

HILARY RUSSELL

Trust in the City: Reviving and Enriching Urban Areas through Effective Social Policy

Hilary Russell explores current urban social policy and concludes that trust must be both the presupposition and the goal of effective policy making. She raises the question of the involvement of communities of faith: why are they around the table in the first place? Will their presence contribute towards building the trust required? Implicit in the argument is an assumption that a critical theological reading of government policy documents is essential for answering such questions.

Cities are increasingly important as drivers of national economic competitiveness in the global market place. But they also reflect our society's social and economic divisions. As urban policy tries to promote both economic development and social cohesion, greater importance is being attached to governance in general and partnership working in particular. This article discusses recent developments and finds that trust is emerging as a significant precondition for the legitimacy and effectiveness of public policies and for harmony in today's very diverse cities, towns and neighbourhoods.

This is not intended to be a theological critique. But, at a time when there is encouragement to, and many opportunities for, faith groups to become involved in the regeneration and governance of their areas, it may perhaps stimulate thought about how churches can become credible and distinctive participants.

Focus on cities

When the Stranger says: 'What is the meaning of this city?'
 Do you huddle together because you love each other?
 What will you answer? 'We all dwell together
 To make money from each other'? or 'This is a community'?¹

As a corporate expression of human self-definition, the city as a whole is a statement about the boundaries and potential of what it is to be human. What does it mean to be humane as well as human? What does human community amount to?²

1 T. S. Eliot, 'Choruses from "The Rock" III', *Collected Poems 1909-1962*, Faber and Faber, London 1963, pp 170f.

2 Philip Sheldrake, *Spaces for the Sacred: Place, Memory and Identity*, The Hulsean Lectures 2000, SCM Press, London, 2001, p 166.

In a fast urbanizing world, cities are the focus of many sorts of interest. On a global scale, the massive growth in cities jeopardizes their economic and social integrity and environmental sustainability. It is within cities that questions arising out of the twenty-first century flows of money, goods, people, ideas and information are crystallized and that the greatest impact of a shrinking world is felt on cultures, communities, and individual choices.

At a national level, reviving cities and towns is a central political challenge. The Rogers Report³ perceived government policies in the 1980s and early 1990s as encouraging urban flight and decline and leaving a legacy of under-investment, congestion, pollution, sprawl and shabbiness. As Nicholas Schoon pointed out in *The Chosen City*⁴, flight from cities is both symptomatic of urban decline and a contributory cause. Inner city abandonment has been matched by encroachment into the countryside.

Over recent years, the two geographic dimensions of economic success have been north/south and urban/rural. Factors such as proximity to European markets and patterns of investment reflecting the centralization of English administration have produced significant systemic differences between north and south. They have created a virtuous circle for London and the South and a vicious one for the North. National policies affect the distribution of economic activity across the country. There is a growing divide between the competitiveness of the cities and metropolitan areas of London, the South East and Eastern regions and the rest of the country. 'We are continuing to witness the devolution of certain political powers to the metropolitan and more peripheral areas of the UK. However, an equitable and fully competitive UK economy will only be generated through the decentralization of the nation's financial and business assets.'⁵

There are, too, variations within regions. Bigger conurbations have generally had more acute problems as have smaller areas affected by the decline of traditional industries, such as textiles, mining or fishing. It is critical to understand the reasons for these divergences, to discover how they have differentially affected different neighbourhoods and social groups, to determine the policy measures needed to address them and to exercise the political will to tackle them.

Rediscovering the importance of place

*The State of English Cities*⁶, a report that accompanied the Urban White Paper 2000, pointed out a change in Whitehall thinking critically affecting urban policies. In the 1980s and most of the 1990s, policies were dominated by an intellectual framework emphasizing a short term model of competition that regarded economic

3 Department of the Environment Transport and the Regions, *Towards an Urban Renaissance*, final report of the Urban Task Force chaired by Lord Rogers of Riverside, E. & F. N. Spon, London, 1999.

4 Nicholas Schoon, *The Chosen City*, Spon Press, Taylor and Francis Group, London and New York, 2001.

5 Huggins Associates, *The State of Urban Britain*, Robert Higgins Business and Economic Policy Press, Cardiff, 2002.

6 Brian Robson, Michael Parkinson, Martin Boddy & Duncan Maclellan, *The State of English Cities*, Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, London, November 2000.

behaviour as somehow detached from its social context. The Treasury orthodoxy was that spatial policy was primarily about redistribution and that space and place had little generative role in the economy. In other words, regeneration initiatives were essentially seen as re-arranging the deckchairs, treating symptoms in the poorest places, without building the UK's overall competitiveness.

Territorial policies at regional, city and neighbourhood level are now accorded a more positive role. First, they recognized the interconnectedness of social and economic life and the costs of waste to the long term potential of the economy, whether that waste is unemployed people or derelict land. Secondly, rediscovery of the understanding that 'space' (or accessibility) and 'place' matter in the economy and in society has brought growing discussion about the salience of 'regions', 'cities' and 'neighbourhoods/communities'. The scales at which lives are led overlap in important ways. Good policy, therefore, is not just about joining up sectoral policies horizontally, but about a coherent set of policies that join up geographic levels vertically. 'The challenge for modern urban policy is to establish a national-to-local framework for enabling the exercise of subsidiarity in a strategic fashion. It must allow local policy choices, but at the same time ensure that strategic wider connections and objectives are pursued.'⁷ Thirdly, new importance is attached to developmental processes. Cities are no longer seen as the victims of externally driven change. Places can be dragged down as much by inability to adjust as by adverse locations. In the drive to compete in the global market, their capacity to respond is as important as their fixed assets.

Revisiting our city vision

'...we must create a City that is attractive and exciting to live in, which provides top quality services and facilities for its citizens and involves them in determining their own future and that of their neighbourhood and city.'⁸

This greater recognition of the importance of place, whether at city or neighbourhood level, connects with issues of image and identity. Cities are more and more concerned about promoting themselves. Image is important. External perceptions often lag behind present reality. But also there are always pressures to tell the story differently according to what you want: talking it up to attract investors; talking it down to lever in European, government or other special funding.

The other side of image is identity: not what others think of the city, but how its residents perceive it and themselves. This connects with self esteem, with levels of aspiration, with what is now called 'social capital'. It is a cliché to say that a city's greatest asset is its people – not because it is necessarily untrue but because it is so often said only at times when that asset is manifestly unrealized, when individuals or groups are being overlooked and their potential being wasted. One challenge for cities is to develop policies and practices to make the statement come true.

7 Robson, Parkinson, Boddy & MacLennan, *The State of English Cities*, p 5.

8 From the Chair of Liverpool Partnership Group's foreword to *Liverpool First: The Prospectus*, 1999.

It is not surprising, therefore, that local politicians and others, prompted by external demands and/or internal pressures, are revisiting their vision of what their city is and what it might be. Reaching that vision means facing the familiar 'social justice' questions: who wins? who loses? who decides? It entails balancing the different possible ways of seeing a city: as a built environment, as an arena for social interaction with its 'interlocking processes of living, meeting, making, relating'⁹, as a locus of economic exchange. Its history, traditions and culture are all important. It requires addressing the different and dispersed patterns of urban growth and the changing social geography of cities.

Trapped in a spiral of decline

A family living in one of our densely packed and run-down terraced streets will not only suffer from unfit housing, but their neighbourhood could be a hotspot for crime and anti-social behaviour. The street may look neglected with abandoned homes and fly tipping. Their children may feel there is no hope of a job, and may have drifted into drugs, prostitution and crime. Escaping from this spiral may feel an impossible task for the family.¹⁰

The geography of cities still, and perhaps increasingly, reflects social and economic divisions and mirrors the different degrees of power people have over their lives. Housing markets are not only polarized between North and South. Even in the North, city centre loft apartments are a world away from, even if physically adjacent to, inner city terraces and outer estates characterized by voids, low demand and negative equity. Housing divisions mirror those of other interconnected dimensions of poverty and deprivation,¹¹ income, employment, standards of health.¹² Particular groups in society are at greater risk. For example, 18% of children live in the 10% most deprived wards in England. 70% of people from ethnic minorities live in the 88 most deprived local authority areas compared with 40% of the overall population.¹³ Lone parents are more likely than others to live in poverty, and they run twice the average risk of being burgled.¹⁴ Those with least choice of housing also probably suffer greater insecurity, poorer local services and a degraded local environment. The already vulnerable have least power in the market place whether for public or private goods.

9 Ash Amin, Doreen Massey & Nigel Thrift, *Cities for the Many not the Few*, The Policy Press, Bristol, 2000, p 8.

10 Blackburn with Darwen Strategic Partnership, *The Local Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy – A Summary*, Policy Department Blackburn with Darwen Council, August 2002, p 3.

11 See for example, Hilary Russell with Amanda Killoran, *Public Health and Regeneration: Making the Links*, Health Education Authority, London, 2000.

12 See for example, Mohibur Rahman, Guy Palmer, Peter Kenway & Catherine Howarth, *Monitoring Poverty and Social Exclusion 2000*, Joseph Rowntree Foundation, York, 2000.

13 Social Exclusion Unit, *A New Commitment to Neighbourhood Renewal: National Strategy Action Plan*, The Cabinet Office, London, January 2001, p 14.

Urban policy

How did we get to where we are today?

Overcoming this unequal geography and all that it signifies for people's lives is the challenge of regeneration. Over the past thirty years, British urban policy has deployed a multiplicity of policy initiatives and instruments. They changed as political priorities and views about the nature of urban problems changed. They variously identified individual pathological or structural causes; targeted particular social groups or areas; responded to social needs or economic opportunities; focused on social support or economic development. Different players and sectors dominated at different times. But the general direction of policy over the last decade or so has been from the piecemeal, project-based and compartmentalized towards the integrated, strategic and mainstream.

The 1990s brought a shift towards comprehensive, area-based and partnership-led regeneration in initiatives such as City Challenge, the Single Regeneration Budget Challenge Fund (SRB) and, in Scotland, the Programme for Partnerships. The SRB brought together around twenty existing programmes from different departments across government and it reflected the breadth of these different funding regimes in its objectives. At the same time, there started to be greater stress upon community consultation and involvement.

Acknowledging that poverty exists

Many policy principles survived the change of government in 1997, now coupled with an acknowledgement of the persistence of poverty and greater concern to allocate resources according to need.¹⁵ Regeneration became part of a wider drive 'to tackle the combination of local needs and priorities associated with poverty and deprivation',¹⁶ especially in areas of multiple deprivation largely bypassed by national economic success. The goal was 'to break the vicious circle of deprivation and provide the foundation for sustainable regeneration and wealth creation'.¹⁷ The rationale was pragmatic and principled, economic and social. Economically, regeneration could help to increase employment and local output. Socially, it could address the unacceptable situation of an otherwise prosperous society having large areas and sections of the population at a substantial and often growing disadvantage.

14 Rahman, Palmer, Kenway & Howarth, *Monitoring Poverty and Social Exclusion 2000*, p 7.

15 An early marker of this concern was the creation of the Social Exclusion Unit (SEU) in December 1997, reporting directly to the Prime Minister. Its remit was to help improve government action to reduce social exclusion by producing 'joined up solutions to joined up problems'.

16 Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, *Regeneration Programmes – the Way Forward (a Consultation Paper)*, The Stationery Office, London, 1997.

17 Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, *Regeneration Programmes – the Way Forward (a Consultation Paper)*.

Our towns and cities

'The state of our urban environment highlights again the importance of ethics to any reflection on place. Whose place is it? Who owns it? Who is kept out or marginalized? Who is not made to feel at home?'¹⁸

In 2000, the first Urban White Paper¹⁹ since 1976 was developed in tandem with a Rural White Paper.²⁰ Both were driven by the view that 'how we live our lives is shaped by where we live our lives'²¹ and that 'wherever we live we face the challenge of adapting to a fast changing world'.²² Since 1997, a bewildering alphabet soup of initiatives has poured down on urban communities: some directed to areas, such as New Deal for Communities; others targeting groups, such as Sure Start; others relating to programmes such as Health, Education and Employment Action Zones. The Urban White Paper recognized that targeted initiatives alone will not solve the problems of deprived areas. Activity must take place across a broader plane and links be made between needs and opportunities. Its vision was for:

- people shaping the future of their communities supported by strong and representative local leaders;
- people living in attractive, well-kept towns and cities that use space and buildings well;
- good design and planning that enables environmental sustainability;
- towns and cities able to create and share prosperity, investing to help all their citizens reach their full potential;
- good quality services that meet the needs of people and businesses wherever they are.

In part, these objectives were driven by the Urban Renaissance agenda²³ which emphasized brownfield development, physical design and making towns and cities attractive – especially but not exclusively – to the middle class. The Rogers Report holds out an ideal of compact connected cities, well designed and supporting a range of diverse uses within a sustainable urban environment. Despite its many welcome emphases, it arguably attaches too much importance to design and places too much reliance on adjusting transport and community infrastructure. It has 'an underlying presupposition of an attainable urban harmony'²⁴ which bears no relation to current realities. Nicholas Schoon pushes the compact city model further but, again, 'there is a puzzling contradiction between the pessimism of the analysis and the optimism of his proposals. His solutions are frequently ones that he admits

18 Sheldrake, *Spaces for the Sacred*, p 163.

19 Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, *Our Towns and Cities: Delivering an Urban Renaissance*, The Stationery Office, London, 2000.

20 Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, *Our Countryside: The Future*, The Stationery Office, London, 2000.

21 Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, *Our Towns and Cities*, p 5 (John Prescott MP in the Foreword).

22 Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, *Our Towns and Cities*, p 13.

23 Department of the Environment Transport and the Regions, *Towards an Urban Renaissance*.

24 Amin, Massy & Thrift, *Cities for the Many not the Few*, p 4.

consumers have rejected. They involve people thinking about the communal good rather than their personal or family interests.²⁵

New commitment to neighbourhood renewal

If only we could be more sensitive, more civilized and develop the means of curing sickening neighbourhoods before they become terminal cases.²⁶

Neighbourhood renewal means a radical improvement in the quality of life for residents within their neighbourhood. It means significantly better health, better housing, better employment prospects, less crime and anti-social behaviour, greater opportunities for learning and achievement, and a major improvement in transport and the environment.²⁷

The Urban White Paper's social inclusion agenda was taken forward in the National Strategy Action Plan for Neighbourhood Renewal, *A New Commitment to Neighbourhood Renewal*, the culmination of over two years work and consultation. Its aim was that, 'within 10 to 20 years, no one should be seriously disadvantaged by where they live. People on low incomes should not have to suffer conditions and services that are failing, and so different from what the rest of the population receives'.²⁸ It acknowledged that government policies have sometimes been part of the problem: too much reliance put on short term initiatives; too little attention paid to fundamental problems such as worklessness, crime, poor education and health; too little done to improve and harness the resources of mainstream public services.

The strategy creates a framework for neighbourhood renewal at different levels: nationally, through all key departments having targets for minimum service standards; regionally, through neighbourhood renewal teams in Government Offices for the Regions; at district level, through Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) in the most deprived local authority areas having to produce local neighbourhood renewal strategies; and locally through new ways of bringing local people to the forefront of managing their communities.

Local Strategic Partnerships

'If local people are to enjoy a sound economy and a better quality of life... we have to harness the contribution of businesses, public agencies, voluntary organizations and community groups and get them working to a common agenda.'²⁹

LSPs are non-statutory, non-executive cross sectoral partnerships. They are meant to operate 'at a level which enables strategic decisions to be taken and is close enough to individual neighbourhoods to allow actions to be determined at community level' and they should be aligned with local authority boundaries. 'All areas should have an LSP, not just the most deprived areas. LSPs will provide a

25 Hilary Russell, ' "If only..." A Review of Schoon, *The Chosen City*', *City*, 6 (1) (2002), p 140.

26 Schoon, *The Chosen City*, p 349.

27 Blackburn with Darwen Strategic Partnership, *The Local Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy - A Summary*, p 3.

28 Social Exclusion Unit, *A New Commitment to Neighbourhood Renewal* 2001, p 8.

29 Tony Blair, *Leading the Way: A New Vision for Local Government*, IPPR, London, 1998.

means of tackling an area's problems, whether they are problems of failure, such as deprivation, or problems of success, such as rapid economic growth.³⁰

LSPs are the main vehicles for delivering both the urban renaissance and neighbourhood renewal aspects of the White Paper agenda. Their introduction reflects government concern with the processes of planning and delivering policy as much as it's content. Potentially, they mark a significant step towards a different pattern of local governance. Traditionally, agencies and departments have been organized around problems instead of people. But life is not so neatly categorized. The mantra of 'joined up' thinking expresses recognition that organizations cannot work effectively in isolation. In East Lancashire, for example, poor housing, low skills and low wages are inextricably linked. The chain must be broken to improve the quality of life, the sustainability of neighbourhoods and the economic competitiveness of the area. As soon as agencies faced such challenges together through the East Lancashire Partnership, they deepened their understanding of the problems and the interrelationship between their various interventions. They began to think 'outside their boxes'.

The building block of trust

The city is a place of difference, and that includes different interests. A policy that does not square up to that will not address the underlying problems.³¹

...are we locked into an impossible choice between economic advance and our basic social values, the building blocks of our civilization?³²

Politics and consumerism

This outline has made clear the government's ambitious goals. Promoting a more competitive economy and promoting social inclusion are individually difficult; reconciling them at national or local level is even more challenging. In addition, it has set itself the task of revitalizing governance and citizenship: renegotiating the relationship between the state and individuals and finding a new balance between individual and collective responsibilities as well as changing the way in which localities are governed and managed, bringing in new players and altering relationships between the local, the district, the regional and the national.

In his Dimpleby Lecture,³³ Rowan Williams talked of us witnessing the end of the nation state and its replacement by the 'market state'. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the dominant vision was of government being trustworthy and legitimate because it promised effective defence and internal stability based on a firm directive hand on the economy and the safety net of public welfare provision. 'The job of those who ran the state was seen as guaranteeing the general good of the community; and its success in managing this was the obvious foundation of its claim to be obeyed.' This, he suggests, is now less credible not because of any

30 Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, *Local Strategic Partnerships Government Guidance*, March 2001, p 15.

31 Amin, Massy & Thrift, *Cities for the Many not the Few*, p 4.

32 Andrew Marr, *Ruling Britannia: The Failure and Future of British Democracy*, Michael Joseph, London, 1995, p 318.

33 Rowan Williams, The Richard Dimpleby Lecture, 19 December 2002.

particular government, but because of a form of political administration that 'has in some ways crept up on us' within the context of massive global economic and technological changes.

To take one example: unstable employment patterns generate escalating welfare budgets. At the same time, other factors are at work. First a consumerist culture is fuelling people's expectations about the level and quality of public services. Second, a consumer model is being introduced into the realm of public goods so that market forces increasingly influence the distribution of those goods and their benefits. Third, there is 'an approach to politics itself that could be described as consumerist'.

Many questions arise out of this analysis about the chances of success of the government's urban policies. Are they realistic about the levers of change in the hands of local players or are local fortunes more determined by powerful, external factors as well as national policies determining the distribution of economic activity and levels of public spending? Do they get to grips sufficiently with the issues relating to diversity in our neighbourhoods and cities? Do they take enough account of the pressures towards self-interested choices? The goal of a more cohesive and equal society depends on the commitment of the electorate yet the market state has weakened confidence in (any) government and created different allegiances and divisions within society. It is appropriate therefore to turn now to looking at some aspects of trust – both as a policy goal and as a prerequisite of effective policy.

Social glue

'Community is code for the countervailing force to economic globalism, the democratic instinct, the essential missing element to the faster, rougher and world-sized economy.'³⁴

At the start of her 2002 Reith Lectures, *A Question of Trust*³⁵, Onora O'Neill quotes Confucius saying that three things are needed for government (weapons, food and trust), and the one that a ruler should hold on to most firmly is trust. Trust is essential to individuals and institutions. Consciously or unconsciously, we use trust as a criterion for what we do and say. Some of the recent anxiety about crime seems less related to the risk of being a victim than to falling confidence in the police. Trust is the issue that lurks behind concern about the apparently failing health of electoral democracy. Trust is a prerequisite for the development of mechanisms for participative democracy.

A feature of government policy statements since 1997 has been greater focus on civil society, the 'space' between the state and the market accompanied by more attention to the voluntary and community sectors, including faith communities. In part, this represents a renewed appreciation of the importance of the 'glue' in society, the restoration of 'community'.

34 Marr, *Ruling Britannia*, p 325.

35 Onora O'Neill, *A Question of Trust*, The BBC Reith Lectures 2002, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2002, p 3.

36 See Duncan Maclennan, *Changing Places, Engaging People*, York Publishing Services, York, 2000.

New Commitment to Neighbourhood Renewal stresses the need to take account of 'neighbourhood effects'.³⁶ But do we know enough about how different neighbourhoods function? How do suburban and inner city or outer estate communities differ? How far are they characterized by close, face to face relationships and transactions (whether between good or bad neighbours) and how far is mobility in transport and communication becoming more significant? Policy often seems predicated on a rather romantic, nostalgic and often patronizing view of community. Community has many meanings. There are communities of place and interest. When geographically based, shared experience of place is assumed to carry a sense of identification and belonging. But within and across neighbourhoods, different groups may have different agendas based upon factors such as gender, ethnicity, age, faith, employment status, disability or sexuality. Communities are as much subjective as objective. They can be sources of social support. Equally they can be oppressive or divisive.

A frequent goal of regeneration initiatives is to build 'social capital'. How far people trust their neighbours is one of the measures. However, there tends to be an assumption that social capital is good in itself, 'warm and cuddly'³⁷ like its conceptual cousin 'community'. But whereas social networks and other expressions of reciprocity are usually good for insiders, they can have wider anti-social effects. This is significant in a diverse society if in-group loyalties (us) are matched by out-group hostility (them). Robert Putnam talks about both 'bonding' and 'bridging' social capital. Both can be valuable to the individual. The first denotes strong, exclusive ties that link people to the families, close friends or immediate circles and give them practical, social and psychological support. Bridging social capital 'can generate broader identities and reciprocity, whereas bonding social capital bolsters out narrower selves'.³⁸ It signifies weaker yet more inclusive ties extending to more distant and disparate groups. Similarly, Putnam makes a distinction between 'thick' trust – confidence in personal friends – and 'thin' trust in a wider range of people, known and unknown, 'that crucial emollient for large complex societies'.³⁹

The needs of strangers⁴⁰

Whilst the physical segregation of housing estates and inner city areas came as no surprise, the team was particularly struck by the depth of polarization of our towns and cities. The extent to which these physical divisions were compounded by so many aspects of our daily lives, was very evident... These lives often do not seem to touch at any point, let alone overlap and promote any meaningful interchanges... There is little wonder that the ignorance about each others' communities can easily grow into fear, especially where this is exploited by extremist groups determined to undermine community harmony and foster divisions.⁴¹

37 Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, Touchstone, Simon and Schuster, New York 2000, p 21.

38 Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, p 23.

39 Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, p 142.

40 Reference Michael Ignatieff, *The Needs of Strangers*, Viking, London 1985.

41 Ignatieff, *The Needs of Strangers*, p 9.

Diversity issues were sharpened in 2001 when disturbances in various towns showed people from different cultural backgrounds living uneasily with the consequences of separation and inequality. Saskia Sassen stresses that we need to recover the concrete, localized processes through which globalization exists and that, when we do, it underlines that multiculturalism especially in large cities is as much a part of globalization as is international finance.⁴² The government talks about building multicultural communities 'based on trust and respect'⁴³ but John Rex recently lamented the prevalence of a weak definition of multiculturalism that has nothing to say about the unifying influence of equal opportunity in the welfare state. He contrasted it with Roy Jenkins' more robust definition nearly forty years ago, 'not as a flattening process of uniformity, but cultural diversity, coupled with equal opportunity, in an atmosphere of mutual tolerance'.⁴⁴

A more honest debate is needed about issues of race, religion and culture and how far people embrace racial and cultural diversity in their city or neighbourhoods. It will become especially pressing if trends in housing markets result in less ethnic segregation. But again it needs to be informed: '...the functioning and governance of multicultural neighbourhoods have been largely ignored to date by the urban research and policy agendas.'⁴⁵ To some extent, the Cattle Report on 'community cohesion' is now prompting that debate. It underlined that community cohesion fundamentally depends upon people and their values, yet '...there has been little attempt to develop clear values that focus on what it means to be a citizen of a modern multi-racial Britain and many still look backwards to some supposedly halcyon days of a mono-cultural society, or alternatively look to their country of origin for some form of identity'⁴⁶ Jonathan Sacks talks about 'the difficulty and necessity of making space for strangers – the very thing that has been the source of racism and exclusion in almost every society known to history' and the need to understand 'that just as the natural environment depends on biodiversity, so the human environment depends on cultural diversity...'⁴⁷

Trust, partnership and community involvement

'They were rendered spectators to their own needs, mere consumers of care provided to them. It was here they experienced that peculiar lack of respect that consists of not being seen, not being accounted as full human beings.'⁴⁸

42 Saskia Sassen, 'Whose City is It? Globalization and the Formation of New Claims' in James Holston, ed., *Cities and Citizenship*, Duke University Press, North Carolina 1999, p 178.

43 Home Office and Neighbourhood Renewal Unit, *Prospectus for Local Authorities and Partners, Community Cohesion Pathfinder Programme*, November 2002 (see www.homeoffice.gov.uk/new_indexes/cc_pathfinder_prospectus.pdf).

44 Quoted by John Rex in a letter to *The Guardian*, 7th January 2003.

45 Ade Kearns and Michael Parkinson, 'The Significance of Neighbourhood', *Urban Studies* 38 (12) (2001), p 2107.

46 Home Office, *Community Cohesion: A Report of the Independent Review Team*, Chaired by Ted Cattle, London, 2001, p 9 (see www.homeoffice.gov.uk/reu/community_cohesion.pdf).

47 Jonathan Sacks, *The Dignity of Difference: How to Avoid the Clash of Civilizations*, Continuum, New York 2002, p 62.

48 Richard Sennett, *Respect: The Formation of Character in an Age of Inequality*, Allen Lane, The Penguin Press, London 2003, p 13.

'One of the most radical disadvantages suffered by the powerless and marginalized of our society is their ultimate exclusion from the *conversation* which creates society.'⁴⁹

Although regeneration initiatives have long tried to develop a model of participative democracy, they have seldom fully satisfied community hopes and expectations. Previous schemes that promised much but delivered little left a legacy of mistrust, not only resulting from disappointed hopes, but also feeling invisible, ignored or not taken seriously, not respected.

Very often, too, the parameters, purpose and likely outcomes of consultation and involvement are not clarified. New Deal for Communities (NDC), a ten year initiative in 39 neighbourhoods across the country, gives a more central role to the local community but it is still hard to achieve clarity and consensus about precisely what this means and what are its implications for central government, regeneration professionals and the deliverers of local services.

If involving people in a properly representative way is problematic at neighbourhood level, the difficulties are multiplied for LSPs dealing with larger populations and a wider range of interests and policy issues. Guidance on community involvement strategies⁵⁰ and ways in which public agencies can benchmark community participation⁵¹ stress the need to support and resource the community sector and create mechanisms to ensure that participation can be real not token. For public agencies, this will have implications for their organization, ways of working and staff skills. But there is also an onus on the sector itself. Personal and organizational self interest afflicts this sector as much as any other. Too often, internal conflicts and competitiveness limit the opportunities open to it. The sector needs a basis of trust on which to develop an infrastructure that can elicit representatives beyond the 'usual suspects', ensure the inclusion of groups who often remain excluded, and establish its legitimacy and accountability.

It takes time to build the trust that is the foundation of all effective partnership. Government often overlooks the fact that even helpful guidance and good practice lessons are not short cuts to establishing inter-personal and inter-organizational relationships underpinned by knowledge, understanding and experience of reliability. Tests of trust and maturity will be how far partnerships can accommodate differences, maximize the benefits of combined perspectives, expertise and roles and cope with conflict. LSPs can work in different ways. At worst, they may only go through the motions of co-operation hoping to impress a (central government) audience, without translating words into actions whilst back stage, there remain tensions, conflicts and fragmentation. At best, better networking and collaboration will lead to more efficient, integrated and effective policies and service provision.

49 Austin Smith, *Journeying with God: Paradigms of Power and Powerlessness*, Sheed and Ward, Wisconsin, 1990, p 132.

50 For example, *Developing Effective Community Involvement Strategies*, Foundations 169, Joseph Rowntree Foundation, York 1999.

51 For example, *Active Partners: Benchmarking Community Participation in Regeneration*, Yorkshire Forward & Yorkshire and Humber Regional Development Agency 2000.

Where are the faith communities?

'...searching for, holding to, living and struggling, and dying in, the creative centre of culture... not an artistic conception, nor is it a geographical location. It is found at those critical points in society where God's creativity and redemptive acts are contending with forces of meaninglessness, dispersion, disorder and despair... To be and to persist, to bear portions of the world's sufferings, to fall and to be picked up, to seek to be 'salt' and 'light' at these points, in the day to day fabric of our human lives, is the common Christian calling.'⁵²

At present, faith communities in many areas are seeking places at partnership tables sometimes, it seems, without asking why or what they can bring. Is it to join in the spirit of partnership, taking collective responsibility for finding solutions to the hard questions facing many areas? Or is it to assert sectional interests in an arena of confrontation and blame? Will their presence promote or corrode trust?

The debate around neighbourhood renewal increasingly focuses on rectifying avoidable inequalities.⁵³ Respect and trust have become central concepts. The vocabulary may be different but this surely resonates with a Gospel concern for all people and for the whole person. Apart from their material resources and practical activity, churches can bring an approach informed by this concern and the credibility that comes from their enduring, faithful presence in neighbourhoods under stress, where they share the anguish yet also embody future hope.

Professor Hilary Russell is a sociologist and is Deputy Director of the European Institute for Urban Affairs at the Liverpool John Moore University. Currently she is Deputy Speaker of Merseyside and Region Churches' Ecumenical Assembly and represents the Council of Faiths on the Liverpool Partnership Group.

52 Anthony Dyson, 'Clericalism, Church and Laity' in *All are Called: Towards a Theology of the Laity*, CIO Publishing 1985, p 16.

53 Sennett, *Respect*, pp 261f.