

a way of life



Stories from my street #1: the street party

There was a street party at the end of my road! I would never have thought something like this would happen on my road.

You only ever read about this kind of stuff in architecture books about community participation. It all sounds so cheesy and forced. Perhaps because that infamous photo where they turfed over a road is in all government documents that talk about sustainable communities. Or getting people to celebrate the queens jubilee or the millennium. All meaningless excuses to force people to enjoy themselves and make them think everything is OK.

I only caught the dying embers of it. Had I known, I wouldn't have gone down to central London. They had plastic tables of different foods, a laptop on big speakers, a few strings of balloons spanning lamppost to bedroom window, and some flags people hung out of their windows. There were cones to stop cars going in on either end. Apparently there were more people before, and 4 policemen at the road blocks, making it look like some kind of 'incident'.

We talked to the main organiser, a polish woman. I liked the fact there was no special reason, she just wanted to do it. However it wasn't that simple. Food and so on was easy (everyone brings a little) But she spent £250 in total in getting permission from

the council, public entertainment licence, alcohol license, and time writing letters to the police, and getting signatures from people on the road that they agreed and would come. I was struck by the effort.

Although they talk about communities, the government doesn't make it easy when someone actually wants to do something. The bureaucracy and presence of police seems completely over the top. It kills initiative, and creates dependency. Whenever there is some problem, the reaction becomes the council should sort it out.

Are streets public space if they are owned and managed by the council, and you can't do what you want without their approval.

Is public space public sector space?