

THE JECH GALLERY.....

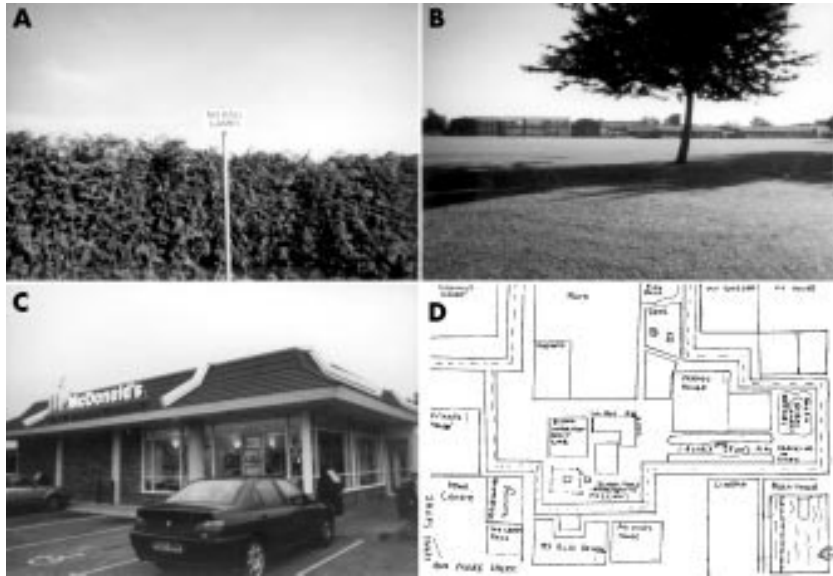
“No ball games”: children’s views of their urban environments

In 1998 and 1999, groups of 12–13 year old and 14–15 year old students in two schools in a town in the south east of England were asked to describe their neighbourhoods, as part of a wider qualitative research project investigating the relation between health and social capital.^{1,2} The research used several different methods, including visual methods, to explore children’s views about places they felt were important to them. The younger group were asked to draw maps; the older group were given disposable cameras, and were asked to photograph (in their free time) “places that are important to me” and then to describe why they had depicted the places they had. This generated about 100 photographs and 17 maps.

Research participants gave verbal consent for their photographs to be used in dissemination. All children retained the negatives of the photographs they had taken; they were offered copies of their photographs (none wanted them). All names in the examples below are self chosen pseudonyms.

The common themes represented were:

- My home, my road or street, grandparents’ and relatives’ houses
- Friends houses, routes to friends’ houses, places to meet up with and hang about with friends
- Schools: the playground, the buildings, their junior schools
- Parks: where to go with friends, to walk the dog, to play football
- Shortcuts: paths and routes, to school, the town centre, to friends’ houses
- Urban landmarks, such as the town hall and the shopping centre
- The local fast food restaurant; shops where they buy lunch or snacks



- Work related: either where they currently have part time jobs, local factories for future work.

A theme that arose in all forms of data from one of the schools was the way in which “No ball games” signs that are on patches of communal grass led to a strong sense of exclusion. Maggie, who took the photograph (panel A) explained: “This is a sign that is on a piece of greenery on my road. It stops children from playing typical games, but little children need somewhere to play . . . They may not be allowed to go to the park”.

Rock, aged 15, photographed a school playing field (panel B), and described how “I play football here—it’s not my old school, it’s next to where I live. There are no dogs, and no adults screaming at you to stop”.

McDonald’s was a feature in photos and several of the maps: Bob, aged 14, described how “I often go there for breakfast” (panel C).

And the map, drawn by Katie, age 14, also features McDonald’s and the “No ball games” sign (panel D).

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References

- 1 Morrow V. *Networks and neighbourhoods: children and young people’s perspectives*. London: Health Development Agency, 2001 (<http://www.hda-online.org.uk/downloads/pdfs/netneigh.pdf>).
- 2 Morrow V. Using qualitative methods to elicit young people’s perspectives on their environments: some ideas for community health initiatives. *Health Education Research: Theory and Practice* 2001;16:255–68.