

**SOCIAL REGENERATION and DIVERSITY IN THE UK**

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## Social regeneration and Diversity in the UK

### Context

Governments in Britain have been attempting to revive disadvantaged communities for many years and there are lessons to be learnt from the previous and present approaches to social regeneration policies and practices; and particularly from the role that women play in active leadership and organizing.

The UK government's Task Force 'Towards Urban renaissance' [1999] found that 90% of the population lived in urban areas and that £200 billion was spent on English towns and cities; this accounts for 60% of UK public expenditure. The same study found that one in four people living in urban neighbourhoods thought that their areas had deteriorated over the years (crime, dirt, transport etc) and only 10% thought they had improved. The Task Force's main recommendation was to propose a planning policy that would support change and be flexible enough for neighbourhood voices to be heard in regeneration master-plans.

However, involving communities, beyond one-off consultations has proved a challenge to many UK governments, including the New Labour government. The present government's approach to social regeneration has been piecemeal and has failed to understand that policies and strategies need to focus on *how to work with communities* rather than on social need targets.

### The fracture between economic and social regeneration

New Labour politicians want to improve mental health and social services and improve the quality of life and reduce crime, particularly within socially deprived communities. New Labour's approach to social regeneration needs to be understood within the context of social and economic regeneration in Britain over the years. Economic regeneration has been and continues to be separate from social regeneration and the politicians involved in economic and infrastructure development have tended to leave social and community concerns to others, usually women elected members.

The planning policies and strategies relating to community and economy have tended to be separate from one another, those working on community strategies also having less status than public managers concerning themselves with infrastructure development. Although this fracture is lessening in some places, in the main infrastructure planning and social regeneration work in the UK is conducted by different managers and politicians from separate committees.

Throughout the world, those most active at the local level are women with less status, power and smaller budgets. 75% of those active in communities are women, who organise local projects on meagre finances usually raised from local government. The distinct nature of local social regeneration is reinforced by this 'gender' divide between those involved at the community level and those involved in master-

planning. While the narrative about ‘social capital’ is included in all current policy documents as critical to the successful civic society- this is the theory. In reality social and human capital development is seen as a local and community concern ignored too often by those involved ‘master planning’ who pay little more than ‘lip service’ to the interests of local people or to the time it takes to build local relationships, especially in areas of conflict. While those in the Third Sector assume that

*“ You don’t regenerate the buildings until you regenerate the people.”*  
[Adebowale 2004]

This message has not sunk into the business planning frameworks of developers, managers or policy-makers. The lack of dialogue between planners and communities was most evident in Britain in the 1960s when a building boom led to planners developing housing estates with little regard for green space, play-areas, shops and facilities. While planners have improved in this respect and now concern themselves with the public realm this change has not extended to change in the *ways that public servants work* with people in disadvantaged communities.

### The role that women play in social capital

Despite the rhetoric about social capital there is little political debate about how to develop it within disadvantaged neighbourhoods nor about the role that women play in building it within public, social relationships. You could say women earn social capital and men spend it (or benefit from it).

*75% of people in local groups in the UK are women, yet when funds roll in and jobs occur, the men appear. Yet it is women who know what is to be done. [Neighbourhood consultant 2004]*

There are of course many contributing factors to local social capital, how it is formally expressed in political parties or less formally expressed in the community; its location in social classes etc. What is clear is that women tend to contribute to ‘social capital’ in a different way from men. Women’s contribution tends to be informal, whereas men prefer the clarity and status of formal organisations [Lowndes 2004]. Most people in disadvantaged communities lack formal power connections and too often it is women and those from ethnic minorities who are active in communities but invisible within the business and political arenas. This has significant implications for the way social capital in deprived communities can connect to the mainstream of politics and to local strategic partnerships.

Hall [1999] notes that local communities in Britain are sustained by women’s participation in community groups and organisations. Yet, women’s representation on local partnership boards is still poor. Geddes [1997] revealed that only 25% of local partnership board seats are held by women and these tend to be places assigned to community representatives, who are isolated. 72% of local councillors in the UK are male and 28% are female [2001 census]. Men invest their time in building social capital in formal politics while women’s way is of building relationships within less institutional organisations, where they feel less constrained.

### Traditional Levers

While, New Labour politicians aim to build on ‘social capital’ within deprived communities, many of the schemes are well intentioned but poor in impact. Although,

local participation in social regeneration is valued on paper in policy, this intent has not as yet been translated into the implementation of social regeneration, such that it involves local people.

Similarly, mainstream public service staff in the UK still tend to view communities as either 'victim' in need of welfare, not as people with ideas and their own solutions. The hoops that local groups have to go through to get grants have intensified because of policy-maker's belief that 'governance' is poor in the community sector (NGO/Voluntary sector).

Public services in Britain are part of society but they are organized along conventional lines to deliver standard services, which become more specific in terms of their target group the more the government rationalizes 'who is deserving' and 'who is not'. Recent schemes include :

- targeted investment in disadvantaged areas; urban, rural, city or regional
- specific programmes for specific groups of people, women, youth, unemployed etc
- monies for particular programmes with specific objectives, such as training etc : ranging from general community capacity building (Community Development Programme), training (European Social Fund), social enterprise, locality funds (Neighbourhood Renewal, small grants, Health Action Zones etc), national programmes (HAZ, Sure Start)
- narrow performance management which is based on government interests not specific local interest or the realities of life-experience of poor people.

The Social Regeneration Budget was introduced to funnel finance into local regeneration schemes but these suffered from the weight of government performance management or "*Too much bean counting*" which pulled statutory staff away from working with communities towards meeting specified single targets. More recently, the Labour government introduced New Deal for Communities [1998] in 39 Urban Neighbourhoods across England, each received £50 million over a ten year period. East Manchester was one such area. Hilary Wainwright [2003] suggests that the weak relationships between communities and the local authority have not helped the New Deal for Communities work, however she suggests that such initiatives do suggest the potential of participatory democracy and the need for brokering a new alliance between the formal representative and participatory forms of political accountability.

The big money in regeneration is in transport, business infrastructure and in housing, and it is a rarely the case that the agenda setters for this domain are female. This is not merely an issue of discrimination against women, many women choose to social and community issues, but of the community domain. One reason for the stark separation continuing between social and physical regeneration is because of the lack of diversity

at board and senior management level, this has a detrimental impact on the way 'regeneration' is envisaged and conducted.

### **Embedded inequalities**

Social regeneration works at the pace of local people – physical regeneration is planned on the basis of work schedules. While one has the large budget the other is less visible, more difficult and is less rewarded. Although, social capital and people's involvement is acknowledged, this is not translated into new approaches to regeneration, such that

- local people are involved in master-planning
- other stakeholders, including business, accept the need for adjustments in schedules and activities in the light of this involvement
- Public space and facilities are part of design and planning
- Social services are part of these process
- Business project schedules are made transparent.

While people's lives are complex and integrated the services and benefits they receive are fragmented and administered by different public servants. Opting of the system can appear as a relief.

One of the reasons for the above is that the government retains its rationalist framework and traditional levers for achieving social regeneration, which fragments communities through forms of performance management which takes little account of the emergent nature of development and the time it takes for people to gain trust and confidence in the work. Working with communities reveals that often local people want

- better mainstream services, not more projects
- genuine consultation, not just 'them' showing 'us' plans
- officials who talk to each other instead of looking after their own jobs and pet schemes
- consistent investment, not finance that comes with so many conditions it fragments local activities and is turned on and off like a tap.

In spite of the above comments being common across the country the traditional levers for achieving social regeneration are still in operation. While there has been a move away from targeted projects on specific communities towards more general neighbourhood renewal schemes, statutory officers are still required to monitor *specific activities* for *specific groups* of people for funding, on the basis of single performance indicators. This fragments local activities and people's lives to appease auditors, and pulls local energy into activities determined by government, not by themselves. This is unfortunate when social cohesion is created when groups of people work together around the realities of life-experience. We need a fundamental shift in the way services are organized and monitored by government, and in the attitudes of public servants towards disadvantaged neighbourhoods.

## Seeking sustainability

If the statutory sector are to move towards negotiated local strategies for development and change with communities, then local statutory agencies need to recognize the need for:

- Stable conditions that allow time for local partnership relationships to develop
- A new framework for monitoring which is based on local partnership indicators
- A central government fund for ‘conflict resolution and dialogue’, shared learning between communities and local officers, and the development of local knowledge transfer mechanisms
- an awareness of the need for diversity and for a value of difference in the public realm.

Partnership between stakeholders (communities, business and statutory bodies) is at constant risk from a loss of ‘champions’, poor management and conflict between partners. However, the main cause of concern is that bigger partnerships receive significant amounts of funding for yet more ‘pilots’, when the transfer of learning from these into the mainstream is poor and frequently resisted. Mainstream change in the way planning decisions and targets are made, and funding is allocated are not even on the agenda, even though it is on the politician’s ‘wish-list’ to radically improve mainstream public services.

## Successful interventions

The question for government is how to intervene in a way that will energize communities without creating chaos and be realistic in terms of the monies available. Successful schemes appear to be those where

- people feel engaged and confident that they will be involved in future work
- the whole community gets a range of local benefits and can see where it is leading, i e. not isolated training programmes
- evaluations inform learning

What makes a difference to local social regeneration

- energetic and committed individuals who drive change
- statutory, public sector workers with a capacity to reach-out to local people and develop activities
- responsive senior managers – who make connections between successful communities and their own practice, and make changes accordingly.

## Social change dependent on organizational change

The lack of connection between public sector ‘custom and practice’ and communities has hindered social regeneration for many years. The inward organizational pull on staff in many local authorities has had a detrimental effect on their capacity to emphasize with what people feel, think and want in communities. Too often those local officers who are innovative have had to choose between their loyalties to communities and to their employer authority. The National Audit Office reported that nearly 50% of all public bodies demonstrated cultures where managers and staff were risk-averse. Even programmes such as the Health Action Zones given the task of driving mainstream change in health failed to really kick-start a serious change process inside the health service or in local government.

The fact remains that there are confidence, prejudice and motivation problems in the public sector. And a lack of ‘*know how*’ among manager about how to motivate staff to work with communities in order to find solutions instead of perpetuating the myth that disadvantaged communities create problems. This traditional narrative and inward pull has had a detrimental effect on all of the government’s regeneration programmes.

## Public Sector Modernization

Driving public service improvement in Britain has largely been through agency restructurings, public sector targets and monitoring mechanisms such as ‘Best Value’ and the Corporate Performance Assessment process in local government. Many local authorities in Britain have been concerned for some time with the micro-management of their affairs by central government – this ethos is driven down the organisation such that too many managers are making staff less self-motivated, not more so.

Unfortunately, the government’s narrative about change strategies continues to rely on top-down directives and on control, rather than on leadership.

<b>Old model</b>	<b>Emergent model</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>•A closed system</li><li>•Rationalist</li><li>•Top down directives</li><li>•Change through structural and operational processes</li><li>•Fragments evidence</li><li>•Seeks neatness and conformity</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>•Emerging within open/living system</li><li>•Defined through</li><li>•dynamic relationships</li><li>•Acknowledges flow and agency</li><li>•Seeks diversity</li><li>•Change through active people</li></ul>

Modernization requires new thinking and practice within government as well as in local authorities. Importantly, a form of social modernization requires a paradigm shift in thinking about ‘change’ itself’, which focuses less on planned activities towards and more on emerging new relationships.

### Internal modernization and social regeneration:

There is too little understanding or discussion about why internal modernization is critical to social regeneration and what it actually means in practice. This is a leadership issue, and the government’s concern with audit in the public sector has resulted in too many senior managers paying attention to what government wants, rather than developing their staff capacity accordingly.

The legacy of the public bureaucracies is that managers are adept at managing the systems but poor at transforming styles of leadership. So it is hardly surprising that most public bodies are run by *system’s enthusiasts* who are

- rational and logical
- good at planning and detail, but poor at people and community leadership
- are detached from political purpose
- deny the significance of emotional intelligence and experimenting with emergent networks.
- cautious risk takers, intolerant of ambiguity and exploratory reflection
- often in reality view change as a matter of policy to be relayed to junior ranks through ‘telling and informing.’

These qualities are unhelpful in a context where public managers need to be aware of the emergent and messy nature of community organisation especially in areas of disadvantage. Additional constraints in Britain include the fact that :

- guidance on how to mainstream radical changes internally is poor
- accountable bodies such as partnership boards or agency executives rarely discuss change strategies
- investment in training is minimal and organizational development is under-valued by most local public employers
- inequalities and community initiatives tend to be seen to be in conflict with corporate internal modernization programmes when there needs to be a synergy between these two priorities
- communication about change strategies across agencies is also poor
- community priorities are based on existing services and government targets not on community views about their needs, solutions or experiences
- public sector staff continue to treat those in disadvantaged neighbourhoods with disrespect
- a fear of risk-taking and working outside of standards and protocols continues- especially in authorities with deferential cultures.
- leadership is unaware of the impact that corporate systems have on the capacity of staff to learn.

Unfortunately, traditional public servants have been trained to stick to the rule-book and are not good at analysing the emotional realities of staff or communities. Their risk-averse culture can lead them into an obsession with operational detail rather than an ability to scan the environment and embrace difficulties and conflict. The problem for the UK, especially in the regions, is that it is those managers who have a history of managing operations and finances who are still promoted over those who have people skills and the ability to orchestrate change; this demoralising for innovative managers [Maddock 1999]. This results in most leaders having particular qualities of decisiveness, control and direction but lacking in the political and emotional skills necessary for transforming public organisations.

The current imbalance in the public sector management between central control and local development is undermining the ability of many managers to make sound and good judgment. Clearly, social modernization demands a form of transformational management style and managers who can cope with ambiguity and uncertainty.

### Where are the transforming Leaders ?

Leadership is critical to modernization because it concerns dramatically improving the people relationships within a complex system and creating work environments that are open to emergent practice and creative individuals. Yet, it can be seen from the above that there is a real lack of leadership in the public sector in terms of persuading staff to become 'outward' rather than 'inward' focused. And we need to ask why this is?

In Britain there is a lot of discussion about leadership; yet, there remains a popular belief in heroic leadership, fed by the press and the media. Ministers are being asked by some to take a look at their own thinking and expectations about the type of people who can 'turn around' failing public agencies and why [Edwards 2004]. Edwards questions the tendency to presume that macho 'heroic' leadership is the only solution to endemic problems in the public sector. Most women suggest that leaders must believe less in the public definition of the leader as 'heroic' and more in the capacity to lead others in a direction that benefits society [Maddock 1999]. Everyone involved in change has the potential *to take a lead* and be a leader, because new practice involves a personal readjustment of behaviour at work. However, demonstrating leadership is harder lower down the organisation because it is not given credibility by status. Women know this well all too well, and remain frustrated in middle and senior management [Maddock 1999, Fox 2002].

While there has been a definite shift in thinking about leadership among many executives and there is now a general acceptance that the traditional directive approach to leadership no longer works in the public sector, there is less clarity about what to develop in its place. Many executives are confused about how to change an organization while also not being directive in the traditional sense. They know that it is no longer enough as a leader to be in control, modernisation requires an ability to scan the bigger-picture and orchestrate the change through the system. Successful organisations demand leaders at all levels with emotional and political intelligence as well as intellect and operational experience. This requires reflective abilities and breadth of experience. Although, the technical society tends to call too quickly for named competences as a way of avoiding discussion about local realities and

appropriate responses, on reflection senior public servants need to develop the capacity to

- be visionary in terms of the bigger political picture able to challenge traditional thinking and as well as practice.
- improve management systems to be flexible enough to support innovation and responsiveness in staff (which is not the same as efficient)
- accept diversity and handle ambiguity and flux
- be open to criticism and new ideas
- have the ability to integrate people issues with financial, performance and operational management

These qualities are now packaged under the heading of ‘transformational’ and require political and emotional intelligence as well as educational achievement. The reason why transformational leadership is critical to public modernisation is that the rigidity of public bodies is no longer appropriate. In spite of twenty years of such thinking it is only recently that chief executives have been grappling with how to ‘walk to talk’ and become transforming leaders. Many of those attempting to make change live are women. [Fox 2004]

### The current scenario

It sometimes appears that some organizational leaders are dis-empowered by modernization and its unpredictability, and want clarity and clear roles. These are those who have not been convinced of the need for change. Amongst those who are convinced that they have to change in order to develop more appropriate services tend to fall into two groups; those who seek neat and predictable change through systems and those who would fall more under the ‘transforming’ banner and recognize the value of developing relationships with people.

While some chief officers are changing their spots, too often those with transforming abilities are working in the community, in independent projects or if in public agencies in middle management where they are seen as mavericks by their colleagues, because they are different. They tend to have varied portfolios and have usually had some experience within situations where there was little organisation and financial backing, they has forced them to organise with what was available.

Unfortunately, although many local chief executives have got the message, policy makers themselves are slow to change their styles and competences. Too few policy makers challenge the hegemony of closed system’s thinking and linear model of change. It would seem that chief executives are beginning to challenge this thinking, because they can see that complex local environments are not so neatly packaged.

Key concerns are the

- unresponsiveness of local public agencies to communities
- lack of alignment between government’s policies for modernisation and regeneration and their change strategies

- lack of connection between social and economic narratives in regeneration

## **Conclusions**

While the British government calls on local agencies and partnerships to prove that they have the capacity to change and to deliver real improvements, in reality this is difficult to achieve when the national economic narrative continues to portray the public and social realm as a cost to the country. The public sector is a resource, an asset and a fundamental platform from which to sustain social capital and develop it in disadvantaged areas.

It may have been helpful to transfer business management practices into the British public sector– it is not helpful for the public sector to adopt business priorities. This is not a sustainable philosophy. The public realm sustains everyone including business [Hutton 2002]. Rarely, is the business sector maligned as a cost when the public services frequently are; yet, the private sector is as dependent on social capital as is the public sector.

Leaders need to challenge dominant narratives about how to drive change and social regeneration and stop maligning disadvantaged communities, whose diversity and creativity the local and global economies will ultimately depend. However, transformation in the public sector is not merely a matter of new economic narratives it also requires leaders who can reconnect political vision with organizational process. It is the rationalist paradigm of closed and predictable systems which has led to many in the UK believing that that public sector can be transformed through managerial technique alone. And I fear that the reason we still have such faith in ‘closed systems’ and such a limited economic narrative around regeneration is because of the lack of diversity within decision-making.

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