

Photo by Cllr. Jenny Chamberlain

London's digital neighbourhoods study: typology of local websites

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.

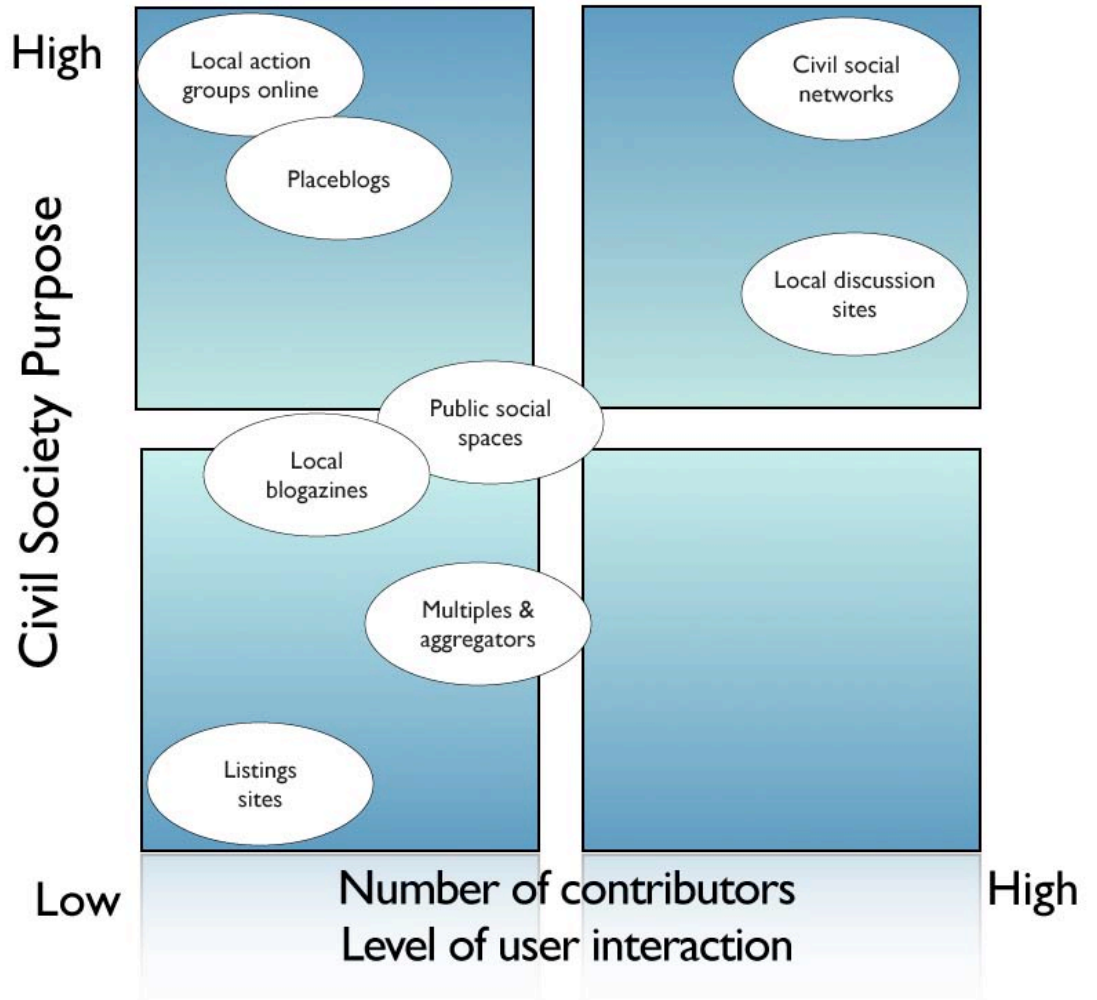
These are early days in the development of neighbourhood websites. As our research review indicates, there have been very few studies of specific local sites and the movement barely registers in the local government world. Many sites are growing and changing rapidly. It follows that any classification 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.



Hugh Flouch and Kevin Harris
Networked Neighbourhoods

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".

The screenshot shows the homepage of Harringay Online, a community website. The header features the logo "Harringayonline COMMUNITY" with the tagline "Connecting the Residents of Harringay". Below the header is a navigation menu with links: Main, Invite, My Page, Discussions, Blogs, Events, Groups, Harringay, Public Services, Gallery, Fun, Members, About, and Manage. The main content area is divided into several sections:

- Events:** A calendar for December 2009 with a table showing dates from 1 to 31. Below the calendar are links for "Last Month" and "Next Month", and a list of events including "Harringay Homeworkers Lunch #2" and "Islington Art Society Christmas Exhibition".
- Harringay Online:** A section describing the website as a double-award winning community network for the neighbourhood of Harringay in the Borough of Haringey. It includes a Google Map and a link to "Questions on signing up?".
- Latest Activity:** A section showing recent user activity, including a picture added by Liz and a discussion added by Liz.
- Right Sidebar:** Contains a "Hugh" profile section with links for "Sign Out", "HoL Mailbox", "Alerts", "Connections - Invite", and "Settings". Below this is a "Notices" section and a "HOL Newswire" section with "Latest Local News" and "Latest Newsletter" links.

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 logo, navigation links (Home, Community, Local Business, Other Discussions, About), and a 'Not signed in (Sign In)' link. The main content area is titled 'All Discussions' and shows a list of recent posts, including 'Book Club Meeting - 26th April', 'Good band needed for party in June', 'Dry cleaner', 'Zebra crossing Florence/Tollington', 'Childcare in Stroud Green', 'Sainsbury's is coming to Stroud Green Road - Woody's is going!', and 'Best Coffee in Stroud Green?'. The left sidebar contains a 'Welcome, Guest' message, a login form, and a Google Ad for 'Hornsey Physio Clinic'. The right sidebar features weather information, a search bar, and several widgets: 'In the area' (local pubs and restaurants), 'Politics' (MP updates and council news), 'Buy stuff' (badges, mugs, and other items), 'Photos' (local photos), and 'Events'.

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.

The screenshot shows the homepage of 'Kings Cross Environment' (www.kingscrossenvironment.com). The main header features the site's name in large white letters on a blue background. Below the header, there are several sections:

- WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU!**: A section encouraging users to share their views and news about the neighborhood.
- Stuff for Kid's This Easter Break**: A featured article with a sub-header 'Attention Parents!' and a row of colorful icons representing various activities like sports, arts, and crafts. The article text discusses downloading pamphlets from Islington Council for Easter break activities.
- Local Youth Charity to Form Girls Karting Team**: A short article mentioning a press release about a local charity's initiative.
- Right Sidebar**: Includes 'BIG LOCAL ISSUES' (linking to 800+ articles), 'SMILE YOU'RE ON TV' (a traffic camera status message), and a 'CATEGORIES' list such as 'Anti Social Behaviour, Crime etc', 'Arts and Entertainment', 'Books', etc.
- Left Sidebar**: Contains an email subscription form, a 'Frequently Asked Questions' section, and a 'FeedBurner' logo.

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 Dorville 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 pipe 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 the Yahoo! Groups interface for the 'SGRA - The Stroud Green Residents' Association'. The page layout includes a top navigation bar with 'Yahoo! Groups' and 'Groups Home' links. A left-hand navigation menu contains options like Home, Messages, Post, Attachments, Files, Photos, Links, Database, Polls, Members, and Calendar. The main content area is titled 'Home' and displays 'Activity within 7 days: 2 New Messages'. Below this is a 'Description' section with the following text:

SGRA is a residents' association in Stroud Green, an area and a Council ward in the London Borough of Haringey

THE association aims to be a voice for residents and to foster a sense of community; and this e-Group is its web version. This web-site serves as a **virtual noticeboard** and as an informal **discussion forum** on local matters.

The **Links** area (left panel) is open to all, including non-Members. You can find links to more than 100 web-sites relevant to Stroud Green. Please report any broken links.

Members can access all services. They can post **Messages** (left) and reply to other Members' messages. In **Polls** you can vote on, amongst other things, which local issues you believe are the most important.

Please tell any neighbours that you think might be interested in joining. There is no cost or obligation. If you would like to **become a Member** of this e-Group, you need to supply your name, address and phone number - one of the objects of SGRA is to encourage residents to get to know one other, which is not always easy in a big city. The approvals process exists mainly to keep-out would-be spammers.

The Web Moderator is Mr. Paul Stork, who also took the featured photograph (alongside), a bee on a sunflower in a local garden.

There will be Members of this Group who don't attend all - or even any - of SGRA's public meetings; and there will be those who attend the meetings in the library but who don't join this Group (some not having Internet access).

Clive Carter
Yahoo group "owner"
per pro SGRA committee
[future People map here]

Below the description is a photograph of a sunflower with a bee on its center. At the bottom of the page, there is a 'Most Recent Messages' section with a search bar and a message snippet:

FW: 3 More Reasons
Subject: 3 More Reasons From: nffiretail@... Date: Fri, 11 Dec 2009 10:15:54 +0000 To: kitg190@... Nottingham Forest Half-Season Tickets
Posted - Tue Dec 15, 2009 3:42 pm

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.

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.

The screenshot shows the Dulwich.co.uk website. At the top, there is a search bar with the text "Find a business" and an example "e.g. Restaurant, Florist, Primary School etc." and a "Search" button. Below the search bar is a map of Dulwich, London, with various landmarks and roads labeled. A text box on the map reads: "Dulwich.co.uk helps you discover and share the best of your local area. Search or browse our directory and find local businesses and customer reviews. Do you have a business in Dulwich? You can advertise on this site for free." Below the map is a button that says "Add your business".

Below the map is a section titled "Find businesses and organisations by category" with two columns of links:

Arts, Culture & Entertainment	Accommodation & Tourism
Bars, Pubs & Nightlife	Travel & Transportation
Restaurants & Take-aways	Cars & Motoring
Food & Drink Shopping	Charities & Non-Profits
Shopping	Education & Public Services
Sports & Recreation	Financial & Legal
Places of Worship	Professional Services
Health & Beauty	Home Services

To the right of the categories is a section titled "Photos of Dulwich" with a grid of 16 small images showing various scenes from the area, including buildings, parks, and streets.

Examples

[Wimbledon Visitor](#)
[Dulwich.co.uk](#)
[My Village](#)
[Your local London](#)

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
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

With thanks to: Our partners



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