

Connectivity and conflict in periods of austerity: Methodological Note

The review used the methodology of realist synthesis (Pawson, 2006) which aims to straddle the divide between systematic reviews, such as the Campbell Collaboration, and more narrative literature syntheses. The focus of the review methodology is to describe theories of change that lead to a particular outcome and then identify families of mechanisms that implement this theory of change. The focus of the review should be on finding evidence of these mechanisms and of contextual factors that enable them to produce specific outcomes. The focus of realist syntheses is usually policy interventions and identifying what particular mechanisms of policy intervention might achieve a desired outcome. In our review, the outcome is not necessarily desired, but there is a broad, if not contested, literature on the unequal use and outcomes of public services. This review was specifically focused on the theory that it was middle class activism that might lead to these outcomes. The focus on mechanisms within realist synthesis was therefore particularly suitable to understanding more fully how the accrual of this middle class advantage might come about.

We reviewed a total of 65 papers (table 1). The first stage in the literature search was the identification of possible synonyms for key search terms from a broad range of specific thesauruses. Two databases were then searched, CSA Illumina and Web of Knowledge to build an initial bibliography. This was then filtered by the research team down to a core set of articles. Cross-checking of a sample of this filtering was carried out and showed no major disagreements on whether a study should have been included or excluded from the review. From these, reference-chaining was used to identify further research, for example from outwith the historical scope of the databases. This was supplemented by additional searches on other keywords used within the literature emerged.

Policy domain	Countries	Number of papers reviewed
Childcare	England	2
Education	England, US, Norway	28
Health services	UK, US	13
Emergency services	US	3
Environmental services	UK	3
Land use planning	UK	4
Infrastructure investment	US	1
General activism and engagement	UK, US, Norway	13
Total		65

The literature was reviewed thematically by policy domain by the research team, identifying key mechanisms identified within the research. Summaries within each policy domain were then written. Through an iterative process of writing and reflection, these separate evidence bases were then synthesised into the broader, cross-cutting review summarised in the main body of this report. This included bringing in the insights from the wider research base on inequalities in service provision, specifically with a focus on deprived neighbourhoods and poorer individuals and policy analysis, for example around the choice agenda within recent policy.