



Regenerating Communities – the view from the ground, and how the Church might help

Regenerating Communities: A Theological and Strategic Critique is a three year research programme (2002 – 5) being headed by Revd Dr Christopher Baker and 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-based 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 will engage, from the perspective of a Christian ethical response, with what best constitutes human flourishing and freedom within current social, economic and urban trends.

The full report of our first year entitled *Mapping the Boundaries* (2002/3) is now available at <http://www.wtf.org.uk>. We are 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 Major Issues addressed by this research

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

We are using 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) sources of data. The status of this first year summary is work in progress. **We invite anyone who has an interest in these issues to contribute their insights and responses to this research by the 31st January 2004.**

What we are researching is the impact of globalisation on local communities in Manchester, and the role of churches and other faith groups in responding to it.

At the end of the first year (October 2002- October 2003) the research has considered:

- The background to regeneration in Manchester, and elsewhere
- The churches' response to it
- New thinking, by a range of writers, about regeneration and community

Background

We've discovered that the picture of change within Manchester is very complex. We've been studying local details of 'regenerating' communities (using field trips—more of that later) and then looking at the data provided by the local studies in the light of current theories about social change, cities and regeneration globally. Thinking about this has revealed distinct themes to the pattern of regeneration projects in Manchester:

- **There is a 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.
- **There are more 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 seems widespread**- almost all new housing has entryphone access only.
- **There is evidence of reduced public life and interaction** - in newly redeveloped areas, for example, contrast new Hulme with unreconstructed Moss Side.
- **There is a decline in local shopping centres** - due to proximity of large-scale retail outlets.
- **Religion and ethnic identity appear to be more visible, the poorer an area is** - for example, the visibility of small black house churches in Moss Side.
- **The newly rebuilt parts of the city have distinct priorities** - for example, nightclubs, office space, and city apartments for single professionals are among the first developments in the newly redeveloping Ancoats Urban Village.
- **Some areas are being rebranded** - usually to rid them of past associations with crime.
- **There has been an increase in the number of immigrants** - into poor urban areas where the housing market has collapsed. This creates a population that is 'just passing through', and can also change the religious-cultural identity of an area, for example there has been a visible impact of African Islam in Moss Side in the past 5 years, and the first significant populations of ethnic minorities are beginning to move into Wythenshawe.
- **Areas that are being regenerated often have 'just passing through' populations** - often these are students populations, or professionals paying a high rent to live near the city.
- **There are more second homes than there used to be** - in newly gentrified areas close to city centre.
- **There has been an explosion of sports, leisure and retailing** on old industrial sites 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 and The Commonwealth Stadium built in 2002 on the site of Bradford Colliery.
- **Manchester city centre is being rebranded as 'liveable'** - there is an apparent tolerance and diversity of lifestyles and identities with designated zones for retailing, entertainment, culture and tourism (e.g. Gay Village, Sport City, Chinatown - each with its distinctive architecture) but this belies growing poverty and ill-health in areas of Manchester not yet touched by regeneration. This in turn raises the question: is Manchester's regeneration 'cosmetic'?
- **The airport is growing in impact** - on poorer local communities, in terms of attracting new transport services and new private house building and more 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

These fourteen processes show Mancunians retreating into privatised space, as fear of crime and social disorder increases. This is despite strong images about the city being tolerant and inclusive of many different communities, and despite the new 'posh' city centre development. Manchester's Universities are growing, so is the airport as Manchester tries to compete in a fiercely competitive global market place, and with growth of big money into the city, more and more new generations of immigrants arrive, often from increasingly poor and violent situations, the populations and communities within Manchester are shifting and changing faster and faster -across all income groups. Places that previously had strong local identities based on one big employer are taking in other groups, who are using the areas in different ways, at an astonishing rate. Existing communities are breaking up, people are moving within their area, or out of it altogether. New communities are flowing in to the spaces created. All this change and flow is also mixing up levels of wealth, poverty and ethnic and religious mixes. But people living near to each other do not necessarily know each other, or get to know each other. It is more like 'each to his own' with separate little worlds nesting in each other, unknown to each other. You can see this as you walk around changing areas of Manchester- changes that might have taken a generation to occur are now happening within timespans of 5 -10 years.

Many people have been writing and thinking about the types of changes we are studying—the interrelation between local and global, changing cities, and the response of the church to all this. These are some of the fields of study which we have found fruitful as we think about what is happening in our sites in Manchester:

- *Urban Theory*, this includes the rise of the 'megacity'; the importance of cities in connecting flows of money and information globally.
- *Theories of Local Civil Society, Social Capital and Regeneration* - these three interrelated areas are growing—the thinking behind them could influence what we actually do to create more sustainable and vibrant local communities
- *Urban Theology* - the changing role and identity of the church in today's cities, and what this says about the nature of Christian faith in the 21st century
- *Cultural and Political Theory* - we are interested in theories relating to post-colonial ideas, especially the concepts of hybridity and diversity. We see these concepts as relevant not only to cultural and ethnic aspects of peoples' lives, but also to political processes—particularly within contested urban spaces. One question arising is : how can we promote a political process that includes the many new voices of the city, especially the poor. Participative democracy is particularly relevant here.
- *Anthropological Theory* - particularly ideas which emphasise the importance of social memory to a community or group's identity—that is the memories that a group of people may have, as a group, and how the group perceive themselves and their story. This is obviously relevant to a city or neighbourhood undergoing rapid and traumatic change. Peoples' memories, the groups they belong to, the way they tell their stories and where—all these create internal maps by which individuals may navigate their way around a physically changing scene.

2) Patterns of Church Response to Regeneration

We went on field visits to our chosen sites (which are listed later), and spoke with people in semi-structured interviews, and this revealed a generally disempowered view of the churches' role in newly-changing parts of the city. 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 what central and local government expected and what can actually be delivered.

On the field visits we tried to gain a picture of how the churches in those areas were doing, and how they were perceived. We considered the following things:

- Sustainability - most churches have small memberships and are low on money. Buildings etc. are shabby, sometimes even 'objects of senseless anger', meaning they are attacked.
- Memory and past glories - as areas change so memories of what the churches did and stood for disappear e.g. Hulme. The Church seems to connect most closely with communities at points of crisis e.g. redevelopment and gun crime. Then, 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.
- Limitations of incarnational/servant theology models - churches need to be more assertive in demanding support and recognition from the wider community, regeneration partners and other sections of the CVS.
- What do people think the church has to offer? The wider community mainly sees churches in terms of local leadership, rather than actually based in church buildings. This creates a sense of invisibility for the churches.
- How do churches relate to the regeneration industry? Sometimes by feeling exploited. Also the church may want to offer alternatives, 'a different rhythm, a sense of space and long-term sustainability.'

Currently there is a commitment by Central Government to target substantial amounts of regeneration money on those areas of England that have been measured as the poorest, and this is the background to these perceptions of the church and faith-based communities. It is recognised that past attempts to redevelop poor urban areas have failed, and this time the emphasis is on the long-term view—10-20 years. This time round the government is offering various forms of partnership and co-operation as a central part of how it is regenerating areas. It is promoting, in the business sphere, private/public partnership; in terms of reaching out to the communities who are to be 'regenerated' it is committed to consulting them on what is planned; and it is encouraging political participation by grassroots communities, especially the NDC programme. As well as this, there is intended to be a bigger role for the community and voluntary sector in delivering public services on the ground. And wrapped up in the effectiveness of all this 'getting together' are the faith communities who are perceived to be closer to those in real need and to have existing volunteers and links into the community that should be useful to the wider regeneration project.

Important themes to emerge from the semi-structured interviews are:

The processes involved in regeneration

- Regeneration has entered a new phase—more uncertain than it was. Some of the early optimism and certainty is unravelling and the honeymoon period is over. It takes longer and it is more difficult to achieve regeneration than was first thought. This applies to the expectations that government had that faith communities would be able to bind communities together somehow.
- Who controls regeneration processes and what does that do to people? For example, central government attempts to control regeneration processes by setting up targets, tables and other measurements of progress, as well as many rules governing conduct. At the same time it financially rewards initiative and networking at the local level. There often feels like a mismatch between giving power to local groups, and then taking it away again in targets and redtape. The result can be high levels of frustration, anxiety and cynicism.
- There is a feeling of parallel universes emerging, between the planners and the doers, despite efforts and new structures designed to bring the two together.
- Where regeneration managers get on really well with their clients, this comes after 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 could be interpreted as the apathy or indifference of the wider community.
- People involved at all levels of regeneration projects expressed feelings of being 'disempowered'. Managers feel it especially, they showed feelings of uncertainty about whether the projects they were involved in would have lasting positive results, Those working at local community level seem more empowered and more confident of what they were doing, presumably because their areas of involvement were more specific.
- The demand that people deliver outputs and meet targets, especially when spending money, cuts short the time in which trust could build up, and real long-term partnership grow.
- There are parent/child dynamics sometimes at work in the relationship between the experts and the clients in regeneration - sometimes the children/clients are naughty and ungrateful (and the parent/experts need to get them in line), sometimes they are innocent and in need of guidance.

The words being used

- The words 'poverty' and 'redistribution' tend to be avoided, especially by performance managers.
- Regeneration jargon seems to disempower those who feel they have to speak it. It doesn't seem up to the task of letting people say what they want to say. Regeneration networks can feel as bureaucratic and top-heavy as the institutions they are supposed to replace.

- Those on the receiving end of regeneration, or at least those who speak on their behalf, are using terms such as colonialisation and oppression with regard to regeneration.
- The church is generally spoken about in bland formulas, learnt from government guidance.

What apparent effect is all this having on the ground?

- Manchester's regeneration often appears heavy on 'spin' and is interpreted by many as 'cosmetic'. Levels of poverty, unemployment and health (for example) show few signs of improvement at the present time.
- Regeneration appears to move poverty, crime and exclusion to other parts of the city; is it capable of dealing with the root causes?
- Those at the top of the organisations believe in the ideas of 'trickle-down/snowball' effects—where benefits of economic investment gradually work their way 'down' to the poorest people—this makes sense to those who believe it, but there is little firm evidence or long-term experience to prove it.
- Pouring money into poor areas is often unpredictable in its effects.

During what we are calling this second, more fragile phase of regeneration—one where optimism and expectation have given way a little to uncertainty about future outcomes - the role of churches and other faith groups is even more important. We have found that the churches make the following positive contributions; they mark major life events in the lives of individuals and communities, preserving a sense of community; they bring together a mixture of people; their stand on what is right and wrong, and their worship activities, support human community and togetherness; they also believe in encouraging people to reach out and get involved in the wider community; they have in their memberships a wide range of skills and experience; they often see what large-scale and disruptive regeneration can do to people. Going forward with regeneration, the church faces these questions :

- Within communities that are breaking up, shifting and transforming, what should the churches do? To what extent should they take on the aims of regeneration projects, or to what extent resist them? And how?
- Does the government's desire to engage faith communities and churches disempower their identity and way of working? The Church needs to develop a language that can talk about the *experience* of regeneration as much as its results. Above all the church needs to speak about developing peoples' power.
- What do the church authorities need to do, to help local churches achieve this?
- How can faith groups and others take time to develop more sophisticated and truer understandings of identities each partner has, rather than relying on stereotypes?
- Do power structures in the church repeat what is happening elsewhere in the regeneration world?

3) *New Theories*

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

1) Typologies of Church engagement

We have divided types of church engagement in rapidly changing city spaces into three groups (so far). These are; i) local/institutional church, ii) cluster church and iii) network church. More is said about this in the full report.

2) Hybrid Church

The idea of Hybridity is that genuinely new thinking and behaviour can grow from the changes and mixing that are now happening in cities worldwide. Hybridity welcomes the challenge and potential of the post-modern world in all its complexity and contradiction—it aims to be flexible, but practical in its goal of creating public, local spaces where diversity is welcomed and new experiences of being together, but different, are explored. Previously the churches have been more defensive than this towards the post-modern world.

Hybrid church does not mean hybrid in doctrine, so much as in its way of going about things. Hybrid church would be willing to engage with different fields of study and expertise. It would be flexible enough to incorporate the typologies of church identified above within a network of connected faith communities that recognises the strengths and limitations of each typology. The point is - **there is no one size fits all approach or typology**. Instead what is required is an open, bold 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 are contained within reflection on participative democracy in recent work by Wainwright, Young, and others. These are fruitful examples for churches to dialogue with.

3) Collusion versus Collision Spectrum

This is concerned with empowerment in relation to partnership and consultation. Colluding with the agenda of regeneration is seen as disempowering for all those engaged in it, while colliding - i.e. rejecting the values of regeneration - 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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