Interpersonal and Organisational Development Research Group

Community Activism, Participation and Social Capital on a Peripheral Housing Estate

Carolyn Kagan, Mark Burton, Rebecca Lawthom and Kath Knowles

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Interpersonal *and* Organisational Development Research Group, Manchester Metropolitan University

IOD Research Group

MISSION:

To undertake research and consultancy which informs policy, enhances the effectiveness of organisations, and enhances the lives of vulnerable people by asking meaningful questions, encouraging the participation of those involved in the research and disseminating the findings to all those with a stake in the research

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Abstract

The nature of social capital and its importance in contemporary social policy and practice in the UK will be outlined. The activities of a newly emerging residents' association on a peripheral housing estate in the North West of England will be followed, drawing on the written accounts of one of the members and research filed diaries of community psychologists associated with the group. In particular it will highlight the development of trust and co-operation, and thereby *bonding capital*. It will illustrate the absence of *bridging capital* and will argue that the development of one without the other widened to schisms within the group, disabling them with the subsequent erosion of trust, co-operation and social capital. The utility of the concept of social capital at a local level will be explored.

The nature of social capital

The concept of social capital is becoming widely discussed and investigated in a number of different fora. Social capital is said to underpin health and well-being (Lomas, 1998; Kawachi et al., 1997; Cooper et al., 1999; Campbell, 1999; Baum, 1999) and to provide protection for children in contemporary society (Jack and Jordan, 1999)). It is also becoming seen as a vital mechanism and outcome of community development practice (Gittell and Vidal, 1998). In the UK, the concept features in Government documents on urban regeneration, health, housing, community safety and crime reduction. Government policy frameworks see social capital as both an asset to be utilised, particularly with regard to public participation in service planning, service delivery and local democracy, and as an asset to arise as an outcome of various legislative processes (see, for example, Cattell and Evans, 1999; Social Exclusion Unit, 1998; 2000). In relation to regeneration, Forrest and Kearns (1999) suggest that the concept of social capital pervades both policy and practice:

> "These ideas have now entered the policy and political arena in Britain. Regeneration strategies have increasingly come to be seen as working with and building on the stock of social capital in a neighbourhood. A key implication is that, without sufficient social capital, regeneration policies will not take root or be sustainable" (p.9).

What is Social Capital? As with many of the 'new' social processes introduced by British Governments, it is an import from the United States. As with all such concepts there is debate about its origins (Gittell and Vidal, 1998; Wall, Ferrazzi and Schryer, 1998). Portes and Landolt (1996) locate current interest in the work of the sociologists Bourdieu and Coleman.

> Bourdieu ..(refers) to the advantages and opportunities accruing to people through membership in certain communities. Coleman ... also used it to describe a resource of individuals that emerges from their social ties. (Portes and Landolt, p.19)

It is the work of Putnam (1993, 1995), however, writing about social change in Italy and in the United States, that has underpinned most discussion in the UK. Whilst we can see from the above that social capital is an inherently psychological concept, Putnam has extended the concept from individuals to groups (even Nations), which makes it of more particular interest for community psychology. Putnam describes social capital thus:

By analogy with physical capital and human capital - tools and training that enhance individual productivity - "social capital" refers to features of social organization such as networks, norms, and social trust that facilitate co-ordination and co-operation for mutual benefit.....Such networks facilitate coordination and communication, amplify reputations and thus allow dilemmas of collective action to be resolved...(Such) dense networks of interaction probably broaden the participants' sense of self, developing the "I" into the "we"... (Putnam, 1995, p. 67)

The main elements of social capital, then, from Putnam's perspective are trust and co-operation.

Jack and Jordan, 1999, in a British context, and arguing that the existence and development of social capital is a major way of protecting children, define it as follows:

Social capital consists of cultural practices, norms, networks, links, know-how and tradition, through which people conduct informal interactions of all kinds. For instance, social capital is the trust that enables people to make contracts, rather than the contracts themselves; the teamwork that makes groups function effectively, rather than the roles and structures of the groups; the culture through which citizens understand and participate in politics, rather then the processes of government or elections; and the expectations that people will be friendly and reciprocal towards their neighbours, rather than the physical buildings and spaces they inhabit. ...(Jack and Jordan, 1999 p. 243)

They go on to outline who might benefit from strong social capital, and to issue a warning that it may not necessarily work for the common good.

Social capital is produced through specific human interactions, and thus available only to members who share in certain ways of life (Jordan 1998a) and is freely available for the benefit of all members who take part in the community's interactions....the beneficial effects of norms, traditions and networks of trust and co-operation are as accessible to rogues and confidence tricksters, fraudsters and felons, as they are to the sociable, active or altruistic members of that society whose interactions sustain it. (Jack and Jordan, 1999 p.243)

Social Capital and Social Deprivation

The notion that poor and deprived areas necessarily lack social capital, an implicit assumption is some contemporary Government policy has been disputed by Forrest and Kearns (1999). In a digest of studies of social cohesion in a four different parts of Britain, they suggest many studies, indeed, show the opposite.

"Close family ties, mutual aid and voluntarism are often strong features of poor areas. It is these qualities which may enable people to cope with poverty, unemployment and wider processes of social exclusion" (p.9).

However, just because there is social cohesion, or even social capital, Portes and Landolt (1996) point out that the assets obtainable through it seldom enable participants to rise above their poverty (p.20). Sometimes, they suggest, close knit ties can create 'downward levelling pressures' to conform to sets of norms and values which make it difficult for individuals to enter mainstream society. Furthermore, the

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poor neighbourhood may have weak and inward looking networks, which nevertheless offer strong support in adversity. In poor neighbourhoods the preoccupation of everyday life is dominated by 'getting by'. Often, those who can, get out, further weakening the social and physical infrastructure.

Putnam (1998) and Briggs (1998) distinguish between the social capital that enables residents to 'get by', the type that brings people closer together who already know each other (what Gittell and Vidal (1998) refer to as *bonding capital*), and the social capital by which residents establish connections outside their neighbourhood, enabling them to 'get ahead' by 'importing clout' (Putnam's *bridging capital*).

This paper will follow the activities of a newly emerging residents' association on a peripheral housing estate in the North West of England. In particular it will highlight the development of trust and co-operation, and thereby *bonding capital*. It will illustrate the absence of *bridging capital* and will argue that the development of one without the other widened to schisms within the group, disabling them with the subsequent erosion of trust, co-operation and social capital.

Background to the neighbourhood.

Meadowbank is an overspill estate from a large North Western City, located in a Shire County, District Authority. The City Authority retains responsibility for housing and the tenancies of most of the residents, and the District authority (of the County Council) responsibility for the municipal services, such as cleansing, and the County Council itself retains responsibility for education, the youth services and social services. The deprivation index for the City authority is within the top one percent of **most** deprived areas of England (of 310 rankings -DETR, 1998) and the District authority is the top 20 percent of **least** deprived districts[1]

Whilst this kind of indexing offers only one approach to the deprivation of an area, and the extent to which local residents are socially excluded, (Room, 1995, especially Robson), it is important to note that the siting of a deprived estate[2], with all the attendant problems of the inner city, in a greenfield site, next to one of the most prosperous towns in Britain means that (i) the estate is likely never to receive regeneration programme money which has been linked mostly to inner city areas and sometimes to poor rural areas; and (ii) to suffer from falling between the responsibilities of the two authorities, with tenants having no political voice in either arena. For example, housing repair (or non-repair) and its transfer from local authority control to private ownership or another social landlord is managed by the City, whereas local elected (political) representatives only have a voice in the District and County authorities.

This context has a direct impact on the struggles of local people to become activists in order to endeavour to regenerate their area without substantial regeneration monies, and the difficulties they encountered in attempting to work in partnership with the local authorities.

Beyond this, the estate consists of two parts: Woodside and Heathside, separated by a wooded valley, known as the 'dip'. Houses are post-war, in a general state of poor repair[3] . Heathside consists mostly of semi detached houses, some terraces and bungalows for elderly people. Roads are not named and residences are numbered (for example a road sign might say 'Woodside, 110-219' or 'Woodside 1120-1179'). Woodside consists of mostly terraced housing, and deck access three storey flats.

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Houses have gardens and there are a number of grassy spaces maintained by the council. A large field is situated, out of sight, over the brow of the hill at the edge of Heathside, and a small area has been tarmac'd and a single basketball hoop erected. The estate is bounded by a main road, some fields and another owner-occupier estate, Hillside. It is about a mile uphill from the nearby, prosperous market town, complete with stately home and some of the highest property values in the country. There is no medical practice or post office on the estate (both of these are on the main road near the Heathside part of the estate). There is a small parade of shops, some of which were not occupied in 1998, next to a public house. There is a 'community house' in the Woodside part of the estate, a Methodist church run cafe, with short opening hours, and a family centre operated by a large Children's Charity. There is an infrequent bus service to the town from the main road, and one bus a day to the nearest hospital about 15 miles away across hilly country (if residents do not have their own transport, an appointment will involve an overnight stay). Two primary schools are situated on the periphery of the estate and the nearest secondary school is in the town. The nearest youth club is in the town.

In March 1998, a women's action group (later called the Women's Regeneration Group) had begun, with a view to stimulating interest amongst residents in the state of the estate, and taking some action to better their quality of life. Initially, two issues were the focus of their activity: (i) cleansing the 'dip' by removing tons of rubbish which had not been removed over a number of years; and (ii) resisting attempts from the City council to hand over the control of housing on the estate by 'trickle transfer'[4]

As they met their activities grew and their group evolved into a residents' association (MECA) with a far wider regeneration brief.

Involvement by the University

We were involved, thorough invitation, as one means by which the Women's Group could be supported. Our initial brief had been no more than to show interest, discuss what was going on with the local women, give ideas and links to other projects, and to spread understanding of what living in poverty in Britain was like (Stewart, 1999). The very involvement of the University gave self-proclaimed strength to the women and helped them gain media interest in life and changes on the estate.

From September 1998 to March 1999 we also supervised a group of community psychology students who worked with local people, at their invitation, on a number of different projects (see Dunne, et al., 2000, for an account from both students and staff of aspects of this work).

A chronology of the major activities of the Women's Regeneration Group is given in Table 1.

Table 1: Main activities undertaken by the Women's regeneration Group, which became a residents association (MECA)

February 1998	Individual activists remove rubbish from the 'dip'
March 1998	Residents and Children involved in 'clean up' of the 'dip'
	First meeting of Women's Action Group
	University involved
April 1998	Residents' survey begun
May 1998	Public meeting held on housing transfer and need for an alternative Residents' Association
	MECA formed with women's committee members taking some officers roles
	Negotiations with City Council for recognition begun
June 1998	Committee working together and getting to know each other. Strategy development
	Negotiations with City Council for recognition continue
July 1998	Intimidation of MECA by other residents
	Negotiations with City Council for recognition continue
August 1998	Lots of support activities for residents taking place
	Residents' survey completed
	Negotiations with City Council for recognition continue
Sept. 1998	Council recognises MECA as Residents' Association
	Support from Tenants Participation Unit not forthcoming
	Further intimidation of MECA members
	Residents survey report completed
	Fund-raising Jumble Sale held
	Keys to Community House handed over
Oct 1998	Community House renovations begun
	City Council delaying in approving fire regulations
	Conflict within MECA Committee over House Rules
Nov. 1998	Support from Tenants Participation Unit not forthcoming
	Conflict within MECA committee over communications
	City Council delaying in approving fire regulations
	Pre-Christmas Open day planned
Dec 1998	Successful Open day, fully inclusive held
	City Council delaying in approving fire regulations
	Conflict within MECA committee over basic values of exclusion/inclusion
	Schisms within Committee deepen
January 1999	Local TV coverage of housing transfer concerns
Feb 1999	Chair of Committee ceases involvement
March 1999	Deep conflicts between some remaining committee members
	Activities for specified groups put on in community house
	Strategic planning within MECA ceased
	Still no support from Tenants Participation Unit
June 1999	Community House officially opened. Apart from committee members, no local residents attend.

This timetable of activities was mirrored by a process of developing relationships; strengthening of personal and interpersonal networks; developing trust; co-operation and a sense of common ownership of a strategic vision for the estate; a failure of

external agencies (particularly those linked to the councils, who have a remit to support tenants' groups) to support the group and to provide resources; growing conflict and disagreement over core values; the widening of schisms amongst group members; an inability to sustain constructive, and then any working relationships; and finally disintegration of the group.

We will present extracts from local newspapers, the residents' survey, our field diary, students' reflective commentaries on their work; and the detailed account of one of the activists who commented on the process throughout via detailed correspondence with one of us (CK), in all writing approximately 40,000 words of reflection throughout the period[5]. We are not suggesting that these sources of data in any way reveal the 'real' experience of what was happening on the estate. Instead we will use these reflections as illustrations of our central argument, which is five-fold.

1. In areas of social disorganisation and lack of social cohesion, the development of social capital is necessary for local sustainable regeneration;

2. Community organising in itself helps to develop trust and co-operation amongst members, and thus local bonding social capital;

3. With obstruction and blocking from external agencies, it is difficult to develop local bridging capital;

4. In the absence of bridging social capital, conditions arise for the negative aspects of social capital to come to the fore and for trust and co-operation to dissipate;

5. The absence of bridging social capital makes confrontational, rather than consensual styles of community organising more likely, leading to difficulties forming local partnerships for regeneration.

An Area of Social Disorganisation and Lack of Social Cohesion.

Meadowside was perceived by residents to have suffered years of neglect by the authorities, resulting in apathy and a disbelief in the possibility of change.

> I can see the dispiriting effects of living in a neighbourhood the local councils don't seem to care about. ... I have pointed out (to the Housing Department) in particular, a patch that has only been cleaned twice in the last 28 years.
> (Martin Bell, MP cited in local paper, February 1998)

> the Councils have allowed the estate to go downhill and this has ruined our community. ...People on the estate do not believe that the council will ever do anything so they have stopped caring (resident cited in local paper, April 1998)

Residents were cynical of attempts to consult them recently over the possible transfer of housing stock, and one wrote to the local paper highlighting the feelings of being ghetto-ised on the estate.

> (We have just had) another blow to our identity..and ..I feel as if we have been betrayed. We were warned at a public meeting that if we didn't support the move then the estate would go 'right down'. Actually things couldn't get much worse. .. It feels as if no-one wants to know or allow overspill residents

to move out of what is almost a 'cultural quarantine area'. I feel betrayed, abandoned and isolated. ('Angry resident' to local paper April 1998)

One woman had begun to clear the 'dip', but met with some suspicion and apathy.

> I hear (the same phrases) from residents who tell me I'm wasting my time trying to clear up here. ... I'm just an ordinary person, have no resources and feel as if my own mental health is being threatened trying to do something.

> ..I'm alone. People have been afraid to help for fear of 'repercussions' - like not getting repairs done...or of being evicted if they owe rent...(Letter to CK, February 1998)

She goes on to describe aspects of life on the estate, illustrating neglect from the authorities and lack of ties between people.

> dealers of hard drugs (now) start to move into the area, attracted by the fact that no-one can complain...neighbours are so passive...I have felt the hopelessness of the people.

> The situation gets...worse every day. Up to 20 children playing on scaffolding round my block every might. It's like a nightmare. The police don't come. Furniture left out for collection isn't collected and the fire brigade attended 3 times the past weekend.

> If anyone complains about piles of rubbish behind someone's house, they (the Council) say ' If we are forced to clear their rubbish we will bill them for it' This works to stop people pressurising time and time again. Some piles have been there for 20 years and the house has had several tenants, none of whom has been able to get beyond threats of having to pay.(Letters to CK, March, April 1998)

Gradually, other women and some children joined in the cleaning of the 'Dip', although the context of their work was not an encouraging one.

> At present there are 3 of us 'active' and several supporters. We feel very vulnerable in this community. Gossip and back-stabbing is rife: amongst the residents and council officials and workers. People have started to 'come out' (to members of our women's group) with regard to 'nuisance neighbours', domestic violence, homelessness and many other issues. But seem powerless to take the smallest action on their own behalf, but it's a start.

> Children ... argue non-stop. (They) name call, are full of hatred towards one another and everyone who passes. Conversations all seem to be in the 'argument' tone. None are capable of listening for more than a few seconds....It's as if no-one knows how to resolve conflict on any level. ... This knowledge is absent throughout the community.

> Gatherings of any kind are discouraged, doing the footpath work is the only way of meeting a cross section of people - even then it is only the people without cars...

> When I started on the Dip, hardly anyone spoke for about 3 months. When they saw I did not seem to be judging or blaming anyone 2 people told me how they felt seeing me do it....they said that they had talked about it and the overwhelming feeling was of guilt and powerlessness to help. Fear of helping. From that point people started to acknowledge me and blame the council (they

felt safe), plus I <u>refused</u> to listen to anyone blaming residents. .(letters to CK, April 1998)

After we had met with the women's group, further dissatisfactions and insights into life on the estate emerged.

> The overwhelming view is that local people believe there is no point doing anything or asking for anything. Impact of local MP's interest is minimal - may evoke a small scale immediate response from the authorities but with no follow-up. One councillor shows interest in the estate without an attitude of blaming the residents for everything, which seems to pervade other official responses. The women, all of whom have lived on council estates before, say they have never seen anything like the children here. They suggested there was underlying 'demonic evil' with children as young as 7 or 8 threatening to 'slit your throat' or ' make you eat dog shit'. Even brothers and sisters in the same family don't defend each other (as they would normally, they say) but instead will attack each other as readily as anyone else - one boy recently broke his sister's arm. Adults and children reputedly talk to each other inthe vein '...

> It sounds as if the council is being obstructive - it really shouldn't be hard to get strong rubber gloves for rubbish removal but this was time consuming and difficult...

> There is a residents' association but it doesn't seem to work with and for local people. The women's group wanted a room to meet and this led to delay whilst their application was 'investigated' and then a refusal. They are obviously angry about this and have begun to get details of the Residents' Association - they have been unable to get hold of a constitution or minutes of the last meeting. They are talking about getting a really representative residents' association, particularly in order to fight housing transfer.

> (Staff Field Diary, 10 May, 1998)

The context was, then, one where trust and co-operation between residents was low; apathy and passivity reigned; residents were blamed for the state of their estate; council authorities were not enabling; few social ties existed between people; and a moribund residents' association was inactive, defensive and obstructive.

Community Organising and the development of trust and co-operation: Development of Bonding Capital

Once the Women's group had formed, the issue of housing transfer came on to the agenda. At the same time, concerns with the existing residents' association were being aired. As an early activity, the women organised a survey of the estate, asking people about their views about housing (particularly repairs), cleansing and the environment, and satisfaction with the residents' association. Carrying out the survey meant they had to work together, and begin to appreciate each other's strengths.

> I'm still delivering minutes and Heather now has 2 women who come round with her surveying. Meg (78) is there for moral support and her daughter Kate. I can see Heather is frustrated at the slowness of things. At this point I'm willing to do all the posting and take care of Liam (Heather's child) in big chunks but not knock doors. I don't feel strong enough, and that the least

rebuff could push me over the edge. ...Last night I did half hours deliveries. 3 kids helped.... (Letter to CK, 11.5.98)

...the survey is shocking and every day we hear more abuse stories. This week an elderly women <u>afraid</u> to ask for repairs. So my head is running around extreme action at this point and I begin to feel happier. Families such as one where the father had seriously abused daughters then committed suicide are 'coming out', no cure whatsoever for the girls (now women) and rage and anger acted out daily - their own children being first in line. So many broken people. The light on the situation yesterday was that people came out <u>asking</u> for their minutes (they had heard about them from friends). (letter to CK 11.5.98

Soon a decision was reached to form an alternative residents' association, and the group called a public meeting to discuss housing transfers and the importance of organising against them.

Heather was determined to bring residents and council together at a public meeting and put enormous amounts of energy into organising it. We invited everyone concerned with the council (MP, Councillors) etc. We leafleted the whole estate and died of fright unless not a single resident turned up! Every single council official dropped out throughout the day. We thought we were going to be totally humiliated...5 women and 2 men sat at the front with their own dossiers on the matters here, one connected with the police. The meeting flowed perfectly, especially when an activist from (another) estate spoke and explained that the residents have rights, and that nobody is telling them about them.

One of the men (Jack)..<u>pleaded </u>with the residents to see that the children are 'hurting' and that is why they behave so badly - that they are needy.

By the end of the meeting they called for a new action group and a committee were voted in. Heather chairperson, me vice chair, Jack treasurer, and the other man and several women from the women's group in different roles. A number of residents signed up for the committee. Our first newsletter goes out soon. (letters to CK 16.5.98)

They recognised that the authorities may not be too pleased to be faced with a new residents' group, and that those with a vested interest in the disorganised community may also not be too pleased.

What a line up. The Council will be horrified. The one councillor who attended the meeting tried to block the election by warning that the whole area will soon be swarming with social workers.

The fear of the residents and the out and out bullying from different sections of the community is becoming more apparent and quite scary and could escalate when news gets around...Dealers, bullies etc. may not want to change.

The morning after the meeting an article appeared in the local paper "Council clampdown on neglect of homes". It tells of how people who live (here) are going to be tracked down and prosecuted for leaving properties damaged or in a poor state etc. The fact that a majority of properties are decrepit when people move in is ignored. Poverty is ignored. The article was designed to intimidate people here. (letters to CK, 26.5.98)

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Members of the women's group were now meeting for companionship and meals together, as well as on matters affecting the estate.

> Everyone is getting to know each other much more. Although Dot and Heather have lived here for some time, they haven't really spoken together. Now they are sharing suppers and the children are getting to know each other. There are differences in emphasis between Jack (with his concern about policing), Meg (with her concern about elderly people), Leila (and her concern with environmental issues) and the other women (with their concern for greater participation by all on the estate in relation to matters affecting their futures), but they are concerned to find ways of working together and of compromising. (Staff Field Diary, May 1998)

> An interesting incident arose whilst I was there of Joe bringing some forms for Heather to complete (he could not write) - it seems many people are coming to her with similar requests. Someone asked for advice on resisting care proceedings; someone else wanted to be accompanied to a court hearing. About 10 residents are planning to go with him. (Staff Field Diary, 13.6.99)

Other residents were being drawn in to help with some of the activities, and trust between the women in particular was growing.

> Yesterday there was miracle when (2 men)..blind to the rubbish in the past, cleared the front of their flats, which was possibly the worst...it was weird to hear them complaining about a few sweet papers and crisp packets that 'appeared' the next day....it showed..as if they suddenly realised they had the 'power'. ...Heather has met someone whilst out surveying who wants to run a toddler's group - she's got whatever qualifications they have.

> I'm operating on 'blind faith', in <u>myself</u> and in people, although I now have an enormous amount of trust in Heather. ... (A good sign is) we've even started to get angry with each other due to tiredness and stress (of community activity) and funnily enough, both women afraid of conflict and confrontation in normal life, and here we are in the thick of it...I want so much from the people here and they want so little to make them happy...(Letters to CK 30.5.98 1998)

Although the co-operation of the authorities was bad in the past, there was optimism that it might improve, and that they would get help in their work.

> I believe the situation could go either way - into dramatic recovery or destruction. Left to the Council, destruction. With intervention now, recovery..Something tells me the situation is on the 'edge' or rock bottom, and can be nudged wither way. (Letter to CK, 30.5.98)

The trust and co-operation spread amongst the group.

> Heather and Leila are beginning to work together more, letting me out a bit at last, and Jack (the one interested in the Police) is turning out a few good letters in his particular style, which I can see would be particularly useful for communicating with Zombies (Officials). So we are beginning to plan strategy, and who 'fronts' it depends on the approach necessary.

> Everything seems more hopeful today. I have faith in the people here or I don't think I could go on. Things are moving, however slowly it seems sometimes, and H has met some interesting and interested people on her surveying. So there's loads of hope and scope. (letter to CK 15.6.98)

Co-operation from external agencies was not so forthcoming.

> The women's group has nominated Kylie (age 10) for a community service award' for her help with the rubbish clearing and with the survey. They heard nothing and she had said nothing about getting the award. Annie contacted the school and was told 'she will be 'commended' for community work <u>when</u> she behaves herself at school'. The tenants'' participation unit at the Town Hall will not recognise the MECA as there is already a residents' association on the estate (NB they are able to recognise as many groups as exist - I wonder why they wont?). There is beginning to be evidence of financial wrong-doings from the old residents' association, but the Council is reluctant to investigate. Gordon, the Community Development worker is only half time on the estate and minutes the community action project (with few local people involved). he does not answer phone calls or letters. A number of contacts given of people who may be able to help from other estate committees, as well as info' about the national context of housing transfers. Heather will contact the Government Department concerned with tenants' participation directly..

> On a positive note, Heather says she has found things she didn't know she had in her; the Welcome cafe has become more welcoming with children's things inthe window and the possibility of a vegetable box starting. The group wants to expand to run a play scheme in the summer - we agreed to get the necessary information and contacts for them. (Staff Field Diary, 30.5.98)

By this time, then, social capital (bonding) was beginning to develop. People were working together and pulling in the same direction. Over the next few months, they became a recognised residents' association; they re-decorated the community house and planned various activities in it; they held fund raising jumble sales and their achievements culminated in a Christmas Fair at the beginning of December.

> Things have moved on in leaps and bounds..(Previous residents' group) have all resigned! At last! So the City Council are hanging by the short and curlies. Heather and jack have gone into overdrive now and are able to throw the book at them. There has been a Dip clean up; they've gatecrashed a meting at the town hall. ...Do you remember where we showed you those houses in the wood near the corrugated stuff? One of the houses that backed onto it had a mountain of crap there. He not only 'surrendered' it to the Women's group clean up, but helped with the Dip! Heather is now their 'Welfare Rights worker'(!) and has sorted out lots of chaos in their lives. (Letter to CK 17.8.98)

> Everything's going well, every tit-bit of news is positive. Kylie is being picked up on by a few people for voice training, etc. Already writing her own songs and hanging out with Heather, Leila etc. and defending the Action Group. She has also been involved in meetings. Heather is hoping to start a young person's action group, now she has K to 'slap heads'. (Letter to CK, 19.8.98)

> Heather is expecting to get the keys to the community house this week. everything is very positive..They have a jumble sale planned for Saturday. (Letter to CK, 21.9.98)

The work of the group culminated in a successful Christmas Fair, reflecting a number of different aspects of positive social capital

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The fair was a great success and Heather said they raised £200. More residents in one place than I've ever seen...The Father Christmas couldn't have been more perfect....He's the husband of Heather's childminder, they don't live on the estate but on a posh estate nearby... Basically everyone I'd hoped to see was there. Including the excluded excluded! Children behaved perfectly.

At one point I noticed the door had been wedged open with 2 new Annuals. I felt really pissed off for a second then let it go. An hour later they were up on a chair by the exit...When we left and all the residents had gone they were still there (my heart jumped for joy).

Eventually we got Heather, Leila, Meg, Kate and Jack together (for a photo). Heather pulled in residents that were left. ...I didn't dare look for more than a second because of the pain that went through me. Through the top of my head and out of my feet. MECA surrounded by at least 8 'visible' residents and 2 of the most ignored children, at least....It seems so important and the photo will lift spirits....Heather pulled them in and at the last second she shouted in a man ... who used to be the 'heavy' used by (previous residents' group) to keep out the 'undesirables' (some of whom were in the photo). I could hardly look at him and his genuine pleasure at being asked. (Letter to CK, 9.12.98)

Not that all residents were happy with the changes taking place. Resistance was evident.

Jacks house has been paint bombed. A bit of detective work by MECA) has revealed it to be the same person as the recent 'grass' graffiti (on someone's house calling them a 'grass'). (It's) one of the police informers Jack is hoping to expose. The victim of the 'grass' graffiti is now joining the women (and MECA). (Letter to CK, 1.9.98)

Meg received a note through her door: 'Scruffy person have a wash! God help us if you or your slag bitch dougher (sic) ruin this estate signing. Fuck off. Dirty cow.'(Staff Field Diary, 6.6.98)

Despite local and police investigations, it is not known who sent this note, but it is clearly intended to intimidate. The fear of intimidation was still evident when the students started working with MECA in October.

Meadowside residents are frightened, both of 'authority' and from within the community, or reprisals and/or victimisation when they try to uphold basic moral (and legal) standards. Such fear is particularly, but not exclusively, heightened for the elderly. (Student (iii) reflexive diary, December, 1998)

By December 1998, then, MECA had been formed, trust and co-operation had developed quickly, but as we shall see proved to be fragile and vulnerable.

Obstruction by External Agencies: Lack of Development of Bridging Capital

Throughout this time, the activists received little external help. Indeed, it was the opposite, external agencies positively obstructed them. Amongst other things, residents had to push for rubber gloves for those involved in clean-ups, for footballs for a summer playscheme, and for anay kind of information about housing transfer beyond the political rhetoric of councillors. The tenants' participation unit at the City Council seemed reluctant to issue them any development grants. Whilst they had the keys to the Community House and had re-decorated it, officials from the local

authority dragged their feet over approving the fire regulations, which meant that it could not be used for public activities. The residents' committee had to push for contact to be made by the authorities via committee members, and an increasingly confrontational pattern of communication was building up.

> Successive visits to Meadowside, after the Christmas holidays were quite disheartening. With regard to the Community House, (my partner and I) have observed no action or presence there because it is still not open. It seems as if the opening date has been 'put back' repeatedly and residents we spoke to had "no idea what was going on". Therefore the Community House cannot serve as an established, active setting where residents can go and communicate and support one another and discuss and instigate plans for change in the community. (Student (i) reflexive analysis, March 1999)

Tensions began to emerge between the activists. These were borne in part from deep seated value differences, and in part from a lack of knowledge about committee procedures and how to manage conflict. Soon after the Community House was re-decorated, the issue of 'House Rules' was raised in the committee. Some members wanted rules of appropriate and inappropriate conduct to be posted in the house, and to be used for the ejection of those behaving inappropriately. Others argued that the House was for all local residents, and any such rules should emerge if people wanted them, and not be imposed by the committee.

> The Committee members have different views on the social exclusion/inclusion issue. Jack wants police surveillance cameras to be mounted as soon as possible inthe house, to catch dealers on the corner. Meg and Leila do not want Heather talking to known drug users, or those known to be involved in criminal activities, even extending to hidden economy work. Heather, Dot and some of the others think all residents should be welcomed and that support would be given to all, even including the 'murderer' who has just returned to live with his family. This is a problem emerging in other areas where they are introducing neighbourhood Charters - the sub-text for which is 'Let's decide who to keep out of here'. Dangerous stuff. (Staff Field Diary, 16.11.98)

Thus as the group developed cohesion and social capital, out-groups were identified, one of the 'downsides' of social capital identified by, for example Portes and Landolt, (1996).These differences of opinion spilled over to other activities.

> It became obvious that relations within the MECA Committee were deteriorating. It may be said that Heather had been taken as the leader (as chair person) and as she saw it, she was being used as a scapegoat (by the others) because things were going wrong (or not quickly enough). ...(It may be) that all leaders must deal with the issue of the inevitable distrust that members feel towards those with 'status', ... but there are surely ways of helping them understand different ways of working together? (Student (i) reflexive diary, March 1999).

The tensions between committee members spread to disputes of what each had or had not done between committee members, and into their private lives. Discontents with one person's dog was compared to discontent with another's child and so on. These disputes nearly all were connected to power disputes within the committee where some members wanted to curb the behaviour of others.

Attempts were made to bridge, not only with the local authorities, but also with other local projects, but to no avail.

> (We tried hard to involve the community action project and the community development worker in the changes stimulated by MECA) - Having influential people on board would be beneficial as they are in a better position to 'get things moving'. Similarly by having a cross over of committee members (from one body to another) members could aid in any future decisions and plans relating to this project, as we could have an ally on both groups. However, the reverse could be true, and on looking back, probably was. (Student (ii) reflexive diary, March 1999)

The nature of their disputes were summarised by their colleague:

> Leila says Heather wont let go of 'power', having the 'say' about everything, even when 'challenged' by the committee, who set up a meeting in her absence! and demanded her presence as soon as she got home. ... Meg complains about Heather keeping important things to herself and generally dealing with people 'independently' and without telling anyone, except '...by the way..' weeks later. ...... she throws the net wide for information, resources etc. The trouble is what comes 'back' is sometimes being forgotten and not shared. That irritates me on behalf of the others...On the other hand, Heather says Leila and Jack 'lack vision' and would charter out individuals. Jack has an injunction against his 'enemy' which she wishes wasn't the case. Heather doesn't feel they have skills with 'problem children' (H does and is more in touch)....Meg and Kate are in the middle trying to bring 'sides' together. (Letter to CK, 1.11.98)

The committee needed the additional resources of external agencies with the appropriate expertise.

> I don't know what will happen but I wish they could have somebody for a day to help with working as a team, and for personal development with regards to prejudice etc. To help them not to in-fight and get stressed. I can always 'hope' they'll find their way but I feel under the circumstances some very simple help from a person with a lot of experience of groups could make a massive difference and guarantee the core group being the best it can be - just to help things and people 'grow up', and give them some special attention for themselves, as special and very important and needed, and they need that too. (Letter to CK, 1.11.98)

> It's a matter of time before a blow up. The biggest hope I have (if they don't get help with it) is that they have had many clashes but are all still there. (Letter to CK, 9.12.98)

Basic training on committee management, conflict resolution and ways of compromising without losing face, would have assisted the committee members. This is usually provided as a matter of course to new tenants' groups by the City Council, but as they took so long to recognise the group in the first place, patterns were set (not that any offers of training were forthcoming even after the approval was given).

By March, Heather had resigned from the committee, determined to work for inclusive participation on the estate outside the organised group, and no resolution to the substantive issues had been made.

> The individual attributes of group members led to clashes. ... Tension within MECA and between them and the wider community became apparent. There was a lack of communication and understanding on many levels (Within the Committee, with the City Council, with other local residents) which proved difficult to discuss or resolve. ... Individual members became entrenched in assigned roles which led to damaging conflict, in this case fracture within MECA, leading to the Chair person's resignation. (Student (iii) Reflexive diary, March 1999)

Very little bridging social capital had been procured[6], and in its absence the bonding capital which had developed was quickly expended. Trust and co-operation had dissipated. The discontents between committee members were further revealed when people from the estate came to the University to listen to the students' presentations about their work. One vociferous committee member challenged forcefully those students who had worked with Heather, and with people from known criminal families on the estate, to the dismay of others there.

> I could have knocked Meg's block off. I was grateful to you for smoothing things over each time. It's all defensiveness! It's as if they don't want Heather to get any credit for anything, after all she's done. Maybe she hasn't been perfect, but now she has resigned, I felt it was all so annoying. Why keep having a go? It shows there much more to it than a mere personality clash - it's more of a childish power struggle. ...M's comment about some people being beyond hope made me feel hopeless again, rather than angry....They should have to sign a pledge or something before becoming committee members, to represent all tenants in matters equally, or not become a committee member. (Letter to CK, 17.3.99)

Ironically, when the community house was eventually opened at the end of April 1999, apart from the committee members remaining at that time, no residents attended the 'opening' and it was only representatives from external agencies (most of whom had been disabling) there. It was also a week or two away from local elections!

Discussion

During the 14 month period of activity described above, it was clear that there was an increase rise in trust and co-operation amongst the community activists (increase in bonding capital). There was a rapid decline in co-operation and trust, as schisms emerged between activists around an axis of exclusions and inclusions in change on the estate. It is acknowledged that social capital also has a downside (Levi, 1996; Portes and Landolt, 1996) in which the very cohesion achieved by its development can lead to exclusions and anti-social acts (as in, for example, gang behaviour and local protection rackets, (see Walklate and Evans, 1999)).

However, we do not think this is what happened on Meadowbank. The obstruction by those with resources and authority (and thus power) did not permit the parallel development of bridging capital. Thus the activists were manoeuvred into confrontation with these authorities as the means to ensure change took place. Consequently, their newly banked store of (bonding) social capital was quickly drawn upon and spent, resulting, inevitably in conflict and schisms within the group.

We have seen how the provision of external resources may have prevented some of the conflicts. A good, supportive external agency may also have been able to help the

action group resolve their conflicts once they had arisen. As Braithwaite (1989, cited in Jack and Jordan, 1999) suggests

> Individual breaches of trust, wrongs, exploitation's or defections do not destroy social capital so long as there are institutions for adjudication, reparation and atonement (Braithwaite, 1989 in Jordan and Jack).

There were no such institutions on Meadowbank. Instead, individual prejudices and word views vied with each other for dominance, fulfilling Jordan and Jack's warning:

> Social capital can be eroded and eventually destroyed, by the development of inequalities, divisions and exclusions that act as barriers to trustful and co-operative interactions. (Jack and Jordan, 1999, p. 244)

This failure on the part of the public authorities to support the efforts of local activists, is just what the UK Government has described as being a major contribution to the deprivation of neighbourhoods in the past.

> Communities themselves ought to b e the best advocates of their own interests. And the best solutions will be those that include their input and have their support or participation. But their capacity to do this has been undermined (...by previous ways of working)....But there is more that the public sector could do to help rebuild this 'social capital', ... by helping them to acquire the skills to help themselves (what is known as community capacity building). (Social Exclusion Unit, 2000 p.26)

Current thinking about partnership and participation, as reflected through Government regeneration strategy documents and practices, will require the development of bridging capital in addition to bonding capital. It is not the responsibility of local people, but rather those of public agencies to ensure this happens, and that common agendas are pursued, developing a consensus, rather than confrontational approach to social change (Gittell and Vidal (1998).

In this paper we have explored the concept of social capital as both a mechanism and an outcome in bottom-up social change at a local level. We have argued that the concept is a psychological one, and should be of interest to community psychologists. We have seen how it arises from joint activity, but that its store is quickly depleted without concurrent bridging capital development (that is, the tapping in to resources available externally).

Throughout, we have looked at social capital at the interpersonal and group level, following the fortunes of a local group of community activists over an 18 month period. It has been argued elsewhere that social capital is best thought of as a societal or institutional level concept, developed over a much longer period of time (see Heller, 2000 for a discussion of the concept at the State level of Kerela, India). Both Heller and Cattell and Evans (1999) introduce the link between social and economic capital, when both small and large scale social change is at stake.

> the concept of social capital is insubstantial without a material base. 'Social and material' capital might be a more adequate way of describing these processes. (Cattell and Evans, 1999, p. 55)

During this period at Meadowbank there was no enterprise development, a key plank in the UK Government's strategy for neighbourhood renewal (Social Exclusion Unit, 2000). Forrest and Kearns remind us that

> the social relations in a neighbourhood cannot be separated from the social context inwhich they operate. A high degree of mutual and voluntary activity in a neighbourhood lacking key economic resources of jobs and incomes will produce quite different outcomes and be the product of very different pressures compared with similarly observed activities in an affluent area (Forrest and Kearns p. 10).

So maybe the development of social capital on Meadowbank was limited from the outset.

As far as community psychology is concerned, although Social Capital tends to be used in relation to both individuals and communities, it might be better viewed as a community-level variable (what Kawachi et al., (1997 p.1491) refer to as an ecologic variable) whose counterpart at the individual level is the social network (Kawachi et al., 1997). We would argue that the concept is one worth further exploration, both in terms of its utility at different levels of analysis, and in terms of its value as an organising principle for community psychology. The role of community psychology in enabling the development of bridging capital, as well as bonding capital is one that could be usefully clarified. Certainly, we would suggest, along with Kawachi et al. 1997, that there is a

> need to distinguish at a theoretical level between a growing array of potentially related notions, including community competency, collective efficacy, sense of community and the 'civil society'. (Kawachi et al., 1997, p 1497)

There is also the opportunity, as Dalziell (2000) has outlined, for community psychologists to become involved in the regeneration arena, both in the development and implementation of strategy. For the first time in a very long while in the UK, the Government rhetoric is one of participation, consultation and self-determination by the poorest and most vulnerable people. Community psychology needs to demonstrate its own capacity to enable the processes, contribute to the development of complex, sustainable systems and to help propel UK society to greater equality and social justice. We have seen, on Meadowside, the difficulty of bottom-up organising in a hostile context wherein politicians stand to gain (in this case, financially, from trickle transfer of housing) from encouraging participation whilst obstructing the transfer of power. One challenge for community psychologists will be to work to avoid the cynical prediction of French students from 1968:

je participe

tu participes

il participe

nous participons

vous participez

<u>ils profitent</u>

Notes:

[1] The local deprivation index for the City authority gives it a ranking of 3 out of 310 rankings, and the District authority is ranked 240. This index consists of a score derived from local amenities, overcrowded households, 17 year olds not in education, derelict land, children in low income households, educational achievements, long term unemployment, insurance premium levels. The city authority is ranked 4th for intensity of deprivation at ward level and the district authority ranked 158 (out of 158 rankings).See *1998 Index of Local Deprivation* (DETR, 1998) for details of this indexing procedure.

[2] See *Mapping Local Authority Estates Using the Index of Local Conditions* (DETR (1997) Housing Research Summary, No. 65) for the approach to deprivation mapping at local estate level.

[3] The City Authority's repair bill was estimated as several million pounds by a Deputy Director of Housing in July 2000 (Verbal report to Housing Strategy Consultation Group, East Manchester New Deal for Communities, 18th July 2000)

[4] Throughout the country there are large financial Central Government incentives for Local Authorities to cease direct management of their housing stock. The two main ways in which control is handed over is by wholesale transfer to another 'social landlord', such as housing associations, or by 'trickle transfer' wherein individual properties or blocks of properties are transferred as they become available. Residents are supposed to be consulted over the transfer of the housing stock. By the former method it is somewhat easier for residents to negotiate conditions of transfer with a new landlord, and thus have a part in regulating rents and contracts for repairs and so on. By 'trickle transfer' it is difficult for residents to be consulted and have any part in regulating rents and tenancy contracts.

[5] This correspondence was one sided. There was no expectation that CK should reply, although at times she did. The correspondence took place during the time that we also met with the local residents, including this activist. It therefore formed a parallel account, linking past reflections of living on different deprived estates with hopes for the future. From the outset permission was given to use the account for educational purposes, and for raising awareness of life at the margins in Britain. As the activist said "I can't tell you how much it helps to be believed and acknowledged. ...if you understand you will, hopefully, feel a responsibility to do something, like I do - once seeing the injustice (of having to live like this) you cannot turn your back" (March 1998).

[6] throughout this period, the University and the community psychology students were involved in various projects with MECA. This paper has not reported on the successes they had in linking with other agencies and bringing some external resources to the estate, but has focused on the paucity of resources available to the Committee. We were seen as an important resource throughout the period. *I sat there for hours after, feeling better, especially when (I heard) the students were coming this week. The relief of that, is for me, that ORCA committee will have someone to talk to about their vision, anger, frustration and disappointment, joys, tiredness etc. etc. apart from one another,.....As well as all the other benefits, such as an important 'authority' (the University) giving their support. (letter to CK, 1.10.98) The idea of us coming to the University is very exciting. Just to say I've been is quite something, or have any connection at all. One of the things about your visits, and the students going up there and being interested, will have an effect. Possibly more than anywhere, and give self esteem and status to residents just by association.(Letter to CK, 7.11.98)* However, when the conflicts between members became too heated, some members aligned us with one side of the dispute (the original Women's Action Group members with whom we had first been involved). We had some of the expertise required, but its deployment was unacceptable to some of the Committee, despite considerable efforts from some of the students to open the way for greater direct involvement in the committee's work.

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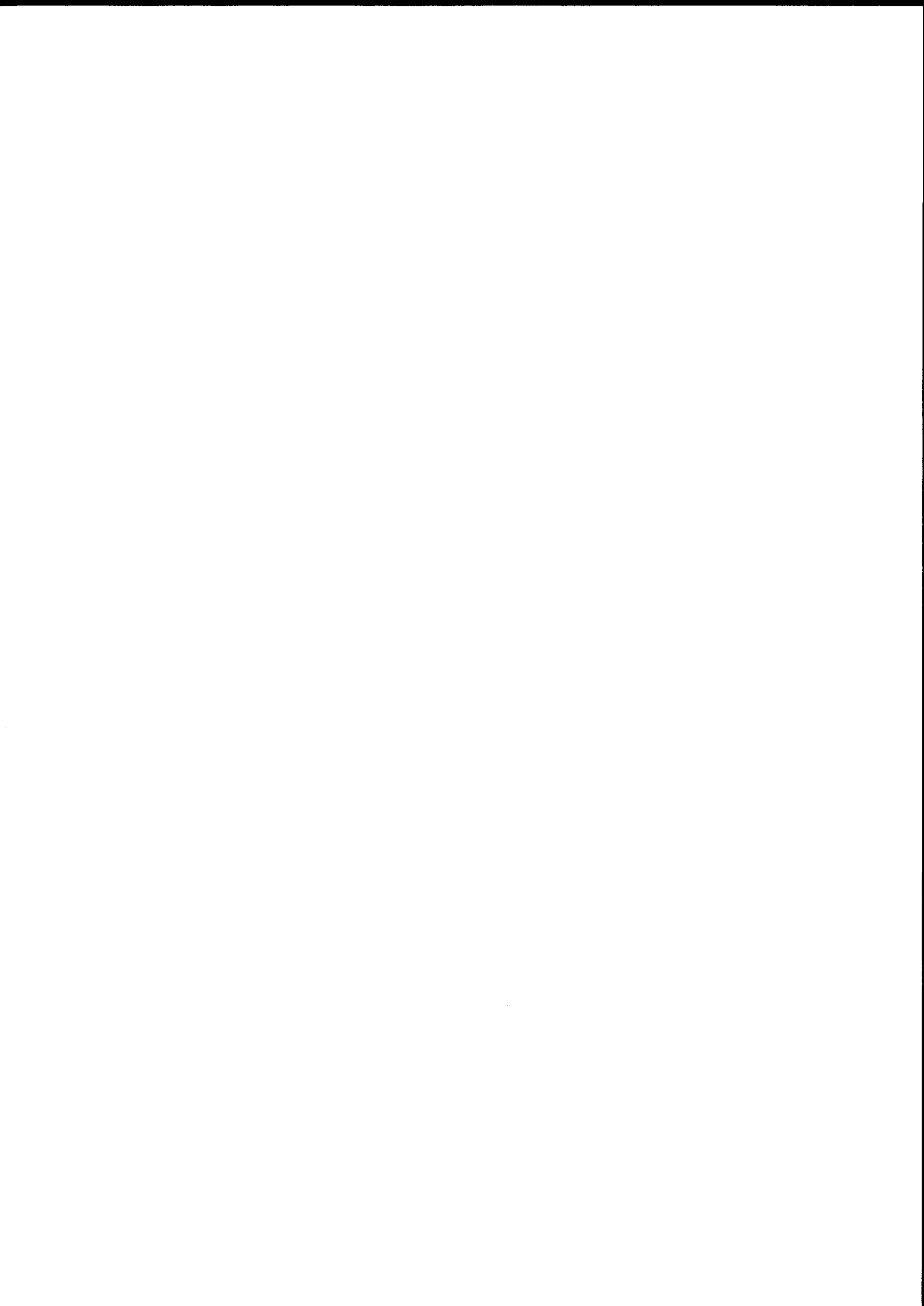Jacobs, J. (1961) The death and life of American cities New York, Vintage

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