



Regenerating Communities: A Theological and Strategic Critique, 2002 - 5

First Year Synopsis

This is a three year inter-disciplinary and contextual research programme carried out by the William Temple Foundation. Named after Archbishop William Temple, one of the architects of the post-war welfare state in Britain, the WTF as an independent faith research and training organisation operating out of Manchester for the past 30 years, has enabled analysis and theological reflection of major social and economic trends. This present research project represents WTF's ongoing commitment to developing a public theology for the UK which would engage with these important issues from the perspective of a Christian ethical response to what best constitutes human flourishing and freedom within current social, economic and urban trends.

The full report of our first year (2002/3) entitled *Mapping the Boundaries*, is now available at <http://www.wtf.org.uk>. exploring the impact of globalisation on local communities in Manchester, and the role of churches and other faith groups in contributing to local networks of response to rapid urban and social change.

The Problematic addressed by this research

That after 20 years of action by both the church and government policy makers, the problems of poverty which marginalise people, communities and churches have persisted and mutated. This research project is an attempt to get inside that problematic and contribute to it by resolving it.

Methodology and style

The preferred methodological stance of this research is that of *theoretical saturation*. This means that the research will be both inductive (i.e. being open to what emerges from the research) and deductive (i.e. having certain preconceived theories and understandings that it seeks to confirm). The aim is to 'spiral' towards new understandings and contributions to knowledge by alternating cycles of testing out theories that emerge from inductive sources (i.e. qualitative data such as primary and secondary narrative sources, responses to field studies, intuitive processes) with deductive sources (i.e. empirical data generated by statistics). We believe that in order to arrive at a new depth of understanding and analysis of the complex ways global forces shaping the New Manchester are impacting on local neighbourhoods, in respect of the current regeneration debate and the role of churches and other faith groups within it, that such a methodology is appropriate. It has led us to adopt a multi-focal approach to data-gathering which is complex and ambitious. The status of this first year summary is that the process of listening to the dialogue between inductive/deductive and qualitative/quantitative sources of data at both global and local levels is ongoing. In other words, this first year has been about mapping the terrain at a variety of different levels; geographical, theoretical and narrative. This document therefore reflects a description of where we have got to so far, the methods we have used, the processes we have encountered along the way and some of the emerging questions which are appearing. As such it can, in places, tend more to the propositional than analytical and ongoing. **We invite anyone who has an interest in these issues to contribute their insights and responses to this research by 31st January 2004.**

At the end of the first year (October 2002- October 2003) the following findings and strategic responses can be reported, presented at three levels:

Background analysis
Patterns of church response to regeneration
New theories

1) Background Analysis

This research has mapped out the **complexity of post-modern urban change** at great depth by allowing local analysis to interact with global perspectives. This has highlighted fourteen inter-related factors:

- **Proximity of wealth and poverty** - for example, price ratios of at least 4 : 1 between new private housing and social housing stock for sale separated literally by the width of a street.
- **Growth of gated communities** - within areas of general and sustained poverty, based not only on income but also ethnicity (for example overseas health workers coming to work for the NHS).
- **Fear of crime** - almost all new housing has entryphone access only.
- **Evidence of reduced public life and interaction** - in newly redeveloped areas, for example, contrast new Hulme with unreconstructed Moss Side.
- **Decline in local shopping centres** - due to proximity of large-scale retail outlets.
- **Direct relationship between poverty and visibility of religion and ethnic identity** - for example, the visibility of small black house churches in Moss Side .
- **Urban priorities in the new post-modern infrastructure** - for example nightclubs, office space, and city apartments for single professionals are among the first developments in the newly redeveloping Ancoats Urban Village.
- **Rebranding of areas** - usually to rid them of past associations with crime.
- **Huge influxes of global immigration** - into poor urban areas where the housing market has collapsed, leading to **transience and mobility** at the lower end of the economic spectrum and a shift in the religious-cultural identity of an area, for example the visible impact of African Islam in Moss Side in the past 5 years and the first significant populations of ethnic minorities into white-only areas.
- **Transience and mobility in regenerated areas** - due to impact of student populations and high levels of rented accommodation for professionals working in the city.
- **Appearance of second homes** - in newly gentrified areas close to city centre.
- **Explosion of sports, leisure and retailing** on sites of previous heavy manufacturing and associated infrastructure over the last 10 years - for example, Manchester's Velodrome, built in 1994 for an Olympic bid, on the site of a huge power station; The Commonwealth Stadium built in 2002 on the site of Bradford Colliery
- **Rebranding of the city centre as a city of liveability** - the apparent tolerance and diversity of lifestyles and identities supported by designated zones for retailing, entertainment, culture and tourism (e.g. Gay Village, Sport City, Chinatown - each expressed in iconic architecture) belies growing poverty and ill-health in areas of

Manchester not yet touched by regeneration. This raises the concept of ‘cosmetic’ regeneration

- **Increasing impact of the airport** - on poorer local communities, in terms of attracting new transport infrastructure and new private house building and the proliferation of business parks on the edge of poor communities. While this provides some local employment, the evidence is that most of the investment generated by these processes flows beyond the immediately local (say 5 mile radius) towards Manchester, Greater Manchester, The North-West region, the national economy and back out into the global economy

In short, these fourteen processes reflect a retreat into privatised space, as fear of crime and social disorder increases. This is despite an image of tolerance and inclusivity promoted by the gentrification process and the new city centre development. Meanwhile globalisation processes associated with the growth of the universities, the airport and the need to attract inward investment - as well as influxes of new generations of immigrants from increasingly poor and violent situations - is generating huge amounts of local transience and mobility, across all socio-economic groups. The wider story is how spaces that previously had strong local identities based on monocultures of employment are being colonised by other groups and uses at an astonishing rate. This is leading to fragmentation and displacement as established communities move out and new communities come in. It is also creating unique wealth/poverty/ethnic/ religious mixes. However, physical proximity is not yet matched by social proximity and interaction. Rather there is an appearance of nesting monocultures or enclaves, i.e. monocultures within monocultures, which is most obvious as one walks round changing areas of Manchester. Changes that might have taken a generation to occur are now happening within timespans of 5 -10 years.

The further background analysis relevant to the first year of this research relates to its interdisciplinary nature. We are in dialogue with, among other fields:

Urban Theory - especially that connected with the rise of the megacity, the growing role of global cities in connecting flows of investment and information, and post-modern readings of urban space

Theories of Local Civil Society, Social Capital and Regeneration - these three interrelated areas are proliferating and are highly influential in strategic responses to creating more sustainable and vibrant local communities

Urban Theology - namely the changing role and identity of the church in post-modern urban space and what it says about the nature of Christian faith in the 21st century

Cultural and Political Theory - especially those theories relating to post-colonial understandings of reality and society. Significant amongst these theories are notions of hybridity and diversity, not only cultural and ethnic but also political, within contested urban spaces, and the related question of how to promote an inclusive political process that includes the many new voices of the city, especially the poor. Models of participative democracy (including networks and partnerships) are of increasing significance in this domain.

Anthropological Theory - particularly those theories which emphasise the importance of social memory to a community or group’s identity in the city or neighbourhood undergoing rapid and traumatic change, and the relationship between these processes and significant nodal points in people’s landscapes.

2) Patterns of Church Response to Regeneration

The research uncovered (through field visits and semi-structured interviews) a generally disempowered view of the churches' role in newly-changing urban areas. Those **outside** the church had little direct knowledge of the churches and grassroots faith groups and tended to deal through one or two gatekeepers. Those with more direct knowledge and experience of local church and faith communities were very aware of the gap between expectation by central and local government and what can actually be delivered.

Perceptions of the role and identity of the church, gathered from field visits to local areas of Manchester undergoing regeneration and other urban change, touched on:

- Sustainability - most churches are reaching critical levels of membership and financial sustainability. Most physical assets are shabby and 'objects of senseless anger.'
- Memory and past glories - as areas change so memories of what the churches did and stood for are being erased, e.g. Hulme. Closest connection with communities seems to be at points of crisis e.g. redevelopment and gun crime. Once areas have been 'regenerated' and the community appears to be in a safer, more prosperous (but also more privatised space), the church appears disorientated and disconnected.
- Inadequacy of incarnational/servant theology models - churches need to have a more assertive theology/stance in demanding support and recognition from the wider community, regeneration partners and other sections of the CVS.
- Perception of assets -these are perceived by the wider community in terms of local leadership rather than physical assets, thus creating further sense of institutional invisibility.
- Tense relationship with regeneration industry - the church can sometimes feel exploited and conscious of the need to offer alternatives, 'a different rhythm, a sense of space and long-term sustainability.'

The background to these perceptions of the church and faith-based communities is the commitment by Central Government to target substantial amounts of regeneration money on those areas of England that have been measured as the poorest. In recognition of past failures at redevelopment of poor urban areas, the emphasis this time is on the long-term (10-20 years) in the form of; private/public partnership; commitments to consultation and political participation by grass-roots communities in delivering regeneration outcomes (especially the NDC programme); and an enhanced role for the community and voluntary sector to be deliverers of public services on the ground. Increasingly important to these outcomes is the role of the faith communities who are perceived to be closer to those in real need and to have existing structures of volunteering and outreach into the community that should be useful to the wider regeneration project. Important themes to emerge from the semi-structured interviews are:

Process Issues

- Regeneration has entered a new phase characterised by uncertainty, apprehension and determined confidence by some. The rhetoric of regeneration is unravelling after initial optimism, as processes take longer and are more complex than envisaged. This is especially true of initial expectation by government of faith communities' ability to deliver social cohesion and other regeneration tasks.

- Who controls regeneration processes and what does that do to people? For example, central government attempts to control regeneration processes by performance and micro-management while also financially rewarding initiative and networking at the local level. The result can lead to high levels of frustration, anxiety and cynicism.
- A strong feeling of parallel universes emerges despite efforts and new structures designed to bring the two together. Indeed the two sets of typologies seem generally polarised and mistrustful.
- Growth and empowerment of grassroots through the regeneration process appears restricted to a few.
- Genuine rapport and understanding between regeneration managers and clients is based on long periods of interaction and long hours of working together. It appears restricted to a handful of people at the heart of the processes. For them it can be exciting. This contrasts with what feels like the apathy or indifference of the wider community.
- Disempowerment is experienced at all levels but more acutely by those in the 'management' typologies who exhibit greater feelings of uncertainty about the long-term sustainability of what they are being asked to do. Those working at local community level seem more empowered and work to clearer agendas.
- Need to deliver outputs and targets, especially spending money, is short-circuiting the processes of trust and accountability needed to create sustainable relationships between partners.
- Transference of feelings and roles between the experts and the clients - parent/child dynamics - sometimes the children are naughty and ungrateful, sometimes they are innocent and in need of guidance.

Language issues

- General euphemisms for poverty and redistribution deployed, especially by performance managers.
- Language of regeneration often works to disempower those who feel they have to speak it. It prevents interviewees from saying what they really want to say. Regeneration networks feel as bureaucratic and top-heavy as the institutions they are supposed to replace.
- Language of colonisation and oppression from those on the receiving end of regeneration, or at least those who speak on their behalf.
- Language used to describe perceptions of the role of faith communities and churches is generally formulaic, learnt from government guidance.

Physical issues

- Manchester's regeneration often appears to over rely on 'spin' and is interpreted by some as 'cosmetic' while levels of poverty, unemployment and health (for example) show few signs of improvement.
- Regeneration is perceived to displace poverty, crime and exclusion to other parts of the city rather than dealing with the underlying causes.
- Trickle-down/snowball economic models of regeneration are actively promoted. This feels positivist and self-explanatory to those who express it, without necessarily firm evidence or long-term experience to prove it.

- The chain of events established by the injection of large amounts of money and infrastructure is far from predictable.

With the regeneration process entering what the research is identifying as a second and more fragile phase (i.e. from a position of optimism and expectation to realism and less certainty about future outcomes), the role of churches and other faith groups have an increasingly significant role. Positive contributions churches make (according to this research) are; marking major life events in the lives of individuals and communities, thus preserving a sense of community identity; bringing together a wide-diversity of people; being strongly committed to social cohesion based on ethical and worship activities; inculcating values supportive of engagement in the wider community; containing a wide range of skills and experience and; often understanding the true nature of the impact of large-scale and disruptive regeneration on people's lives.

In the light of this analysis, the following questions are asked:

- Within what appears to be a polarised and fragile regeneration process, what is the best role the churches can play? To what extent should they accommodate or dissent from the regeneration matrix? And how?
- To what extent will central government's desire to engage faith communities and churches disempower their identity and way of working? The Church needs to develop genuinely alternative discourses, words and concepts that are readily understood, don't reflect jargon, and refer to processes and experiences as much as outputs. Above all the church needs to develop a discourse of *empowerment*.
- How can the church authorities best release churches at local levels to perform these roles?
- How can faith groups and others take time to develop more sophisticated and truer understandings of identities each partner has, rather than having to rely on stereotypical understandings?
- Can the churches ensure their own power structures don't replicate the dynamics experienced elsewhere in the regeneration matrix?

3) *New Theories*

To help develop answers to these questions this research is developing three new areas of theory.

1) **Typologies of Church engagement**

So far three main typologies have been identified for church engagement in rapidly restructuring urban space, but more are likely to emerge. These are the; local/institutional church, the cluster church and the network church. Initial evaluation of the relative strengths and weaknesses of these typologies are available in the full copy of the report.

2) **Hybrid Church**

The idea of Hybridity, as used in the context of plural and diverse urban space, is committed to creating genuinely new identities and discourses from the plurality and diversity caused by global migrations of ideas, cultures and peoples. It takes seriously the challenge and potential of the post-

modern world and aims to be flexible, but pragmatic in its goal of creating public, local spaces where diversity is welcomed and new commonalities are explored. This is a departure from previous ecclesiology which has been negative and defensive towards the post-modern world.

In this context therefore a hybrid church would look primarily to the **methodology of hybridisation** rather than seek to be doctrinally hybrid. By this I mean the church would be **willing to engage in an interdisciplinary way**, avoiding simplistic binary analysis, and flexibly enough to incorporate the typologies of church identified above within if not a single organism, then a more formalised network of connected faith communities that recognises the strengths and limitations of each typology. The assertion being made here is that **there is no one size fits all approach or typology**. Instead what is required is an open, proactive and creative approach to seeing how the best of these typologies can be brought to bear within local settings. Ideas of how a network could be best sustained is contained within reflection on alternative processes of participative democracy; recent work by Wainwright, Young, and others are fruitful examples for churches to dialogue with.

3) Collusion versus Collision Spectrum

This model takes up the concerns about empowerment in relation to partnership and consultation which have emerged powerfully during this research. It is suggesting this: overt collusion with the agenda of the regeneration matrix is seen as disempowering for all those engaged in it, while overt collision - i.e. a rejection of the assumptions and ethos of the regeneration matrix - leads to self-imposed marginalisation, self-selected disempowerment. In order to negotiate a way between these two, church-based communities need to position themselves both ideologically and methodologically somewhere in-between. The space in the middle is self-consciously and proactively broad-based. From here the church can prepare to work with a number of different partners in varying degrees of informal or formalised, relationships. It can work in an interdisciplinary way - i.e. prepared to engage with other disciplines in order better to understand the nature of the post-modern urban environment in which they work - and yet remain radically local and contextualised. The alternative to collusion/collision requires institutional structures of management and support that allow the faith-based groups on the ground to work in whatever way is most effective at the local level, and to be proactive in that support.

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