

New Maps: Social Systems Mapping in the London Borough of Lambeth

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*I used to know these parts
By now they draw the town with new maps
Now a complete stranger
Looking 'pon me like I am the danger*

Roger Robinson (2017)

Abstract

We present findings from participatory mapping research undertaken with Black and minority communities in the London Borough of Lambeth. The work was commissioned by [Ubele](#), the African diaspora organisation as part of [Black on Track](#), a public health and community development project. The overarching aims of the project are to support and progress the life chances and opportunities of the Black Caribbean community in Lambeth and to address deeper systemic change needed to remedy the barriers that are limiting the opportunities, prosperity and well-being of citizens in the target communities. The research brief for the mapping was to create a 'Systems Map' of the relationship between the pilot group and members of the Dominoes club in Lambeth and surrounding communities to identify the barriers and leverage points to their economic engagement. As a basis for the research design, we brought together two very different methodologies in what we believe to be an original and innovative way. Firstly, we identified the needs of participants from the user group using storytelling to capture the barriers and challenges of their lived experience. We then used 'Network Mapping' to visualise the ecosystem of support groups and resources in the area. The two data sets then formed the basis of a composite map connecting personal needs to pathways to support organisations, information and community assets. The mapping outcomes were then gamified and made available for stakeholder workshops in the form of a dominoes game, where we link the work to the Lloyd Leon Community Centre (also known as the Domino Club), a hub for Black enterprise in the Borough.

Why *Social System Network Mapping*?

The word system is often used as a vague shorthand for something we think is organised and connected but which is unknown and sometimes threatening. Definitions from Oxford Languages online dictionary include:

'a set of things working together as parts of a mechanism or an interconnecting network; a complex whole'.

and

'a set of principles or procedures according to which something is done; an organised scheme or method'.

These definitions neatly encapsulate a difference in emphasis in how to approach mapping systems. The first implies the exploration of an existing set of connections that may not have been designed, and may not have a shared and stated purpose, but may exhibit purposive behaviour. The second is purposeful and implies control and design. Often, in mapping systems we move from the first to the second - initially exploring the complexity of what exists, before moving to change the revealed system so that it works better for some purpose.

Our first challenge in designing a Systems Map for the Black on Track project was to find a suitable methodology and theoretical frame that would enable us to bring together the two very different elements of the Lambeth social ecosystem – those of the people and their experiences, and the network of support groups and organisations available to them. A baseline requirement was some sort of stakeholder and asset mapping of relevant support services and community resources available in Lambeth. Information that could easily be sourced from the internet and visualised as an interactive geographic map showing locations and organisations details; or as a network map to show thematic clusters, connections and linkages between organisations, groups and resources. Either mapping would at best visualise the resource base, all be it in different ways - but do little to meet the requirements of the brief to provide a Systems Map that would also incorporate the *'relationship between the pilot group and surrounding communities to identify the barriers and leverage points to their economic engagement'*

The purpose of the map was to create a genuinely useful tool that will not only visualise the components of the resource base, but also map their relationships to the user group needs, and enable users to find pathways to the help and support they need to reach their goals and aspirations. Additionally, it will have the potential to allow organisations to alter the structures of collaboration in the area to make the support ecosystem more connected to the needs of Black and minoritised communities.

This was going to be more than a conventional systems analysis map, but rather a mapping that has more in common with Social Systems Mapping as defined by Greater than the Sum 2021:

A Social System Map is a tool designed to help build critical mass and momentum behind tipping points and to help people within social eco-systems to see and navigate complexity with the aim of amplifying and accelerating the system-change efforts of people who are engaged in movements and transformation networks. It also aims to help network members collaborate more effectively across differences; to surface and leverage the dynamic creative tensions inherent within multi-perspective networks, and navigate wisely within self-organizing human systems and increase adaptivity, resilience and (re)generativity in social eco-systems. A fundamental principle of this approach is that a Social System Map grows outward from the people.¹

This emphasis on a participatory, crowd sourced process fitted well with the aims of the Black on Track project in that it places people at the centre of the process - essential for making the mapping outcomes relevant to the target group's needs. Inevitably this iterative, collective

mapping of complex social dynamics will be much more ‘messy’ than a straightforward analysis of the support network infrastructure – but will yield a much closer approximation of the complexity of the real world situation.

The Lambeth System

Our research into the provision of information about support services available to unemployed and underemployed Lambeth residents showed that service providers published information through the different service areas of the local authority websites in the form of static directories of providers or as printed leaflets. In some cases, this has led to both gaps in information provision and duplication of effort. The potential of the proposed systems mapping is that it promotes a new approach with information from multiple sources being brought together into a central database that is relevant and available to service users. As a great deal of this information already exists in the public domain, what appears to be missing are the connectors that link sectors, groups and organisations together and people in the community to the information they are seeking. Identifying these missing connectors provided a basis for defining more closely the purpose of the map; essential points of entry for the mapping process and a focus for data collection.

The ‘Lambeth system’ is a loosely co-ordinated set of organisations; some of which collaborate with each other and whose members have different goals, command different resources and follow different processes. Mapping this complex interactive network can support efforts in the Black on Track project to:

- Identify possible support for individual or business development.
- Chart pathways through the systems and evaluate the ‘touch points’ where the users interact with them.
- Pinpoint areas where greater collaboration between map members could benefit the target group.
- Identify leverage points where interventions might improve the way the systems work for the target group.

The Map Development Sequence

The first phase of the map development sequence begins the process of identifying the issues of concern that confront participants; both the barriers and challenges they have experienced in the past that have brought them to their current situation and the challenges they face going forward to achieve their goals. The aim was to ensure that the resulting map is personalised by and for the community and its organisations, and importantly uses the language of the community. The Black on Track participants are a diverse group that includes local entrepreneurs who know the local scene and, in some cases, have worked their way out of unemployment. Others are working to find meaningful ways to build their communities, find employment or enjoy a more active retirement. Their local knowledge and life experiences provide a rich baseline for the mapping process.

The second phase of the sequence was to create a database of organisations, groups and community enablers that are linked to the issues of concern identified by the user group. The two data sets are then brought together in a composite network map that enables users to explore pathways to support and information.



Figure 1. Mapping Methodologies

As a framework for the mapping, we bring together qualitative data derived from storytelling with a quantitative analysis of the local resource base in the form of a Network Map

Storytelling seeks to capture the voices of the lived experience of the target group. This participatory approach has shown that shared stories can bring impetus to communities to help identify what they seek to change and can be effectively implemented in community partnership projects. Importantly it also enables previously unheard authentic voices to be carried to other stakeholders in the social ecosystem, setting up a cycle of trust.²

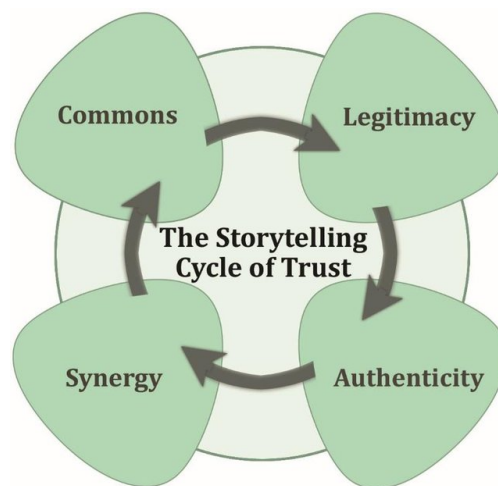


Figure 2. The storytelling cycle of trust

Network mapping visualises thematically the ecosystem of support groups and resources in the area. The map's unique contribution is to visualise and analyse patterns of relationships - to reveal natural clusters and the nodes that are key to the network's operation.

Participants' stories form the basis of the two starter data sets for the systems map:

1. A data set of issues of concern that reflects the barriers and challenges experienced by the group in seeking their personal goals.
2. A data set of organisations, groups and community enablers derived from the user groups experience and local knowledge – (augmented by additional internet research by the mapping team)

The two data sets then form the basis for a composite map that connects issues with organisations, information and community assets. The map aims to link personal needs to pathways to support and information.

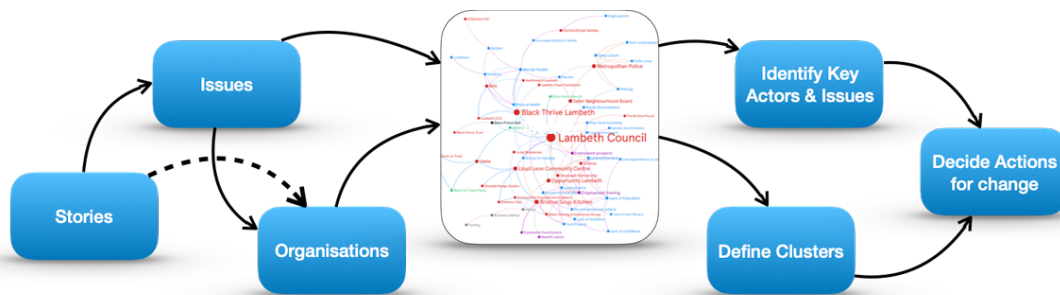


Figure 3. The Social Systems Map Design

The outcomes from the mapping will be to identify key actors and issues of concern and define thematic clusters of issues and organisations. It will also aim to facilitate decision making and actions for change through the creation of a dynamic, interactive and updateable network map of the systems operating in Lambeth related to the needs of the Black and minority community.

The Storytelling Workshop

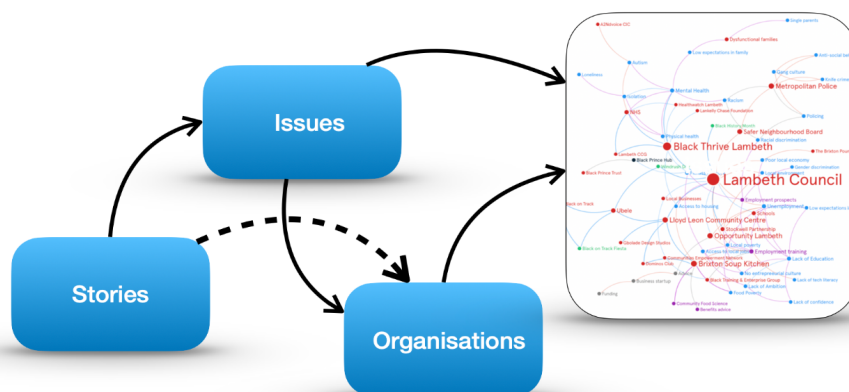


Figure 4. Story Mapping

The methodology we adopted for the storytelling workshop format is derived from persona creation and user journey mapping, tools frequently used in the design of web-based products and services.³ The user-journey is characterised by a more user-centric approach to design, that will lead to better user experiences. We have applied this methodology here in the design of the Black on Track systems mapping as a way of capturing authentic user experience and as a process for testing its useability. The user journey can also be helpful when tracking key performance indicators and outcomes that can help to inform strategic recommendations arising from the project. Before creating a user journey map, it is essential to align the design of the journey with user goals. Personas are fictional characters, or actors who are based on real user experience and information about the target audience. Importantly the creation of fictionalised characters as a vehicle for the stories allows participants to transfer their very personal experiences to the

character, facilitating a collective conversation about the issues that can be less revealing for individuals who may not want to disclose more sensitive information about themselves.

In its most basic form, journey mapping starts by compiling a series of user goals and actions into a timeline framework which is then built into a narrative that includes user thoughts and emotions. The narrative is then condensed into a visualisation used to communicate insights that will inform design processes. Journey mapping combines two powerful instruments: storytelling and visualisation – a combination that works particularly well as a frame for producing the systems map because they are effective mechanisms for conveying information in a way that is memorable, concise and that creates a shared vision.

In a workshop setting participants created a series of personas, in which they explored the barriers and challenges, the factors they have encountered as well as the meaning of work - its purpose, importance and function to them personally. The personas act as a vehicle to gain a greater understanding of the user group, to explore their needs, aspirations, barriers, expectations, and current circumstances and help them to identify, set and achieve goals by asking:

- Where are people starting from?
- What are their issues of concern?
- Where do they want to go?

Key elements of creating personas and user journey mapping are storytelling, empathy and visual communication. Stories are an effective way to communicate and express aspirations, beliefs, and values. User Journey maps use stories as an effective way to communicate the user's experience and lead to meaningful solutions or outcomes, creating a story mapping of transformational journeys that are grounded in lived experience. Connecting with users and how they feel about their experiences reveals barriers and opportunities from the users' perspective. Developing empathy also enables user-centred decision making rather than a 'top-down' approach. User Journey mapping also aims to establish a shared vision amongst users, even though they may have different trajectories on their individual journeys.

In the storytelling workshop, participants were asked to share their experiences of employment and to explore pathways into and out of unemployment. The format of the workshops involved dividing the group into smaller groups of around six participants. Each group was asked to create a persona that they thought was typical of people in the community. Once they had chosen and described their character, they then went on to create a story, drawing on their personal life experiences and their knowledge of the community. The purpose of the stories is to identify local people's perceptions of the issues and possible opportunities that exist for the target group using their local knowledge and lived experience. We have used persona storytelling in several previous community-based projects, and it seemed appropriate to use this method as a way into the issues facing the community in Lambeth. We asked each sub-group to consider a different scenario in which the endpoint for their character was to achieve a specific goal. These scenarios were:

- Getting back into work
- Setting up a business
- Moving into an active retirement

We also encouraged participants to explore the following stages of change:

- Why they wanted change - triggers to change to a new life
- What had been holding them back - barriers and challenges to overcome to start
- Where they found help and support - enablers: information sources, mentors, allies
- What new skills, resources and knowledge do they need and where to find them
- What they had to overcome - barriers and challenges along the way
- Progress so far
- How the change can transform their life

Each group started by describing the present circumstances of their character. They then sketched the life course that had led to the present situation of their character. Finally, they mapped out a possible course towards their goal.

The issue list was then used to create an issues map, creating links where we felt that the issues were connected in some way. Again, local knowledge should be used to expand the list of issues and to add known links. Note that we have set the map to analyse the most central issues according to the pattern of connection and have sized the nodes according to their centrality.

All maps were created using Graph Commons software (<https://graphcommons.com/>)

Local research and mapping the Lambeth ecosystem.

The user journey aims to help people explore the social and economic ecosystems of their locality and become active explorers themselves. Identifying potential users' information pathways is crucial at this stage of mapping design. To this end, a database of resources, places, people, events and activities can provide a useful tool for people to find opportunities as the endpoint for a user journey. This research phase of the data collection seeks to identify examples of opportunities and resources, both formal and informal that are available in the community. Identifying existing hubs of information and service providers, for example, volunteering, employment, community and faith groups, and grassroots knowledge will build a database that is meaningful and relevant to the user groups. In Lambeth, we asked:

- Where are the 'go-to' places for opportunities?
- What are they offering?
- How do they link with the user journeys?
- Where are the gaps?

Using the list of issues, we searched the internet for organisations acting in Lambeth to address them. Through our online research we added the groups and organisations mentioned by participants in the storytelling workshop. An important finding from the workshop was that participants could only identify a few local groups and organisations that they would turn to for support and advice for their persona.

The organisations network map shows the listed organisations and their connections as described on their websites. Informal working connections between organisations, which may play a major part in the way they work, can only be established by further survey, interview or local knowledge. Again, the nodes are sized by centrality.

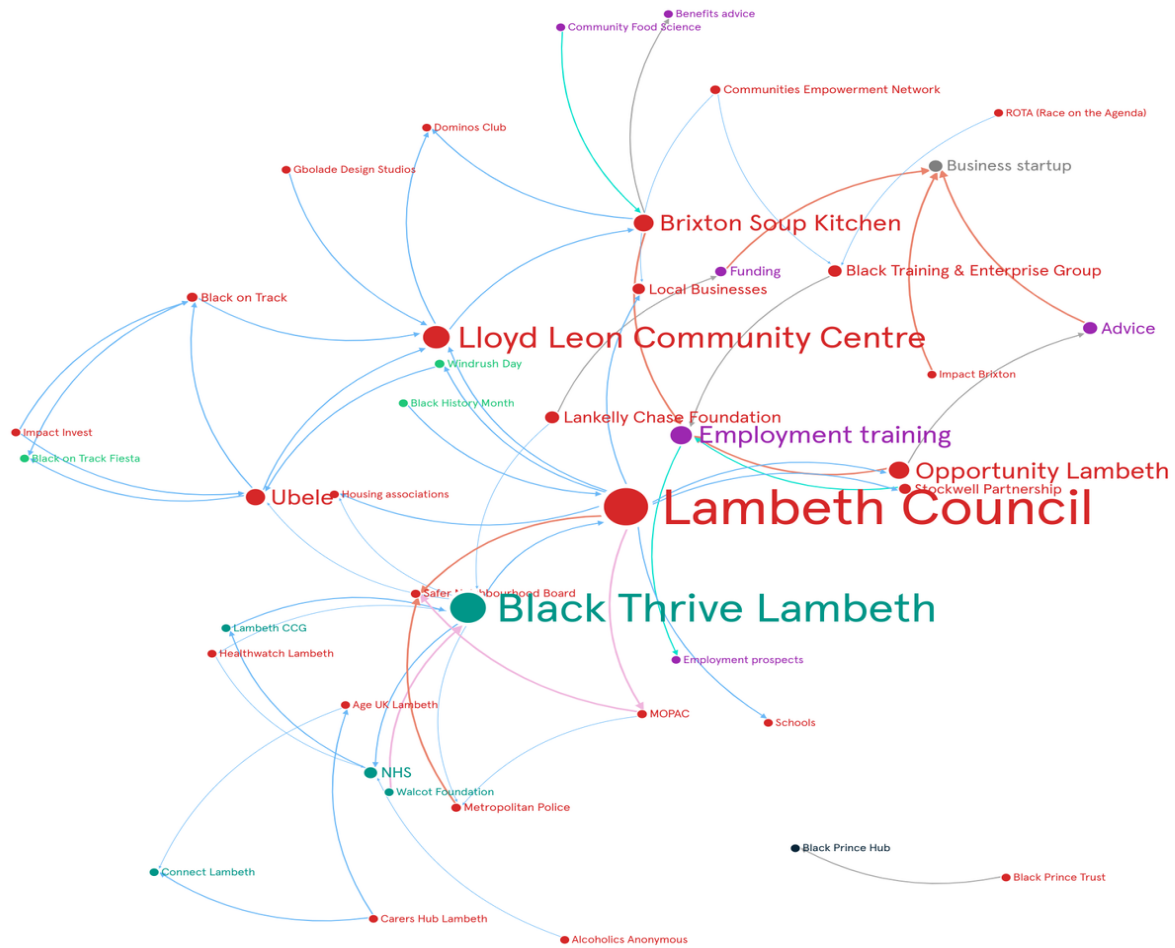


Figure 6. Lambeth organisations network map

The Composite Map

We started the map construction as described above by mapping the issues identified in the storytelling workshop and their possible connections – asking what are the influences between issues? For example, isolation may lead to loneliness and have implications for mental health. Having mapped out the set of issues, we then considered which organisations have an interest in addressing these. This led to research into the capabilities and collaborations between these organisations as expressed on their websites, which provided a description and a set of connections for the map

The Composite Map shows the issues (in blue), organisations (in red) and possible opportunities (in purple) - note these classifications are still in development). We have divided organisations into ‘frontline’ - who deal directly with the target group - and ‘second tier’ who support the frontline organisations through funding, advice, research and so on.

Navigating the Map: Data Cards.

Each clickable node on the maps contains data that has been:

- Collected from the websites of organisations
- Gleaned from issue definitions researched on the internet. Where there are specific factors that pertain to an issue in Lambeth, we have added them to the common description.

A typical data card is shown below. It describes the organisation and contact details. On the right of the card is a list of the organisations that it works with (red) and the issues it addresses (blue). That list is organised by the number of connections these nodes have with the most at the top. Clicking on a node will take you to the data card for that node... and so on. You can explore the map and its relationships entirely at the card level if you want to (see a later idea for a card game based on this process).

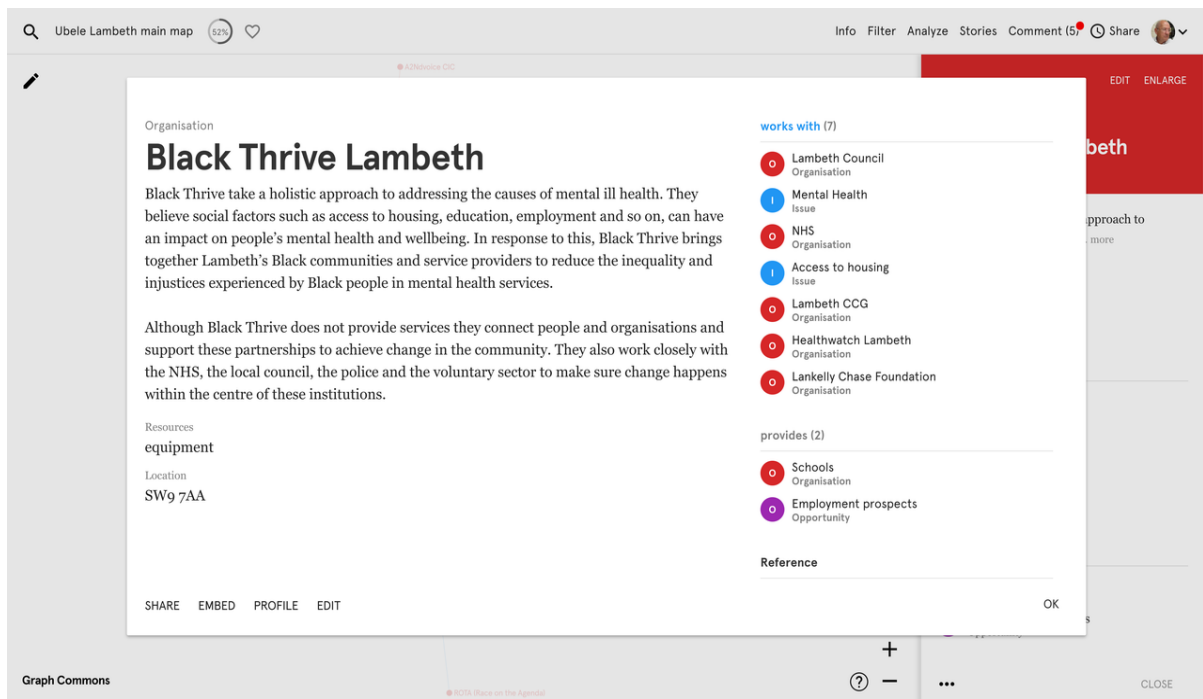


Figure 8. A map card example

User pathways through the map

The following section deals with how the map might be used to assist both individuals and organisations seeking advice and support for their future development. The next step is to use the personas to explore user journeys or pathways of discovery in a systematic way, often described as 'sensemaking' in seeking solutions to complex problems.⁴ As well as analysing the overall structure of the network we can use the map to trace pathways of development for both individuals and organisations using the following steps:

1. Select the issues facing the individual or organisation by clicking on these while holding down the shift key. The organisations that address these issues – those that may be able to provide advice and/or support – will appear as a list on the right-hand side of the screen.
2. Clicking on an organisation in the list will bring up its data card with a description of what it does, a link to its website and contact details.
3. Hit the link to a website to be taken there to explore in detail what that organisation has to offer.
4. Record the contact details of the organisations that are the best fit to assist.
5. Contact the most appropriate organisation to see how it can help.

The methods of analysis cited above are useful in gauging the overall capabilities of the network of organisations to address user issues. The patterns revealed by the map are useful in thinking about how to improve service delivery and collaboration of all sorts for the target group across Lambeth. It can help Ubele and others identify opportunities for change and the leverage points that might be most effective in achieving that change.

However, the maps that have emerged from the storytelling workshop and desktop research are not tools that are necessarily easily accessible to members of the public who may not have access to the internet and are probably unfamiliar with network maps and associated technology. There is potential here for future training in network mapping and analysis for local organisations and agencies so that they can use these map tool to implement the process.

To address this issue of useability the final phase of the systems map development sequence is the creation of a tool derived from the issues and resource mapping and refigured as a game that can be played live or in online workshop settings. The game also acts as an engagement ‘attractor’ to engage participants who may be reluctant to engage with official support agencies and information through more conventional channels. The game was designed as a Domino game to link it to the Lloyd Leon Community Centre (also known as the Domino Club), a hub for Black enterprise in the Borough.

The Domino Game.

(The following section will be turned into players and facilitator’s instructions as we develop and test the game)

Purpose

The game aims to use the issue and information cards to explore individual participants user journeys to help them to find the assistance and support they need to improve their situation and achieve their target goals.

Players

Player’s form teams of 3 people. They don’t play against each other but form a discussion group to explore the map (online a facilitator is assigned each group to record decisions onscreen).

Materials

The ‘Dominoes’ are the data cards from the Graph Commons map. Each node has a card that shows:

- A description of the organisation or issue
- The URL associated with its website
- A list of the other nodes it is linked with

The cards represent the issues shown on the map and the organisations that address these issues in Lambeth and are generated by the mapping software.

Outcomes

- Familiarity with the map through the card structure.
- Discussion around the assistance available to the target group based on
 - The map
 - The experience and expertise of the players’
 - Additional data to be fed into the process by the players.

Due to Covid pandemic restrictions the Domino Game workshop was held online with participants choosing issue and organisation cards from the map and the cards being manipulated by the facilitator using Quip software. Ideally the game is played in a live setting with the issue and organisation cards printed as card decks. Card types are indicated by different coloured borders.

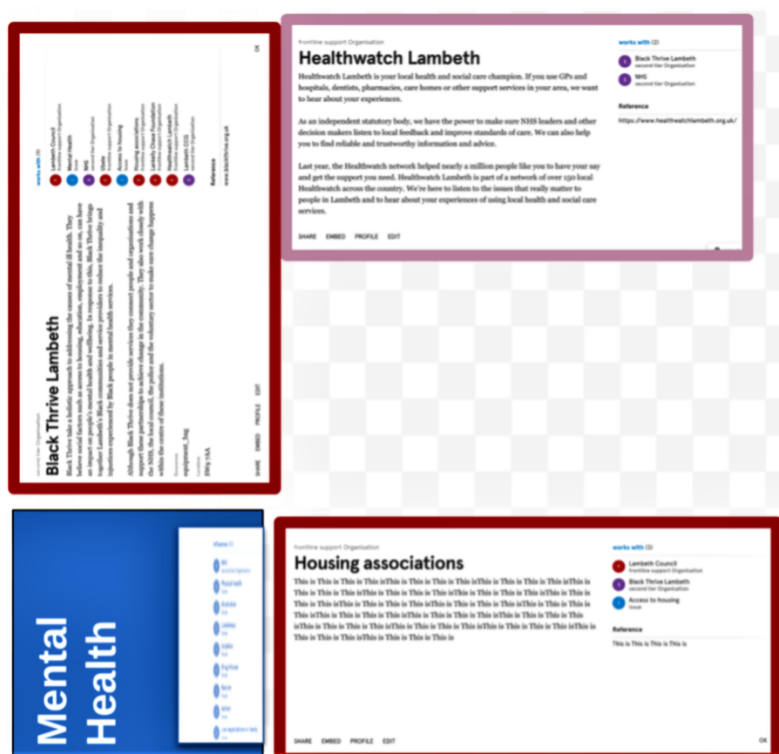


Figure 9. A screenshot of the Domino Game being played online.

Conclusion

The inequalities facing Black and minoritised communities, historically embedded in the racism and discrimination that greeted the Windrush and other migrants coming to Lambeth from Africa and the Caribbean Islands to rebuild the post war economy has gone substantially unchallenged by public policy initiatives for decades. In recent years the established Black communities in Lambeth have faced a new challenge, with the influx of wealthy, predominantly white middle class people moving in. The resulting pressures of gentrification are relentless, driven by property development and an ideology of economic improvement and progress that continue to marginalise communities and erode their cultural presence. As Roger Robinson writes:

The danger with gentrification is that it breaks up long-held communities and bonds and histories without acknowledging and valuing them. Brixton has resisted gentrification before and it will again but a lot of energy and resources are being placed into the process of its gentrification, far more than the resources that were available to support its long-time inhabitants.⁵

In his poem *New Maps*, which we began this piece with, he vividly laments the disappearance of the signifiers of Black culture, the sound of reggae music and the rumbling bass of the sound system culture, the diverse cultural foodscape that used to exist in Old Brixton Market, and local space and identity lost to a new white, middle-class aesthetic.⁶ Gentrification has also impacted existing businesses and start-up opportunities, seeing the closure of many traditional Black African and Caribbean shops, cafes and market stalls.

Even more recently London's Black and minoritised communities have been impacted disproportionately by the Covid-19 pandemic, exposing health inequalities and access to social infrastructures and services. A situation that has highlighted the discrepancies faced by Black community organisations and groups – revealing inequalities in access to resources, partnerships and alliances. The Black Lives Matter movement has highlighted the injustices Black communities face, and the urgent need to eradicate racial inequalities in Lambeth and other multi-racial communities both in London and the UK generally. Policies and practices are urgently needed to tackle the root causes of systemic racism and discrimination that reproduce poverty and deprivation in all minoritised communities.

Our pilot social systems mapping has revealed a lack of connectedness between the network of support groups and organisations that limits the potential for resources to be channelled to those most in need. Participants have said that they don't know where to look for support, information and help to change their economic and health related difficulties. Working with the social systems mapping framework and the Domino Game provides communities with a methodology with which they can visualise firstly the real needs of citizens by mapping their lived experience through storytelling and secondly the strengths and weaknesses of the social ecosystem through network mapping of the community resource base. The pathways through the map enable community organisations to work together to build networks and alliances to identify the true needs of Black and minority communities.

This is a methodology that gives the voices of Black and minority communities a central role in the process of identifying issues and resolving them. The user journey storytelling and the resulting Domino Game are effective engagement tools for individuals and user groups to use to

begin conversations and come together to build community and individual resilience and strategies to facilitate change that is led by them and not done to them.

The Network Maps are not static – they will grow as more issues and resources are added through future workshops. The mapping and game process have great potential as tools to tackle other so-called ‘wicked’ problems.

Authors

Dr Barbara Brayshay is a Director of Livingmaps and a section editor for Living Maps Review. Barbara has an academic background in Environmental Science and Bioarchaeology and was previously a lecturer in Environmental Change at the University of Manchester. More recently her work has focused on community consultation, specialising in the use of participatory mapping in the areas of social justice, community development and sustainability.

Drew Mackie, originally an architect and urban designer, has worked for over 30 years with communities all over the UK on regeneration projects with a particular emphasis on continuing public involvement. In the course of this work, he has used games and group storytelling to engage local people and explore possible futures. For the last 10 years he has used network mapping to visualise and analyse the collaborative connections between agencies, community groups and key individuals in order to improve network resilience and delivery performance. He’s a past Chair of the International Simulation and Gaming Association (ISAGA) and has taught and examined at Universities in UK, Europe and the US.

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Notes

¹ Greater than the Sum (2021) *What is Social Systems Mapping?* <https://greaterthanthesum.com/what-is-social-system-mapping/>. Accessed online 31/03/2022

² Copeland, S., & de Moor, A., (2018) Community Digital Storytelling for Collective Intelligence: towards a Storytelling Cycle of Trust. *AI & Society* 33(2).

³ Asbjørn Følstad, Knut Kvale, (2018) Customer journeys: a systematic literature review, *Journal of Service Theory and Practice*, <https://doi.org/10.1108/JSTP-11-2014-0261>

⁴ De Moor, A (2018). A Community Network Ontology for Participatory Collaboration Mapping: Towards Collective Impact. *Information*. 9. 151. 10.

⁵ Ahmed, S. (2021) *Roger Robinson on the actuality of gentrification in Brixton*. Roger Robinson - Cities Imaginaries Lecture UCL 20 May 2021. <https://uclurbanlab.medium.com/roger-robinson-on-the-actuality-of-gentrification-in-brixton-9619d3c734a8>

⁶ New Maps: Roger Robinson (2017) https://soundcloud.com/jahtari_records/roger-robinson-new-maps-1