, he described the social ecology of Barking and Dagenham, one of 32 London Boroughs. Juxtaposed with the richest square mile in the world, it is less than 30 mins to the City of London. Today it is (literally) post-Fordist. Just 2,000 are employed at the Ford Motor Company's Dagenham plant, compared with 40,000 during our mudlark's East London childhood. Since then, the loss of stable, semi-skilled, mainly (white) male jobs means that just 2,000 are employed manufacturing vehicle engines.

Meanwhile, the population has grown to 212,000 (23% more than a decade previously). Over the past twenty years there has been a dramatic demographic

change. In 2001, 89% of population was white British; by 2011 this was less than half. 51% of schoolchildren have English as their first language (c.f. UK 80%), with 12 other languages making up the majority of the remainder. In some neighbourhoods fewer than 9% of people associated with an address in 2011 were still living there in 2018. And, it has the youngest population demographic of all local municipalities in the UK.

On the other hand, Manchester had been the birthplace of the industrial revolution, suffering repression in the Peterloo Massacre of 1819, establishing the basis for the cooperative movement through the Rochdale Principles and witnessing decades of industrial decline with the loss of cotton and manufacturing industries. Today it has 2.8 million residents, served by 10 local municipalities, 10 local health bodies, one Police Force and one Fire and Rescue Service. Here exists a complex melange of social ecologies, bound together by their history of resistance to controlling forces of capitalism and successive governments, working class solidarity and a collaborative mindset.

**1 in 30**



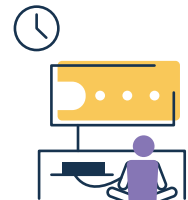
working-age people claim unemployment benefits...

...while **4.6%** are unemployed



**10,700**

of 16-19 year olds are unemployed



**38 µg per m<sup>3</sup>**

annual average roadside NO<sub>2</sub> concentration

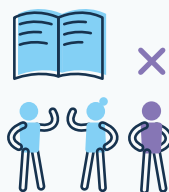
**241**

rough sleepers (estimated)



**1 in 3**

children are not school ready



Male healthy life expectancy:

**60.0 years**



Female healthy life expectancy:

**64.4 years**

Source: Presentation by Phil Swan, Chief Information Officer & Digital Lead, Greater Manchester Combined Authority (Local Government Association Digital Showcase, 4 Nov 2019). This data is representative of the Greater Manchester area only.



In both locations, he described deep-seated deficits – wicked problems. For Manchester, just some of the many problems encountered are poor air quality, wide differences in life expectancy, homelessness and rough sleeping, unemployment and unpreparedness of children to start school.

Using data from Barking and Dagenham, he explained how the Borough is close to bottom on 12 out of 14 measures compared with all other London Boroughs. These measures include life expectancy, educational attainment, domestic violence and abuse, and survival of new businesses.

With the realisation that national government was not going to help, this begged the question for local council leaders: what would a thriving place look like? They responded by making a manifesto commitment to leaving 'no-one behind'. Barking and Dagenham Together was born and over 3,000 citizens contributed to what became a concerted plan to regenerate and build social ecosystems that would cultivate a fully a functioning and inclusive ecology in the Borough. That meant addressing directly the problems described.

From a leadership and governance perspective, the local authority had repurposed and restructured itself to 'transform public services' to tackling the root cause of the many problems being faced by residents, communities and businesses in the Borough. It had replaced the outdated, rigid, hierarchical, department-based structure with Community Solutions, an integrated people-based service focused on harnessing community assets and helping residents to get the best out of life.

In parallel, it had created new, collaborative organisations to lead on 'inclusive growth': Be First – a growth, regeneration and development company aiming to facilitate creation of 20,000 new jobs; Reside – a general fund housing company aiming to provision 50-60,000 new homes; and an energy company to provide better tariffs for local people, based on the assumption that we know exactly where fuel poverty exists in the borough, so intervention can be targeted in the right place. As a consequence, the Borough is now one of the fastest growing, economically, in London and is building more municipally-owned houses for rent than losing through sales.

Greater Manchester had also been the beneficiary of structural change albeit from a different source. Devolution of governmental functions was cultivating a new 'platform of purpose', the Greater Manchester Combined Authority. With an elected mayor and leaders of the ten municipalities, the city's cooperative mindset was being rekindled with local leaders working for the common good of people in the city region.

A collaborative, servant style of leadership could be detected with no-one operating in isolation. Connections were being established with the many stakeholders in their place-based ecosystems, networks were being orchestrated to cultivate growth in capacity and capability, and solutions were being generated organically, co-created with local interests.



O-seop Sim, 'Aerial Photography of State of the Art Architectural High-rise Building'

Dominic Milton Trott, 'Spiceland [Manchester, UK]'

Central to both was a focus on skills and capabilities, harnessing mindset and skillset – creative, analogue minds (intuition, curiosity, relationships and behaviours) alongside logical, analytical minds, leveraging data and institutional memory and co-creating ecosystems and solutions.

Three examples of ecosystems undergoing creation:

## Cyber ecosystem

- 1 Collaboration between 30 organisations - GMCA, National Cyber Security Centre, four universities, Police, NHS, and the private sector - cultivating expertise and contributing to the city region's economy.



### Building ecosystems that deliver: GM Cyber

Since 2017 Greater Manchester created

## The UK's fastest-growing cyber eco-system

A 30 member collaboration set up for common benefit and the sharing of expertise.

Source: presentation by Phil Swan, Chief Information Officer & Digital Lead, Greater Manchester Combined Authority (Local Government Association Digital Showcase, 4 Nov 2019)

## The campus

A repurposed and refurbished Civic Centre offering degree courses in collaboration with the University of Coventry and local employers. (It is no coincidence that Coventry also has a long history of association with the car industry). The Campus is evidence of a strong focus by the local authority on creating accessible education and training opportunities - building capacity (technical skills, domain expertise) and ability to adapt ahead of what the future may bring.

## Enabling collaborative networks

'Empowering residents to support themselves while ensuring public services are there for those in most need' - addressing existing Community Food Club – now a base for accessing housing and money advice, education, training and job opportunities – reciprocal interest in cultivating individual and ecosystem growth at neighbourhood level.



More than a century after Booth's work in East London, our mudlark described how B&D is pioneering use of a ward-level index that focuses on the social progress of residents. The aim of the 'Social Progress Index' is to enable community development through intelligent action rooted in an evidence-base. Bringing together a rich variety of datasets - metrics, include health, noise

and air pollution, rates of exercise and obesity, recycling and domestic violence, new insights are generated into the principal components of diverse social ecologies - relationships and root causes of persistent problems that undermine basic human needs, the foundations of wellbeing and access to opportunities.



Social Progress Index. Source: Pye Nyunt, Head of Insight & Innovation, London Borough of Barking and Dagenham (presentation to Nesta Sparks event, 12 March 2019 available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P9TqISoSqEs>)

These insights into outcomes (not inputs and outputs) create the basis for collaboration and participation, indicating where to locate assets, services, advice and support based on the needs of residents, rather than the historic accident of land ownership and building leases. Openly published and accessible, examining the metrics over time helps to bind social ecologies together, holding diverse stakeholders, including council and community and business leaders, to account.

In Greater Manchester, our mudlark explained how data is being used to inform better decision-making and identify resource deficits to facilitate the wellbeing of local, social ecologies. Vacant spaces in areas lacking open-air amenities are being mapped in order to create small parks (parklets). Bicycle-mounted recorders are being used to co-collect data as a byproduct of cycling journeys, resulting in plans to improve street design and safety for all street users - drivers, community transport, cycling and walking.

Reflecting on both these examples, from Manchester and East London, our mudlark described them as examples of 'regime shift' – changing the mindset, the structures, the technologies and the information to be leveraged and harnessing local ecosystems for collective value. The shift is no more apparent than in the transition from organisation-centric, producer-led interventions to evolving organic, and co-created solutions that facilitate the wellbeing of ecosystems. These centre on a concern for people and their wellbeing – the social ecologies in which they live and interact.

Leadership is visionary but diffuse and collaborative, orchestrating healthy interactions of people and enterprises in places and complementary relationships that spawn innovation and co-create value. Focused on the whole system – political, social, economic,

environmental, technological, legal and not being afraid to tackle persistent, wicked problems, these approaches work across geographical, language and cultural barriers to address issues of power and distribution. Critically, they focus on the future, what could be and 'what's not there' currently.

At last year's Drucker Forum, a different mudlark challenged us to take care that: "our humanity is not swamped by the digital revolution". Charles Handy might well say the same about governments and public services becoming remote, inhuman and opaque.

Our mudlark contended that these examples from the UK offer hope with their focus on being transparent about people and the human condition - the social ecology that binds them together in their place – and breaking through previous decades of public policy impasse in addressing their wellbeing.

## Mudlark over and out







11<sup>th</sup> GLOBAL  
DRUCKER  
FORUM  
2019

IMPERIAL PALACE VIENNA

Dennis Javis, 'Austria-00092 - Imperial Palace'

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