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**Inter-generational Understanding in the
inner city: 'Edge effects' and sustainable
change in community organisations**

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Introduction

The work of the Interpersonal and Organisational Development Research Group, in the Department of Psychology and Speech pathology, Manchester Metropolitan University, is concerned with social change, and the improvement of life opportunities for the most vulnerable members of society. The Community Programme of work combines interests and skills in community, organisational and empowerment psychology. Staff and students work in partnership with community organisations, both formally and informally constituted, and including those from statutory, voluntary and commercial sectors.

This paper will describe some steps of a project which seeks to develop inter-generational understanding in an inner city borough in Greater Manchester. The project described is part of a larger Millennium Project, which was conceived and is co-ordinated by one of the authors (MC). The context in which the project developed, and the methods used to create principled organisational and community development and change in the lives of local people will be described. Particular attention will be drawn to the ideological climate within which the project operates and to which it contributes; the organisational eco-systems within which the project operates; the elements that combine to form the basis of the project and the different functions they perform; and the natural resources that are harnessed in the course of the project development. Climate, eco-systems, elements and functions, and use of natural resources are all critical components of analyses of sustainable ecological development (Mollison, 1991), and analogies will be drawn with natural ecology throughout the discussion (Trist, 1976). The concept of 'edge' effects (see, for example, Odum, 1971), which are highlighted by the permaculture movement in the design of **sustainable** ecological development, will be explored, in order to demonstrate how such a small human resource (one co-ordinator and a steering committee) can be an effective agent in principled and sustainable community development.

Principled Development

Greater Manchester supports a number of ethnically and socially mixed boroughs containing large areas of social deprivation. Some of these localities are high on the list of communities to receive Government attention under the *New Deal for Communities* (Social Exclusion Unit, 1998). 'New Borough' is one of these areas. Administratively it is separate from surrounding towns, although historically, distinctions were less easy to draw. In common with other such localities, youth unemployment is high, juvenile offending rates give cause for concern and fear of crime amongst the increasing elderly population is high. There are many welfare organisations seeking to provide better futures for specified groups of people, e.g. Community Services to Asian Elders; Youth projects, etc., few grass-roots organisations seek to combine the interests of both young and old in the borough. The purpose of the project is to facilitate inter-generational understanding between elderly and young people in 'New Borough', so that greater understanding and social harmony follow. A 'new community setting' (e.g. Sarason, 1972; 1974) has been formed, and this paper will describe some of the methods of doing this. The project has incorporated statutory and voluntary education and welfare organisations, including several local council departments and grass roots projects; youth projects; Greater Manchester Police; commercial sponsors; and the general public (see Mayo, 1997 for discussion of partnerships for community development).

Ideological Climate

Education, welfare and community organisations, whether statutory, voluntary or commercial, operate in the midst of a web of different, often conflicting ideologies that at different points in time create a climate of uncertainty and turbulence. The last decade in Britain has seen particular ideologies gain a stranglehold on many different sectors of social life. The ideologies of the 'new right', which stress anti-egalitarian individualism and autonomy, and traditional family values (within which are enshrined patriarchal ideologies of work and of caring wherein men of all ages work

as the major breadwinners, and women of all ages do the caring and the community work), have contributed to the strengthening of those ideologies which underpin self-help in contrast to state welfare or even full employment. This injunction to self-help has now been extended by *New Labour* to communities (as if they are real, see Hoggett, 1997), as part of their commitment to communitarianism (Driver and Martell, 1997). Somewhat paradoxically, under *New Labour* even greater centralised power has undermined the autonomy of locally determined education and welfare provision. However, there are apparent contradictions within these ideologies (see Fawcett and Featherstone, 1994, in relation to Community Care). Along with individualism and autonomy go the ideologies of consumerism - choice, consumer demand, and user participation in determining both community need and local responses to need. Along with the centralisation of power, goes a concern with quality, efficiency, effectiveness, and budgetary control.

The very paradoxes and contradictions within the ideological web present possibilities for change (see Rappaport, 1981 for the principle). Progress to community integration is possible as different hegemonic coalitions form, uniting the interests of different stakeholders in the futures of the Borough (Burton, 1994; Gramsci, 1971; Kagan and Lewis, 1993; 1994). Thus, for example, local government education officials who have to enhance school performance may ally with local businesses who want to sustain a good press, locally, and with voluntary agencies who seek to enable good quality and fulfilling lives for elderly people, and with police forces who wish to reduce local juvenile crime and engender a greater sense of social responsibility in young people.

The current ideological climate has been used by the project in one main way. It has been able to catalyse the formation of coalitions between different existing community organisations (commercial, statutory and voluntary) and external interest (sponsorship) groups, thus forming a hegemonic coalition (Burton and Kagan, 1996). Ideological turbulence and contradiction need not lead to organisational stagnation.

Instead, it can be the foundation of progressive organisational responses to community change.. Much of the project's work has been forming, facilitating and helping to sustain the coalitions. These coalitions have boundaries other than those of the constituent organisation(s).

Organisational Eco-systems

The project's work has few organisational boundaries. It works with statutory agencies (social services, education, youth, employment, leisure and recreation) and with voluntary organisations. It also works with local business, some of whom are developing reputations for social responsibility (Reder, 1995). Work has been undertaken with different levels of organisations, from Chief Executives, Senior managers, middle and first line managers, contact workers, children, elderly people and their friends and relatives. Care is taken to negotiate a brief and follow up any work with further contacts and time, so that those that are in the position to make change happen are able to do so. For community development it has been necessary for the project worker to develop a thorough understanding of the different stakeholders in the locality.

The project does not work in isolation. Within the different organisations, use will often be made of existing people (e.g. teachers, youth workers, Chairs of voluntary organisations, police officers etc.), some of whom will be managers in the developmental change process. Between organisations, experienced and knowledgeable people have been linked, in order to maximise developmental possibilities. When new activities have been suggested, existing workers and managers who will be in a position to create change have been involved. It is one segment of a complex community system that has been incorporated into the project and with which the worker must engage.

Elements and Functions of the Work

The work of the project can be described in terms of the different elements involved: each element focuses on different aspects (or combinations of aspects) of community development. The activities undertaken, and community development functions served, include:

Elements of Activity

- visits/series of visits to local schools, projects and organisations
- discussions with councillors and officers; contacts with change agents
- information exchange
- obtaining sponsorship
- interviews and observations
- talks
- resource procurement
- negotiation and consultation
- group work and networking
- membership of planning groups
- research
- organising and mounting community events
- media interviews

Functions

- personal interpersonal and organisational capability
- decision making
- project development
- involvement of young people
- resource allocation
- resource co-ordination
- thinking and understanding
- building on existing practice
- publicity
- introducing best practice
- event design
- local participation
- enhancing skills

Natural Resources Used

As far as possible those resources that are already available in the locality are used. Schools and youth projects already work to support the development of young people's creative and performance skills, their moral and social awareness, their contributions to community life. Sharing of practices has been spread by the project. Newspaper and television coverage has helped disseminate the achievements throughout Greater Manchester. The project works with other local projects in their own localities in order to help them develop from where they are now. Where good relationships exist between different agencies and sectors these are supported: where they do not attempts are made to enable them to develop by strategic use of planning committees and networking events. The project worker is able to respond to local requests for assistance and to identify other sources of support. The project has often

served to catalyse (speed up) processes that are happening anyway. In ecological terms the project is interested in sustainable development and this will be best achieved by addressing local conditions and working with existing practice. Where additional resources are artificially injected, this is done in a way that is short term and will lead to the development of local resources (Mollison, 1991) - much of the project's work is analogous to 'do nothing farming' (Fukuoka, 1971).

'Edge' Effects and Energy Efficiency

The breadth of the geographical remit, and complexity of the community system with which the project works, means that the different elements of the work of the project and the resources available, have to be focused carefully if any coherent community development is to be achieved that is of benefit to those living locally.. One way of thinking about the work is to see everything that is done as being at the interface of at least two different organisational eco-systems (or parts of them). For example, the project may work at the transition of existing practice and better practice; of statutory organisations and non-statutory organisations; of education and social services; of policing, transport for the elderly, and youth work; of welfare organisations and local communities. The transition between two or more diverse ecological communities is known as the ecotone (Odum, 1991). At such junctions, the variety and diversity of species and thus the productivity of the ecotone is usually greater than the sum of each of the adjoining communities. Not only do species from each community share the ecotone, some species are only found there. Furthermore, the junction between communities often acts as a kind of net or sieve for resources - they accumulate at the boundary.

The increased variety, resources and productivity of the ecotone is known as the 'edge' effect. Mollison (1991) highlights the importance of the 'edge' for sustainable development: the economies of at least two different environments can be combined and the natural benefits of each environment can be preserved. The same may be true of sustainable organisational development. By working at the 'edge', the combined

resources of adjoining eco-systems can be used. Just as it is possible, through the design of sustainable systems of ecological development, to increase the relative contribution of the 'edge' to each adjoining community, so it is possible to create a larger edge effect in organisational development and thereby maximise its benefit to the organisational eco-system as a whole. This is, in effect what the project is attempting to do. Figure 1 illustrates this developmental process.

Figure 1 about here

If we are successful in maximising the 'edge, it will be possible to maximise the energies and resources available to the community development process, and be energy efficient, whilst contributing to sustainable change. With such a small human resource facing such a large and complex community development task, it is essential that the work is carried out in sustainable and energy efficient ways. It is uncertain whether, at the moment the project is successfully working at the 'edge' : it may be that it is still too occupied with bridging activities. Current attempts to obtain financial support for the project as a whole, rather than for individual events, as in the past, may lead to further clarification of this point.

Conclusion

Some concepts borrowed from sustainable ecological development help in the understanding of the contribution that a small project can make to large scale, geographically spread community development in inter-generational understanding. Climatic turbulence can enable the formation of hegemonic coalitions. Access to both horizontal and vertical zoning of the organisational eco-system can help target activities appropriately so that beneficial development is most likely. The work of the project is made up of a diverse range of elements with different functions and combinations of functions, to fit local conditions and different historical requirements. Existing natural resources and developmental processes are used to maximise the chances that developments will be sustainable. Most usefully, the project attempts to

work at the 'edge' - the transition between two or more ecological communities. In working to increase the edge and with the edge, the project will be most likely to maximise the amount and variety of resources available to it; to preserve the best features of adjoining systems and to enhance the likelihood that developments will be sustainable ones. Whilst the 'edge' is usually enriched by the adjoining communities, with bad stewardship it can become barren and impoverished, supporting little of environmental benefit. Working at the 'edge' therefore has responsibilities to preserve the very best of all adjoining communities and this may present further challenges for the project in the future.

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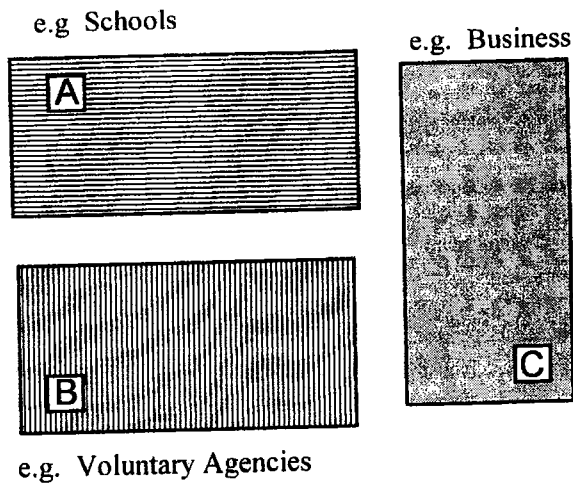
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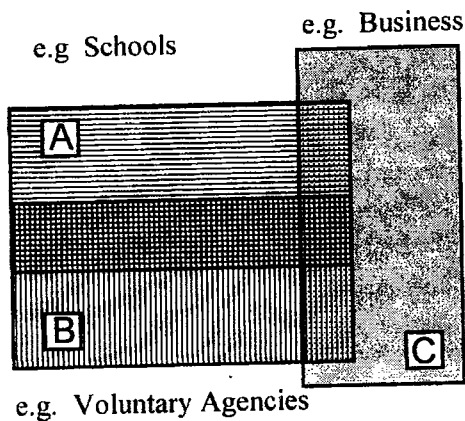
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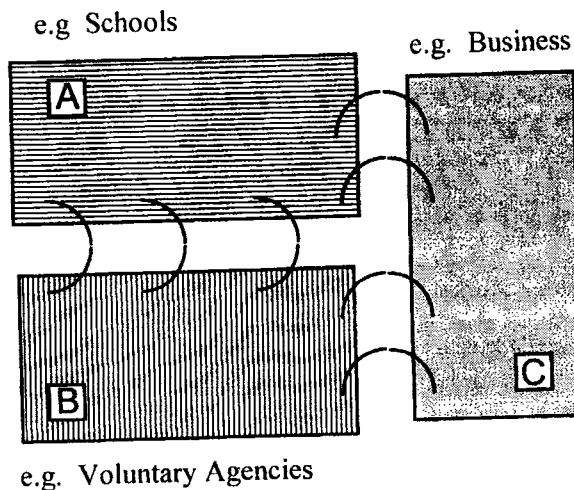
Figure 1: Maximising 'Edge' Effects for Sustainable Organisational Development



*Working within organisational boundaries:
Development and change targeted at each organisation separately.
Energy inefficient and unlikely to lead to co-ordinated change in the common domain.*



*Maximising the 'edge':
Using natural resources - getting people from different organisations to work together and utilise the expertise of each.
Energy efficient and high likelihood of leading to sustainable and co-ordinated change.*



*Working at the organisational interface:
Attempts to bridge organisations.
Energy intensive: some likelihood of co-ordinated change, but effort is on the margins of each organisation's area of concern, so sustainability is questionable.*



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