Alone together: the social life of benches

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The Bench Project · Research Aims

- To test how making a film can tell detailed and nuanced stories about encounters, exclusion and wellbeing in outdoor spaces
- To record the ways in which different people use, and think about how they use, benches and other small places of outdoor gathering,
- To explore how the interactions between users of benches may be sociable or may cause problems,
- To find out how spending time outside is good for people, and,
- To understand ways in which public spaces and seating areas are controlled

AHRC Connected Communities Call
Addressing the Challenges of Disconnection, Division and Exclusion
Innovation Grant - January–November 2015

The Un-Sociable Bench, and other urban micro-territories of encounter and intimidation

Project partners

PI - Dr Clare Rishbeth - Lecturer in Landscape Architecture - University of Sheffield
CI - Esther Johnson - Professor of Film and Media Arts - Sheffield Hallam University
CI - Ben Rogaly - Professor of Human Geography - University of Sussex

Community group leaders and fieldworkers

Radhika Bynon - The Young Foundation
Dr Jasber Singh - Greenwich Inclusion Project
Diana Coman - Sutton fieldworker
Samprada Mukha - Woolwich fieldworker

On a day such as this, while roaming around this park, if you see a thousand faces then it is good for you. My ancestors used to say that.

– Chali Kumari, General Gordon Square, Woolwich
RESEARCH PROCESS

Location 1 · General Gordon Square, Woolwich

Spread from Alone Together, the Social Life of Benches DVD booklet, BP028 2015

Location 2 · St Helier Open Space, Sutton

Fieldwork in both Locations · People flux throughout the day and night

Spread from Alone Together, the Social Life of Benches DVD booklet, BP028 2015
Filmmaking Approach
- Observational
- Portrait
- Poetic
- Social sciences

Lived Experience

Oral Testimonies

Interviews with a wide range of visitors to the two locations
Repeat visits and interviewing

Spread from Alone Together, the Social Life of Benches DVD booklet, BPS028 2015
Focus on Sound Design

Mid-edit review sessions
This took place in each location – Sutton and Woolwich. An online link to the rough edit was also available in case contributors preferred this viewing option.