# 'BACKGROUND OF DISTANCES'

# PARTICIPATION AND COMMUNITY COHESION IN THE NORTH: MAKING THE CONNECTIONS



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## ICPS WORKING PAPER 1

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MAKING KNOWLEDGE WORK

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# Note to the reader

This working paper is also a report of the ICPS conference *Participation and Community Cohesion in the North: making the connections*, held on the 26th of February 2004.

It reads as a whole document.  However, for a short overview of the conference day and conclusions, we suggest you read the sections up to and including 'Key Themes' and the final conclusions and recommendations.

The longer section entitled *Community Cohesion and Participation: Where Now?* provides a context for the conference through a discussion of government theory and practice before and after the conference day.



**Cover Graphic:** The words in the mural say, "The world will be happy if all colours and all thoughts have their own place."

# Introduction

The conference *Participation and Community Cohesion in the North: making the connections* was held two and a half years after the North of England experienced a summer of major social unrest.[1] One delegate described these disturbances as 'attempted suicide by a community – a cry for help.' This is a controversial image of powerlessness and disenfranchisement, but it raises a question that goes to the heart of our reasons for holding this conference. Does the success of Community Cohesion depend on the ability of communities to nonviolently express their views on the issues that concern them? Does it depend on a belief in one's own power to effect change without violence? In other words does it depend on the extent to which people see a point in working together for goals they have set themselves?

Participation is understood in many different ways. At the International Centre for Participation Studies, we understand that participation is about the ability of all to engage constructively with processes for change. The Community Cohesion agenda is about creating positive change in troubled societies, emerging as it did when these troubles came violently to the surface, and so we asked these questions:

> ***Does the Community Cohesion agenda provide a framework for increasing participation?***

> ***Can fostering participation contribute to Community Cohesion?***



From left to right: Heather Blakey (ICPS), Shaun Gregory (Head of Peace Studies), Bhupendra Mistry (Government Office North West), John Denham MP, Jenny Pearce (ICPS), Karl Oxford (Government Office Yorkshire and the Humber), Seema Patel (Government Office North East).

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[1] The ICPS has been involved in a major study of the Bradford riots and is in the process of feeding research back to those 'researched', which includes rioters, police and 'third parties' who were not rioters but who played various roles in relationship to the riot, such as peacemakers.

Those that work with the Cohesion agenda on the ground have a vast amount of knowledge and experience. Through our conference we aimed to create a space for the expression of this learning in relation to policy. Participation does not simply relate to ways of working within communities, but is itself an important tool for thinking about issues.  We believe that participation in debating community cohesion, such as at our conference, makes an important contribution towards ownership of a shared agenda that is therefore more likely to translate into success at a real level.

The majority of practitioners at our conference felt that participation is critical to the success of Community Cohesion, but also that there are tensions and dangers. Participation per se does not inevitably lead to cohesion.

Indeed genuine participation can lead to conflict as difficult and divisive views are brought to the surface. This offers an opportunity of addressing these conflicts in a managed way, not an easy task but an important one. The key message from our conference was that this work cannot be tackled simplistically. Individuals, communities and organisations all need the time and support to address complicated issues. This report draws together delegates' views on how participation and cohesion work can support and enhance one another, and on how to handle some of the challenges.

Of course, work on the ground does not exist in a vacuum. Our conference also explored how the Cohesion agenda, which has shaped this work since the disturbances, supports the attempts to address these challenges.

The Ministerial report on Public Order and Community Cohesion which followed the riots (known as the Denham report) clearly linked participation to the Community Cohesion agenda:

> …*Understanding how the issues are seen and understood by local people is central to shaping effective policy responses. We need to involve local communities in the process of developing future policy* [2]

In practice, it seems there are lots of reasons why this clear intention can still lead to people feeling disengaged on the ground. Policy makers may not always know how best to engage communities. They are often under pressure for the 'quick fix', which does not allow the time necessary for communities to own and participate in policy development. Sometimes policy makers do not see the value of such participation and feel that 'expertise' resides with Whitehall civil servants or local government officials, rather than the knowledge and experience of people who work in and with local communities. And it takes time to clarify government thinking, which means that local people, who need to be involved in the policy debate early on, sometimes receive confused messages.

Our conference therefore set out to capture the ways in which work in the North is able to shape the Cohesion agenda, to look at the work and the policies in context with one another. We tried to find out how far people who are actually working with the issues day to day feel involved in policy development around Community Cohesion, and how this effects the implementation of the agenda.

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[2] Home Office (2001) Building Cohesive Communities: A Report of the Ministerial Group on Public Order and Community Cohesion. London, Home Office. p. 10.

This report does not include detailed summaries of all our speakers' inputs or of all the conversations that took place during the day (the participatory nature of the conference process meant that there were a very large number of short presentations; a quarter of all delegates were speakers or facilitators). Instead we have drawn together some of the concrete points made about working to increase Community Cohesion and participation, and key ideas about the relationship between the two. These key points are highlighted in boxes in the text, which relate them to a review of the development of the Community Cohesion agenda.

Beginning with a review of the day, which highlights some key themes, we trace the origins of this government's engagement with the concept of Community Cohesion, and outline the infrastructure that was built to promote the Cohesion agenda. We look at how our conference participants understood its meaning by February 2004 and how they wanted to see it develop. We then explore the way it came to settle in the course of 2004 much more on the idea of citizenship and managing diverse views than the concerns with inequality, power and 'real participation' that were raised at our conference. We conclude with a reflection on what came out of our conference in terms of building the Cohesion agenda in a participatory way, one that takes with it the many people who must own it for it to be effective.

Our findings acknowledge that all who are involved in this building process must face challenges, from the government to local authorities to community and voluntary sectors and to all of us who identify with one or multiple 'communities'.

We hope in this way to show the difficulties involved in building this agenda, through genuine participation by those expected to implement it. We hope also to highlight the fact that the agenda will generate scepticism and cynicism unless the knowledge and experience of those who are expected to implement it is valued and respected. In turn, the latter need to develop more effective ways of conceptualising their experience and knowledge so that policy makers can see its worth.

Our conference and this report are offered as a part of these processes.

# Views in the North: the pre-conference briefing paper

Prior to the event we had a series of conversations with (and gathered written contributions from) people working on Community Cohesion and participation across the North. From this, we designed the conference programme, and produced a pre-conference briefing paper.[3]

The key points that came out of these pre-conference conversations were:

- **Cohesion.** We found:

    a) Confusion about the meaning of the concept; a sense that there must be a 'true' meaning to the concept that the government knew but which had failed to reach people on the ground

    b) Nevertheless, people had interesting ideas of their own about the concept and produced some important definitions that reflected their experiences of trying to work with the agenda.
    Working definitions included:
      - *"Promoting **greater knowledge, respect and contact** between various sections of the community, and establishing **a greater sense of citizenship**"*
      - *"A **repressive agenda** – about managing difficulties, making better citizens, dealing with anti-social behaviour in an isolated way"*
      - *"**Diversity and conflict are normal facts of life** – Community Cohesion is about how that conflict is managed"*
      - *"**Community Cohesion is not a project** – it is like equal opportunities, a way of looking at all that you do"*

    c) There were some powerful critiques of the concept, expressing fears that it **'blurs the bigger picture of poverty, regeneration and disengagement'**

    d) Mike Waite of Burnley Borough Council, who gave us the title of this paper, used the phrase 'background of distances,' to describe relationships between not only neighbours, and people in 'the community', but also between people and those making decisions affecting their communities. This illustrates the point that 'Community Cohesion' is a goal not a reality perhaps because we place insufficient value on *being* a 'community' – something that requires time, energy and a lot of communication.

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[3] The full text of this briefing paper, and a list of contributors, are available from the ICPS.

- **Participation**. We found:

    a) Some very interesting ideas and in particular a plea that the conference **'should take a critical approach to the issue of participation – go beyond agreement that it is a good thing'**
    b) Some saw participation as 'empowerment' and others as 'consultation'
    c) Many felt that the key issues in discussions around participation were power and power relations. Participation was seen as including people in power structures where they were previously voiceless. To promote participation successfully therefore involves addressing power imbalances that might affect community participation.
    d) Many rejected the idea of 'consultation fatigue' – saying quite strongly that people are not sick of being consulted, but simply sick of seeing no changes as a result.

- **On the relationship between participation and cohesion**. We found:

    a) Most people felt that participation was critical to the success of the Community Cohesion agenda.
    b) More participation-as-empowerment not consultation could overcome some of the scepticism towards the concept of Community Cohesion – addressing some of the fears that it merely 'puts a plaster' over the cracks in society, the cracks that reflect divisions of wealth and power as well as cultural identity and race.
    c) Nuanced understanding of the tensions between participation and cohesion – inviting participation can bring difficult views to the surface, as division and segregation form the context for the promotion of participation in relation to building cohesion. The democratic system, it was pointed out, one important form of participation, has resulted in the election of BNP candidates. Most people would not regard this as enhancing cohesion. Many felt, nevertheless, that precisely this tension '**is a necessary part of the process towards transformation**'. Unless views such as those that lead people to vote BNP are expressed and challenged (in a safe, non-hierarchical space) the real problems are not being addressed.

# Aims of the Conference

The conference was about providing a 'safe space' [4] for discussion about the difficult issues that the Community Cohesion agenda raises. This 'safe space' was designed to:

- Support a sharing and mutually beneficial relationship between practitioners, policy makers and academics

- Provide opportunities for all three to look beneath the concepts we work with

- Provide opportunities for all three to challenge and be challenged

Through these discussions, we aimed to:

- Reflect on two years of working with the Government's framework on Community Cohesion across three regions of the North, informing dialogue between central policy makers and those working in the regions

- Explore the ways in which practitioners engage with the concept of Community Cohesion, and how a focus on participation can inform practice

- Provide people with additional tools, approaches and ideas relating to participation that will usefully inform their work around Community Cohesion

- Create an opportunity for professionals and practitioners working on Community Cohesion in the regions of the North West and Yorkshire and the Humber to build links, share experiences, and debate the challenges/opportunities for positive change

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[4] Bradford University's Programme for a Peaceful City (PPC) has been working for some years on the concept of building 'safe spaces'; its 'safe space hub' is where the discussion of what this means takes place and particular events are evaluated.

# Review of the day

The day began with the Embedded Voices panel. A refugee, a resident of a rural village, a policeman, the victim of racist abuse, a member of an inner-city resident's association and a vicar: six people from different communities in and around Bradford who spoke with moving honesty, and with hope, about their experiences of community and conflict. They raised issues about identity and the challenge of difference, power dynamics as being more significant than diversity, changing social and industrial landscapes, about the energy and commitment that 'belonging' can require, and about the support and community that can be found within and around the headline-grabbing negatives. More than one of the speakers focused on the difficulties of being 'different' within a cohesive society, raising problems associated with 'too much' cohesion, rather than too little.

One young white male speaker suffered sustained harassment centred on his home in a predominantly Asian area of Bradford, moving through attempts to 'win over' his persecutors, a determination not to be driven away, to a final acknowledgement that he was 'tired and unhappy' at which point he moved out of his home to a different area of Bradford. Another speaker recounted the lack of understanding – even prejudice – that she experienced on returning to her native rural community as an unmarried woman and the new perspective that distance had given her on the traditional attitudes, and underlying fears, of her home village. Another spoke passionately about the importance of finding local solutions and the difficulties created by outside directives and explanations.

The panel grounded the day's conversations in lived realities. These are hard issues; the panel – and participants' contributions afterwards – constructively reminded us that they cannot be glossed over by neat theories that do not address them in concrete ways.

For the rest of the morning, participants explored some of the theoretical issues that affect their work. They then brought these perspectives to bear on practical questions in the afternoon. These discussions were aided by many excellent speakers and contributors. These included comparative experiences, from Julie Jarman of Oxfam UK regarding participatory development work in the Global South, and on Northern Ireland from Neil Jarman of the Institute for Conflict Research in Belfast. John Grayson of Northern College facilitated a discussion around empowerment in the field of mental health; Maggie O'Neill of Staffordshire University spoke from her experiences of working with communities affected by prostitution, refugees and asylum seekers; Dominic Harrison of Common Ground North West discussed the impact of participatory approaches to health on Community Cohesion; and Dal Babu shared learning from his work as a Metropolitan Police Officer on secondment to the Commission for Racial Equality.

John Gaventa, Coordinator of the Participation Team in the Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex, spoke of the generalised crisis of democracy, which is not specific to the UK. His theme helpfully described the context in which participatory approaches to community cohesion are being developed. The crisis of democracy is precipitating new kinds of relationships between citizens and the institutions affecting their lives. A spectrum of new approaches to governance is on the agenda, including deliberative democracy and inclusive governance, and forms of participation that are not 'by invitation' or 'about consultation,' as is often the case in the UK. These are challenging the classic model of democracy in which citizens are consumers of politics, participating only once every few years. These new forms of

participation have also raised issues of representation and accountability amongst community leaders as well as in the elected arena. Who speaks for whom? They have also challenged the formerly excluded, who are now invited 'to the table', to move beyond adversarial positions and to clarify the basis for their participation. John discussed the themes of power and power relationships embedded in participatory processes, themes that were taken up by speakers and delegates throughout the day.

John Denham spoke challengingly on identity as a key facet of Community Cohesion, and joined a strong panel for the closing plenary. An extract from his comments can be found as Appendix 1. He pointed out that it is not enough to hope that traditional values of tolerance, coupled with action against discrimination, are sufficient to make a diverse multi-racial society work. We need to bring into the open the causes and meanings of the kinds of behaviour that Community Cohesion policy is supposed to 'fix,' to be prepared to hear what these are, and to address them. Without that, we have no hope of making a lasting difference.

## *Key Themes*

A number of key themes informed many of the day's discussions, having in common both a dissatisfaction with surface responses to the issues, and the desire to look critically and challengingly at the work that needs to be done. Participants questioned how helpful it is to think of Community Cohesion in terms of a negative absence – as seeking to solve the 'problem' of social unrest. Community Cohesion is not the absence of something, as the final panel reminded us, but a major social asset, whose presence has widespread benefits for all sections of society. Consequently, work towards it should be the concern of all.

The conference agenda focused on the connections between this agenda and participation, and sought to explore the challenges implicit in a 'bottom up' approach, as highlighted by the LGA Guidance on Community Cohesion.[5] As the agenda was arrived through the discussion with practitioners, each topic acts as a record of issues and problems facing the Community Cohesion project in 2004.

☐ **Community Facilitation – a Government approach to cohesion**

The governmental Community Facilitation programme was a short-term emergency response to the riots. It was developed within the nine Government Offices and under the umbrella of the NRU. The NRU were particularly interested in conflict resolution approaches to tensions in the deprived neighbourhoods upon which they focused. These approaches were not, however, the main form of the community facilitation programmes, although some did focus on local mediation. In the end, the NRU opted

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[5] Local Government Association (2002) *Guidance on Community Cohesion* London: LGA.

to focus entirely on building a trained team of conflict resolution specialists. Those who had been part of the community facilitation process who attended the conference, welcomed the flexible character of the funding but had been constrained by its short-term nature which had not enabled them to develop what for many had been an important experience in local cohesion building.[6] Although some of the projects funded under the scheme may be able to find funding elsewhere, those involved would have preferred a longer term funding regime from the beginning to enable them to build up the local trust needed to play a role in alleviating neighbourhood tensions. There was, they argued, no quick fix to the problems facing the North and the weight of expectations on a few small projects was disproportionate to what could be delivered. The Community Facilitation programme was formally phased out during 2004, though some projects would seek funding elsewhere in order to continue their work.

## ☐   Citizenship and Governance

Community Cohesion had become closely associated with the debate on citizenship in a multiethnic Britain. Bikhu Parekh had launched this debate with the publication of the report of his commission on the Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain.[7] It is interesting that the debate around multiculturalism was not one that the conference participants felt comfortable in addressing. In his keynote address to the conference, John Denham MP challenged practitioners to stop avoiding difficult but crucial debates around identity. He explored what he perceived as a reluctance – on the part of political parties, institutions and voluntary organisations – to confront difficult issues and find solutions. There are many possible explanations for this. One is the extent to which many practitioners still viewed such debates as superficial compared to the problems of poverty and inequality. Another was the complicated nature of this debate for many people. David Goodhart, the editor of Prospect magazine, provocatively asked in the Guardian the week of the conference, is Britain too diverse? 'In the rhetoric of the modern liberal state, the glue of ethnicity ("people who look and talk like us") has been replaced with the glue of values ("people who think and behave like us").[8] But British values grow, in part, out of a specific history and geography. Too rapid a change in the make-up of a community not only changes the present, it also, potentially, changes our link with the past'. His article sparked the most animated discussion yet on citizenship and identity in multi-ethnic Britain. Trevor Philips rejected Goodhart's argument and argued in The Times (3/4/04) for the abandonment of 'multiculturalism' which he said 'suggests separateness. We are now in a different world. What we should be talking about is how we reach an integrated society, one in which people are equal under the law, where there are some common values – democracy rather than violence, the common currency of the

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[6] It is interesting to compare the experiences of the participants from the north of England at our conference who had been involved in the Community Facilitation programme with an evaluation of the equivalent programme in the East Midlands. Five areas had participated in the locally named 'resolving differences' project with funding for diversionary summer activities following the disturbances of 2001 in the north of England. Between January 2002 and June 2003, over 100 community facilitators from diverse backgrounds, age ranges and gender were deployed. They were managed locally and the recruitment and methodology was developed to suit local circumstances and conditions. The evaluators found that the facilitators played an important role in fostering cohesion, that investing in training and dedicated support increased their effectiveness and confidence to act in challenging situations, but that short term funding and time scales had a negative impact on local perceptions of their role and the trust and bridge building was essential to it (M.O'Neill, C. Browne, D. Virk, (2003), *Leicester Resolving Differences, Building Communities Evaluation* mimeo).

[7] The Runnymede Trust (2000), *The Future of Multi-ethnic Britain: The Parekh Report*, London: Profile Book, Ltd

[8] David Goodhart, 24th February 2004, *Discomfort of Strangers*, The Guardian.

English language, honouring the culture of these islands. But I also think people should be allowed to be a bit different. It's a good thing that people are different in Yorkshire than they are in Cornwall'. This debate signalled perhaps that some of the harder issues underlying the debate on Community Cohesion might be rising to the surface. Without it, the framework of Community Cohesion will arguably remain opaque for many.

## ☐ Participation and Inequality

Participation was a key theme of the ICPS conference. The conference was trying to make the connections between participation and cohesion. It had to address the fact that some groups who participate actively, such as the BNP, do not promote cohesion. What then is the form of participation that does? Many organizations that were interested in contributing to the Community Cohesion agenda were grass roots community and voluntary organizations devoted to social change, who often found participatory spaces offered from 'above' were tokenistic, and felt in very unequal relationships with those who organised them. There were strong feelings expressed at the conference against 'tokenism' in all guises, and much serious thought was put into what it really means to promote participation, and how this can be done. Genuine participation, it was pointed out, is clearly only possible if the organisation seeking participation is open to change, and clear where they feel that change is possible. It was said to us quite strongly that people are not sick of being consulted, but simply sick of nothing changing as a result. A related inhibiting factor is the feeling by some that the real decisions are taken at other meetings than the open forums, leaving participation merely as legitimisation, perhaps just a facet of a wider problem, that of a top-down culture that is institutionally restrictive of participation. A number of organisations are trying to address these issues of power. Participants views on barriers to participation are looked at in more detail on page 28 *(Factors Inhibiting Participation)*, points which are valuable in looking at the problems of building 'bottom up' engagement in the Community Cohesion agenda.

## ☐ The Non-Governmental Arena and the State: Partnership or co-option?

Government documents on Community Cohesion make clear that they consider partnerships to be the most useful way to advance and implement the new agenda: "It is essential that the local approach to Community Cohesion is developed and owned by all local agencies and organizations. They should work in partnership, and integrate the issues within the community strategy and service planning systems in order to sustain progress and achieve the positive benefits.'[9] The conference discussed the problems associated with partnerships between the non-governmental arena and the state, and the mutual mistrust and misunderstanding that still permeates the relationship. Those in the former are often mistrusted, seen to be unaccountable and non-representative. Who speaks legitimately on behalf of communities? At the same time, those in the non-governmental sector spoke of the difficulties of persuading local authorities to take community participation seriously. Yet, some in the local authorities want to do that, but are struggling to find the best means. A good example was provided at our conference by Salford City Council, which is working on a variety of ways to promote participation, in partnership with voluntary organisations such as Community Pride.[10] However, issues of power inequalities can complicate partnership and weaken the capacity of the non-governmental sector to influence policy as well as practice. When the voluntary and

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[9] Local Government Association (2002) Guidance on Community Cohesion, op.cit. p.10
[10] Information on Community Pride is available at http://www.communitypride.org.uk.

community sector gets involved in delivering services, it often finds it difficult to sustain a critical agenda. The fear of cooption leads some to prefer to work independently of the local authority. Clearly all these issues are relevant to the relationships that will need to be constructed if a shared agenda on Community Cohesion is to be developed through partnerships.

□ **Community Development and Conflict Resolution in Divided Societies**

Community Cohesion is understood to be an illusive and difficult goal, perhaps a process more than an achievable endpoint. However, there are strong views on some of the factors that hinder this process. At the conference, this process was explored through experiences in Northern Ireland, aiming to open up the relationship between community development and conflict resolution, and how this might help work on Community Cohesion. Many issues were discussed, which it was felt inhibited the potential for community development to impact on conflictive and fractured communities. Our conference participants' views on *Factors Inhibiting Community Cohesion* are discussed on page 14.

□ **Managing Emotions in Effective Community Cohesion work**

In Donna Pankhurst's introduction to the Embedded Voices panel she touched on a theme that was echoed throughout the conference day, highlighting the deeply felt issues that divide people, and the role that emotion plays.

> *Although we are getting more used to hearing 'the other' talk about how they feel ignored, left out, marginalized and or even attacked …it is even more difficult for people to listen to someone's account of why they hate, are angry and feel driven to aggression or even violence … and yet if we don't try to understand the emotions that drive people's behaviour, any attempts to change that behaviour must stand very little chance of success.*

This view clearly illustrates something we heard more than once in preparing for the conference. Important as it is to celebrate difference and diversity, it is not enough – not enough to learn each other's customs, not even enough to learn each other's needs. As a society we need to find ways of doing the difficult work, of choosing not to gloss over or contain the problems. We need to construct empathy across differences and this is not easily done. For one participant, real empathy only came through feeling unsafe for the first time in his life, after sustained verbal and physical harassment centred on his home. This insight focuses us on the responsibility for society as a whole.

## *Factors Inhibiting Community Cohesion*

Community Cohesion is understood to be an illusive and difficult goal, perhaps a process more than an achievable endpoint. However, there are strong views on some of the factors that hinder this process.

❖ Fear – unwillingness to take risks, and reluctance to confront difficult issues such as the crucial debates around identity.

❖ Failure to engage with complexities. It is safer to remain with surface interpretations of problems, to shy away from topics we are not prepared to open up for discussion (for example, the police do not specifically monitor levels of sectarian violence in Northern Ireland).

❖ The disconnection between policy frameworks and the reality on the ground. It is assumed that a policy framework applied well means better community relations on the ground, but in Burnley, where a self-assessment showed they had 80% met the expectations of the community cohesion policy, there are now a significant number of BNP councillors, and a 30% increase in reported racial incidents over one year.

❖ Limitations of different approaches: single identity work can lead to better-informed bigots, yet cross identity work often meets with resistance.

❖ Individual and community isolation, where the mass media takes the place of direct experience. In Northern Ireland further or higher education is the first experience for many people of coming together in an integrated environment.

The following were also raised as practical impediments to Cohesion work:

❖ Funding – place-specific funding, short term funding, competition for funding, and differentials in skills to access funding – and the lack of energy to keep bidding and chasing funding, particularly in view of the emphasis on funding projects rather than organisations, and also the quantities of energy needed to service funding in terms of reports and auditing.

❖ Short-termism – both as a result of funding limitations and of political imperatives. There are imperatives on managers to deliver – making it harder for the necessary time to be given to the process. It is also a source of anxiety, and can paralyse effective processes.

❖ Unrealistic pressures on communities to participate in inappropriate ways.

❖ Unrealistic expectations – a mismatch between what is promised by organisations or expected through policy targets, and what is achievable given funding constraints, timeframes and the nature of the issues, the effects of which may be cynicism and disillusionment within both organisations and communities.

## *Community Cohesion – What Works?*

The following comments express generally held, or thought provoking, views on what practices support effective work towards Community Cohesion.

❖ "Local solutions for local problems"

❖ Trust – such as trusting people to use public resources with integrity

❖ Fun!  Projects that allow for linkages that are fun and unusual

❖ The need to look at power dynamics as well as diversity – it's meaningless to applaud the diversity of staff at a supermarket if the owners are all white."

❖ Attending to causes as well as symptoms, looking the ways in which society as a whole is part of the problem. For example, Oxfam confronted editors with their actions by counting positive, neutral and negative words used in newspapers to describe refugees and asylum seekers. They then held a conference where editors were obliged to acknowledge the evidence of prejudice.

❖ It is important to recognise the enormity of what we might be asking, and to be realistic about what might be possible. Might elderly, white, marginalized women, who have never expected to be the engines of change in society, feel like they are being asked to change their history, discard their identity? What does it mean to ask a woman coping with a cold climate and western material secular decadence, to help create a dynamic Punjabi/English fusion society, and is a community suffering vocal and increased Islamophobia on easy ground to open up and engage with the society from which it feels under attack?

❖ Neutral spaces need to be sustained and sensitively managed. It is too easy to return to entrenched prejudices from residentials and time-limited programmes.

❖ Statutory organisations need to increase their capacity to listen – they are not seeking to engineer a solution from above, but actors within the situation.

❖ Communities must be involved in the process, including a range of people (such as children and people with poor literacy skills), so that the whole community can own the outcome. This can be through practical action as well as discussion – for example building a community café together.

❖ Shared goals – a concrete common objective to work towards, though care must be taken to avoid unrealistic expectations.

❖ It is important to look at commonalities as well as difference, thinking through the kinds of shared values that we need to underpin social cohesion.

❖ Community Cohesion work needs to crosscut all other projects, to be part of the approach to all activities – results that are the 'coincidental' consequences of work in other areas can often have the most impact.

# Community Cohesion and Participation: Where Now?

The ICPS conference demonstrated the interest in Community Cohesion, the extent to which people are engaging with it and the volume of creative work going on. We are supplementing our conference findings with evidence from recent government reports to present a longer view of the progress and pitfalls surrounding efforts to build a new social policy agenda around Community Cohesion in the UK.

The momentum of debate has gained more pace since our conference with a series of press articles on multiculturalism, the publication of the ODPM Housing, Planning, Local Government and the Regions Committee report in May 2002, the launch of the government's consultation document: *Strength in Diversity: Towards a Community Cohesion and Race Equality Strategy* also in May 2004, and the publication of the independent Community Cohesion Panel report 'Parallel Lives' in July 2004. Evidence from these sources supplements the conclusions of our conference.

The following sections of the report relate the views of conference participants to the development of government policy on Community Cohesion, and the relevance of participation.

## *From Riots to Citizenship*

The riots in the northern towns of 2001 highlighted some deep-seated problems in Britain, jolting the UK government as well as the country as a whole. The Community Cohesion agenda, which formed the umbrella for the government's response to these events, developed from the two major reviews of the riots: the Independent Community Cohesion Review Team under the chairmanship of Ted Cantle, and the Ministerial Review, led by John Denham MP.

The Ministerial Group Report focused its explanations for the cause of these riots on issues of poverty, young men, race and racism, the Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities and the role of far right extremists.[11] Cantle's team focused less on each of these, important though they were, than on the evidence of segregation in the towns that it visited:[12]

> *Separate educational arrangements, community and voluntary bodies, employment, places of worship, social and cultural networks, means that many communities operate on the basis of a series of parallel lives. These lives often do not seem to touch at any point, let alone overlap and promote any meaningful interchanges* [13]

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[11] These issues reflected the evidence that all the wards affected were amongst the 20% most deprived in the country, and parts of Oldham and Burnley ranked amongst the most deprived 1%; the participants were almost all young men aged between 17 and 26; white and ethnic minority young men were involved, the latter were mostly from the Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities, and the riots took place in or very near areas mostly inhabited by those communities; far right organisations had been active in some of the areas and raised tensions in them.

[12] In addition to Oldham, Burnley and Bradford, the team visited Southall, Birmingham and Leicester and talked to the Black Community Forum in Sheffield.

[13] Home Office, op. cit. p.9.

Ted Cantle did not have a significant body of research on Community Cohesion to refer to in 200.[14] His brief was 'to identify good practice, key policy issues and new and innovative thinking in the field of Community Cohesion'.[15]

Focusing primarily on segregation, as the Cantle report does, rests on an assumption that the issue of cohesion is about cultural contact between communities, and identity divisions, notably race and religion. The report acknowledges the relevance of social class and economics, but does not prioritise these factors. However, it must not be forgotten that the northern towns, suffering the outcome of industrial decline and uneven post-industrial recovery, have very high indices of deprivation. In addition, 67% of ethnic minorities live in the 88 most deprived districts in the country compared to 37% of the white population.[16]

John Denham, then Home Office Minister, suggested in a speech to the Runnymede Trust in March 2002, that the government was seeking to mark a turning point in social policy, aiming to make the issue of Community Cohesion part of the mainstream agenda, rather than a concern for only certain sections of the population. Race equality remained an unequivocal commitment; however, it could not be achieved in a vacuum. He particularly questioned the practice of targeting those statistically deprived 'to the exclusion of other communities, particularly, the white community or those parts of the white community that suffer similar levels of deprivation, or an approach that ignores the significant differences within and between different minority communities as well as the majority community'.[17] Community Cohesion did therefore seek to depart from the way social policy had dealt with minority ethnic groups in the past, and evidence that it had highlighted and reinforced cultural difference rather than promoting social integration.

Past approaches were seen to focus regeneration where race and poverty coincided, with the result that the broader picture of poverty and deprivation was neglected. Problems emerging within minority ethnic communities, such as youth crime, also

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[14] Cantle drew like many New Labour thinkers on a raft of concepts, many from North America, some from continental Europe, which became social policy currency in the course of the 1990s. His report (p. 13) specifically refers to 'inclusion and exclusion, social capital and differentiation, community and neighbourhood'. Behind these concepts is the view, strongly influenced by the work of Robert Putnam that levels of trust in society which derive from strong social ties and bonds of association and community is on the decline in the US. The Home Office under David Blunkett believe something similar may be happening in Britain, although others dispute that. Social exclusion derived originally from French thinking and assumed a strong state tradition and culture of social solidarity which it was felt certain groups of people were falling out of. In Britain, it tended to refer to particular people and areas suffering a combination of linked social problems which left them 'outside' mainstream society and which specific programmes were needed to bring 'back in'. It allowed for a broader approach than 'poverty', linking various sectors of government. In addition to these conceptual underpinnings, Cantle and his team drew also on a body of academic research in the UK, such as the ESRC Centre for Neighbourhood Research.

[15] Home Office (2001) Community Cohesion: A Report of the Independent Review Team Chaired by Ted Cantle, p.5.

[16] Neighbourhood Renewal Unit 2004.

[17] J. Denham, Promoting Community Cohesion in the Runneymede Trust (2003) *Developing Community Cohesion: Understanding the Issues, Delivering Solutions* London: Runneymede Trust p.4.

existed in poor white communities, and the issues which divided communities which were not just about race, for example the perceived unfair allocation of regeneration resources and failing public services. The idea of Community Cohesion proposed a new way of thinking potentially able to encompass differentiation in all manifestations and the basis on which we should deal with it.

In this way, the cohesion agenda came to rest primarily on diversity and citizenship, particularly ethnic and religious diversity. The events of September 11th 2001 arguably had an influence on this, turning attention towards Islam and religion/citizenship. Poverty was still seen to be important, but it was not necessarily the starting point for Cohesion policy. It was brought in where ethnic and religious diversity connected at the neighbourhood level with deprivation.

As a result of the focus on identity, the Cohesion agenda soon became part of a much wider debate than the events in Burnley, Oldham and Bradford and the relations between minority Muslim populations and white communities in those towns. This debate centred on the question of citizenship in Britain today, a question raised by the Parekh Report of 2000 and pre-dating the riots, i.e. what does it mean to be British now that we are a multi-ethnic society? It took the riots to provoke what could be described as the beginnings of the national debate on how we can live together as a society with multiple minority cultures.

## *Cohesion into practice at Government level*

In May 2002, the Home Office and Local Government Association drafted a working definition of Community Cohesion that defined a cohesive community as one where:

- There is a common vision and a sense of belonging for all communities
- The diversity of people's different backgrounds and circumstances are appreciated and positively valued
- Those from different backgrounds have similar life opportunities; and
- Strong and positive relationships are being developed between people from different backgrounds in the workplace, in schools and within neighbourhoods.

Community Cohesion became a core concept for the government, who placed a lot of emphasis on local appropriation and ownership of that agenda. The Guidance on Community Cohesion, published by the Local Government Association in 2002, in partnership with the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, the Home Office, the Commission for Racial Equality and the Inter-Faith Network for the United Kingdom, stressed the importance of 'proactive action at the local level'[18] and of partnerships between public, voluntary, community and private agencies. It spoke powerfully of values and vision:

> *People moving towards a commonly agreed goal are more likely*
> *to interact, understand and value differences positively. This*
> *approach builds cohesive communities and can also reduce anti-*
> *social behaviour. A shared vision should be challenging,*
> *inspirational and inclusive, grounded in respect for your common*
> *humanity and recognition of our shared responsibility for the future*
> *of our society. It should stem from an open discussion involving*

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[18] Local Government Association (2002) *Guidance on Community Cohesion* London: op.cit. LGA p.8.

*the whole community and give local communities a clear sense of direction. Unity in diversity should be the theme – the message must be that cultural pluralism and integration are not incompatible.*[19]

This placed a great deal of emphasis on local ownership of the cohesion agenda and partnerships between the community and voluntary sector and public and private bodies. The voluntary and community sector were seen as key partners in the work.

*Engagement with these groups will support a 'bottom up' approach to building Community Cohesion' argued the Community Cohesion Guidance, but it also recognised that 'their skills are sometimes not fully utilised by the statutory bodies.*[20]

The challenge of the Community Cohesion agenda was to engage the sector but also to persuade local policy makers and agencies that a 'bottom up' approach was appropriate, when this was still not the norm.

One significant source of engagement was through practitioner groups set up by the independent Community Cohesion Panel (set up in April 2002 and led by Ted Cantle). The Panel set up 12 groups to draw in people working on the ground. Some 200 people participated in these from central and local government, the voluntary and statutory sectors, feeding into the Panel's report, published in July 2004 (discussed later in this report).

The location of the governmental infrastructure that would take forward the cohesion agenda, and the practical activities to promote cohesion, were subjects of some debate, a debate that reflected something of the clarification process of the focus of the cohesion agenda. In the end, the Community Cohesion Unit was located in the Home Office rather than the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) where the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit (NRU) made some claim also to drive the agenda. In the Home Office it was alongside the Race Equalities Unit; in the NRU it would have been alongside the Social Exclusion Unit.

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[19] Ibid p 13
[20] Local Government Association (2002) op.cit. p.19.

Within the Home Office, the Community Cohesion Unit (CCU) placed the agenda of Community Cohesion at the heart of debates on citizenship and belonging, and the Home Secretary's personal drive for civic renewal and active citizenship. It also located cohesion alongside crime and disorder and concepts of 'social order' that were for some a theme that remained strongly – arguably too strongly – implicit in the development of the cohesion agenda. The location of the CCU highlighted, therefore, that citizenship/race equality rather than poverty and exclusion would essentially frame the discussion. The latter were still recognised as important elements as was the corresponding need to work with other areas of government, particularly the NRU. The unfolding agenda nevertheless indicated that the government was intent on incorporating race equality issues within cohesion, a shift reflected in the publication of the Home Office consultation document, *Strength in Diversity: Towards a Community Cohesion and Race Equality Strategy* in May 2004.

The CCU brief was to develop the government's Community Cohesion agenda, working with local authorities, local strategic partnerships, voluntary and community groups, the private sector and nationally with other government departments. A Beacon Council Scheme was introduced in 2002 to encourage the development of best practice from local authorities in the field of Community Cohesion. The decision was made that the measurement of local government performance under the Comprehensive Performance Assessments was to be redesigned by the Audit Commission to demonstrate performance in creating 'stronger and safer communities'. A Community Cohesion Pathfinder Programme was launched in April 2003 together with the NRU to identify innovative approaches to promoting Community Cohesion and to identify barriers to cohesion. Fourteen pathfinder local authorities were created before the programme came to an end in November 2004, with a budget of £6 million. The aim was to disseminate the good practice from these areas in a programme to run until January 2005.

The NRU became the centre for the development of practical activities of conflict resolution at the neighbourhood level in the most deprived areas with which they are concerned. This began with a Community Facilitation Programme discussed at our conference and considered in the 'Key Themes' section of this paper. The aims of this Community Facilitation programme were to promote local conflict resolution/prevention work where tensions were identified and strengthen capacity to deal with conflicts thus enabling more effective implementation of Neighbourhood Renewal Strategies in neighbourhoods experiencing tensions. This was wound down following a ministerial review in January 2003 in favour of a strategy which mainstreamed Community Cohesion and conflict resolution within neighbourhood renewal policies and programmes, creating a specialist team of conflict resolution advisers in the NRU who could be sent into conflictive neighbourhoods where there are NRU programmes. The model was drawn from the United States, some of whose experts visited several areas of the country in 2003, invited by NRU. This professionalisation and centralisation of conflict resolution was to be supplemented by the development of a medium to long-term programme of work to address below the surface conflicts within the 88 local authorities that received Neighbourhood Renewal funding. The logic was that this work would no longer be an emergency response to the 2001 disturbances, but an integral part of Community Cohesion thinking. However, while professionalism and systematic knowledge are clearly of value, contradictions remain between a generic approach of this kind and the importance of local knowledge and experience emphasised by our conference participants.

By the end of 2003 also, the NRU and Home Office were addressing the issue of regeneration and cohesion and dealing with a major problem identified by Cantle,

which is that area based funding initiatives often gave rise to feelings that certain areas are favoured over others.

Complementary efforts were also made by local authorities and community-based organisations to raise the Community Cohesion agenda and to develop work in this area. An example of this is the formation of the Burnley Task Force in response to the 2001 disturbances, created out of a conference called jointly by the Borough Council and local community leaders. The Task Force was then able to feed into national policy debates.

These responses were augmented by central government initiatives in the area of local government. The three authorities where the riots had taken place were asked to come up with Community Cohesion strategies, and subsequently the other 88 most deprived local authorities were required to do the same. In addition, a Beacon Council scheme in 2002 was introduced to encourage the development of best practice from local authorities in the field of Community Cohesion. It was also decided that local government performance under the Comprehensive Performance Assessments should include how they had contributed to 'stronger and safer communities'.

## *Reactions to the concept – the practitioners' critique*

While many welcomed the very necessary focus on these issues, it seems clear that the government underestimated the problems facing real ownership of their agenda by practitioners,[21] and its translation into effective delivery on the ground (some of which were expressed at our conference).

To start with, cohesion appeared a bland term for many community and voluntary organisations who worked with deprived communities. Did it 'paper over cracks' rather than address fundamental injustices and inequalities in wealth and power in the UK? Was Community Cohesion merely a response to riots, a new approach to public order?

In identifying the problem of 'parallel lives' as the core problem, Cantle did not please everyone. Those with a long history of work on race were particularly upset, alarmed that cohesion might mean a shift from combating racism to what appeared to be a more diluted agenda: tackling diversity.

Faisal Bodi, reviewing the Cantle report, compared it unfavourably to the Scarman report which had followed the unrest of the early 1980s in Brixton and Toxteth:

> *There are some instructive comparisons between the way this government has handled the riots, and the way the Thatcher regime dealt with the far more serious outbreaks in the 80s. Labour appointed an unknown civil servant, Ted Cantle, to head its probe; the Tories assigned Lord Scarman, a senior judge. Scarman's report supported the reform of legislation that was being applied discriminatorily, most importantly the dehumanising stop and search laws. Cantle, on the other hand, has proposed more repressive legislation –quotas for Muslim schools and oaths of allegiance –which he spelled out in last December's dreadful Community Cohesion Report.* [22]

The Runnymede Trust, which had done a great deal to foster debate about the meaning of citizenship in a multi-ethnic Britain, also had critical questions for the approach of the Cantle team. They argued that it gave insufficient attention to the historical context of the disorder, such as the 1980s disturbances; that it underplayed the importance of economic factors, and that it gave more emphasis to the weaknesses of civic leadership than the issues of race and racism.[23]

Community Cohesion, therefore, did not appeal to those who had struggled for years against racism and discrimination and who could point to the ongoing evidence that Britain's minority ethnic communities remained disadvantaged on a range of measures.[24] Neighbourhood Renewal Unit statistics showed that 67% of ethnic

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[21] By practitioners, we are referring to people outside government who are engaged in work on the issues that the Cohesion agenda addresses.

[22] F.Bodi, Muslims got Cantle. What they needed was Scarman. *The Guardian 1/7/02*

[23] Runnymede Trust (2003) quoted from its Quarterly Bulletin, no.329, March 2002, in *Developing Community Cohesion, Understanding the Issues, Delivering Solutions* London:Runnymede p.2.

[24] 'There is a significant lack of information about minority ethnic groups in society, and about the impact of policies and programmes on them. But the available data demonstrates that, while there is much variation within and between different ethnic groups, overall, people from minority ethnic communities are more likely than others to live in deprived areas and in unpopular and overcrowded

minorities lived in the 88 most deprived districts in the country in 2004 compared to 37% of the white population[25].

Some who were closely connected to debates around race and multiculturalism, did not find 'cohesion' a sharp enough concept for addressing such deep seated fragmentations in the country and argued that it reflected the confusions about the exact nature of the problem to be addressed. Trevor Philips, Chairman of the Commission for Racial Equality, told the House of Commons Committee on Social Cohesion which reported in May 2004, that:

> *I dislike the term 'Community Cohesion', frankly, I think it lacks clarity. I think we are beginning to talk more about the term 'an integrated society' because in order to advance a solution – which is what I think Community Cohesion is supposed to be – we have first to understand what it is you are trying to remedy. My view is that we are trying to remedy some of the fractures of our society. Some of those are economically driven; some are driven by other kinds of difference and division independent of economics* [26]

It seems that many of the conflicting views on how effective Community Cohesion is as a remedy, rest on just this lack of consensus over what the 'problem' is. The following section looks at some of the dilemmas that shape people's responses to the Cohesion agenda.

## *Issues and Dilemmas*

The divergence between the government's view and that of many practitioners working for years on issues of discrimination can be seen to rest on two conflicting ways of framing the problem. Is it about poverty and deprivation, whose impact is expressed through the lens of diverse identities? Or is it about deep-seated divisions between diverse communities, divisions that overspill into violence and unrest when exacerbated by social and economic issues?

This issue is further complicated by differences over identity itself. Is the widened focus represented by Community Cohesion a positive move to encompass the complexities of identity, or is it a dilution of the race discrimination agenda?

Important questions arise from these distinctions. Where is the problem that Community Cohesion is supposed to 'fix' located? Is it a problem *of* society as a whole, or less strongly, simply a problem *for* society as a whole? Or even a problem merely of and for certain sections of society, who need to be helped to 'fix' it by a wider society that is in the main functional itself? For example, is citizenship about

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housing. They are more likely to be poor and unemployed, regardless of their age, sex, qualifications and place of residence. As a group they are as well qualified as white people, but some black and Asian groups do not do as well at school as others, and African-Caribbean pupils are disproportionately excluded from school. Pakistani, Bangladeshi and African-Caribbean people are more likely to report suffering ill-health than white people. And racial harassment and racist crime are widespread and under-reported and not always treated as seriously as they should be' Cabinet Office (2000) *Minority Ethnic Issues in Social Exclusion and Neighbourhood Renewal. A Guide to the work of the Social Exclusion Unit and the Policy Action Teams so Far.*

[25] Neighbourhood Renewal Unit 2004.

[26] House of Commons (2004) ODPM:Housing, Planning, Local Government and the Regions Committee, *Social Cohesion* Sixth Report of Session 2003-2004, London:House of Commons p.6.

encouraging minorities to assimilate, or is it about society as a whole drawing on the assets of a diverse population?

The answers to all these questions lead in significantly different directions. A focus on poverty looks to address structural and economic issues as a priority. A focus on identity suggests that the over-riding need is for dialogue around multiculturalism and integration. Emphasising race and discrimination leads to dealing with the expressions – and perpetrators – of racism and prejudice.

In reality, the issues are never clear-cut, but it is apparent that there is a lack of clarity over the assumptions that each set of actors makes, which adds to the difficulties of the debate, and consequently the success of the Cohesion agenda.  It is therefore worth looking briefly in more detail at the complexities that underlie these assumptions.

A key early question was whether Cohesion is a new approach to race equality issues or was it opening up wider issues about 'difference' and 'diversity' and the prejudices and divisions associated with them. Identity clearly is more complex than race; gender, generation, sexuality, belief systems, rural versus urban, inner city versus suburban residence fragment communities. And identity is not the only issue at stake in the real world of our communities. Britain is still deeply divided along class lines. Inequality cuts across communities already divided by identity to create yet more complex divisions. However, one of the difficulties of the Cohesion debate is that for a long time the framework of thinking around division in our society tended to be focused primarily around class, race and gender, so that institutions and movements emerged that would prioritise and focus attention on differentiations and inequalities derived from one or other of these.  The extent of the problems faced by people feeling discrimination in these areas meant that there was a strong incentive to fight for particular rights, rather than see the complex interactions between all the social divisions.  There is consequently a divide between those who feel that there is a need to address those complexities and look to universal solutions, which will include, for example, impoverished and excluded white communities, and those who feel that change will only follow from a close and sustained focus on the sources of discrimination such as racism.

An example of these dilemmas can be found in the Ouseley Commission report into the problems of community division in Bradford, which began life as the 'Bradford Race Review' and which ended up with the sub-title 'making diversity work in Bradford'. That report had highlighted the 'fragmentation along social, cultural, ethnic and religious lines' in the District. It did not ignore the important issues of racial discrimination and the obligations on Bradford District to implement the Race Relations Amendment Act of 2000. However, it highlighted that there was more to the problems of Bradford than discrimination on race grounds. Bradford communities were moving apart:

> *Self-segregation is driven by fear of others, the need for safety*
> *from harassment and violent crime and the belief that it is the only*
> *way to promote, retain and protect faith and culture identity and*
> *affiliation* [27]

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[27] Bradford Vision (2001): *Community Pride not Prejudice*: *Making Diversity Work in Bradford* p. 10.

Bradford District would subsequently challenge the narrow interpretation of cohesion as about race.[28]

However, the rhetoric over diversity and difference begs the question about where wealthier and wealthy communities are with respect to the cohesion agenda. For instance, working class white estates and middle class suburbs also reflect parallel worlds, and when richer Asians enter those suburbs, for example, a double differentiation occurs with those living on the white estates. Yet most of the Cohesion debate still appears to assume that the dynamics of community fragmentation of concern are those amongst and between poor communities and in particular between ethnically divided communities, rather than those between middle class and poor communities of the same ethnicity. We need to ask ourselves whether cohesion is an agenda for us all or for certain communities and groups identified as 'problems.'

These ambiguities have not been clearly resolved, and the parameters of the cohesion discussion have developed around race, diversity and to a lesser extent poverty, rather than inequality of class or power, a direction that sidesteps the question of engaging *all* communities in the project of seeking 'cohesion.' Clearly, the effectiveness of our attempts to engage with serious issues is hampered if entire communities are absent from the debate. As long as people living in more privileged communities sense that cohesion is for 'problem' communities rather than something involving them, they are unlikely to engage with this debate.

For instance, the Cohesion agenda stresses the importance of connections with others whose worldviews might be profoundly different. There is a perceived implication that people accept cultural pluralism, reinforced by certain strands of Cohesion work that promote cultural contact and 'celebrating diversity'. While important, this is also problematic – the need to connect does not make everything in the name of cultural difference acceptable. There are real differences between people and cultures, based on strongly held values. Defining what is acceptable and what is not – and according to what justification – is no easy task. It is also one that cannot be resolved within individual communities, but calls for the involvement of all.

Similarly, while inequality and discrimination persist, communities who feel embattled and attacked are equally unlikely to engage. When groups are on the defensive, they are less likely to embrace change and want to belong to a more universal community, so the debate needs to isolate the real difficulties rather than stereotype entire

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[28] Conversations with K. England, Acting Director of Policy, City of Bradford Metropolitan District Council.

groups. Other serious obstacles can be found in fundamentalist views that see connecting with others as undermining traditional identities, and those who see no point in coming together with others due to racist or supremacist views. All of this is further complicated by the fact that cultures are not static, but consist of a myriad of developing and varied views. These issues suggest a need to promote participatory spaces that allow for serious engagement between differing views as well as for the sharing of commonalities.

Finally, a dilemma can be found within the term 'community' itself, the part of the phrase that is often taken for granted beside the obvious complexities of cohesion and identity. Conference participants raised issues about the difficulties of building even intentional communities, the communication and effort that it calls for. This must be seen against our twenty-first century reality that 'as a source of social identity the neighbourhood is being progressively eroded with the emergence of a more fluid, individualised way of life. Social networks are city-wide, national, international and increasingly virtual.'[29] If we are to address our society's problematic lack of cohesion, it is possible that we need to give matching attention to the factors that are eroding the existence of 'community' as a meaningful part of daily life.

There have been many contributing factors to this erosion of social stability: the disintegration of the pact between capital and labour around the welfare state, the crisis of the patriarchal family and the decline of relatively secure and stable employment, to name but a few. In the North of the UK, these have all impacted hugely on white working class communities. Similarly, Asian men who came to the region to work in the textile factories in the 1950s, found themselves out of work two decades or so later as global economic changes resulted in increasing de-industrialisation throughout the North West and Yorkshire. An outcome of these socio-economic changes appears to be growing disparities in income and lifestyle between those who are in a position to take advantage of the new opportunities that open up and those who find themselves left behind and ultimately stigmatised as the 'excluded'.

The dwindling reality of 'community' in a geographical sense is of course significantly truer of some communities than of others. It is interesting to note, for instance, that the Pakistani community of Bradford, with its strong kinship and biraderi[30] networks, 'defended' their communities in the 1980s rather better than those on white estates;

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[29] R.Forrest and A.Kearns (2001) *Social Cohesion, Social Capital and the Neighbourhood* Vol 38, No. 12, 2125-2143, p.2129.

[30] Biraderi means 'brotherhood' and refers to extensive clan or tribal networks that are extensions of systems of allegiance in Pakistan.

community elders built strategic local political connections while many turned to religion and tight family structures to preserve identity against the surrounding insecurities. A multicultural framework, which served as the policy backlash to racism, encouraged local authorities to respond to the elders and their communities. While this approach to survival has not brought prosperity to the majority of the community, it contrasts with the poor community response to change on white working class estates. These differences in themselves of course generate further divisions – the latter resenting the success of local Asian communities in tapping regeneration budgets (perceived unequal distribution in those budgets has been a permanent source of tension).

Because the kind of experience described above is declining, there is a shift in focus from geographical communities to communities of interest, which has strong implications for Community Cohesion. In some cases, communities of interest, such as those arising from a shared ethnic background, also form geographical communities. In others, they don't. We have already seen that problems can arise even where geographical communities are internally cohesive, with repercussions for the expression of difference within those localities. However, it is true that the shift towards communities of interest – where social ties are determined by the choices we make or single facets of our identity – raises equally complex issues. This shift is often presented simply as a relocation of people's allegiances. However, though we use the same word – 'community' – it is relevant to note that it is a qualitatively different form of community, which has implications for engagement and cohesion. Geographically based communities are based on multi-faceted relationships, complex webs of responsibilities and connections. In a community of interest, you *choose* you who are in community with, a significantly 'thinner' vision of community. While this may have some positive benefits for the individual, in terms of the freedom to define your own identity, the shift in allegiances away from geographical communities also means the erosion of responsibility to those who you live amongst. It means you can choose *not* be in community. These changes have clear implications for cohesion, in terms of the networks and interactions that shape our behaviour towards one another.

It is clear that in these issues and in others, the intricate web of social, economic, historical and psychological leads to great variations on how individuals and sections of society engage with the Cohesion agenda. And it is through this differentiated engagement that that the aims and ideals of the agenda translate into practice.

## *Factors Inhibiting Participation*

Mechanisms for participation may be problematic – as one participant put it, "there are lots of forums but participation is low, people do not want to be involved in this way," perhaps an indication that participation policy itself is not designed in a participatory way. Issues raised include the following points:

❖ **Practicalities**, such as timing of meetings and accessibility.

❖ **Lack of resources** – in Salford, needs expressed through participation could not be met due to the budget deficit, inevitably people stopped coming to meetings.

❖ **Lack of clarity** over the purpose of participation. Unsurprisingly, attendance is unlikely to be retained where the agenda is unclear.

❖ **Unrealistic expectations** – it can be a source of frustration to participate in a small-scale project that is expected to be able to solve larger problems.

❖ **Rigid mechanisms** for measuring participation – it was suggested that people aren't always invited to participate because they have something useful to say, but because they are someone else's target!

Another set of issues relate to the approach of statutory agencies. There is seen to be a tendency for agencies to "always do things the way they have always done them". Organisational cultures may themselves need resources and attention – it may not be enough simply to create mechanisms for participation.

Perceived problems include:

❖ **Reluctance to share power** – those in power must be willing to give it up and share it for the process to work.

❖ **Power dimensions** – for example not taking gender into account.

❖ **Misuse of power relations** – attempting to control the process and therefore the outcomes by deciding who should participate.

❖ **The boundaries of change** – it was asked whether things are 'participatory' up to the point where people disagree?

❖ **Lack of understanding** – tools can be misused, leading to 'phoney' participation. The requirement, even the will, to invite participation is not enough alone.

❖ **Tensions with existing cultures** – for example, for the police force, a participatory approach to long-term issues calls for different training from emergency situations, where there is a clear need to identify solutions and take control.

Finally, there are limitations relating to the skills of individuals within communities *to* participate. This raises a number of issues:

❖ **Lack of learning opportunities** which were previously available through organisations such as trade unions and the Workers Education Association.

❖ **The need for community development work** to underpin the ability of communities to engage, requiring long term planning – quick fixes as a preface to individual programmes are not enough.

❖ The importance of communication skills – it is assumed that if you get people to participate things will go well, but participation can be ill informed, conflicting, inconsistent, and a challenge (in both directions) to communicate effectively."

### *Participation – What Works?*

Participants described some basic requirements for meaningful participation:

- ❖ Recognising the rights of communities, instead of focusing on their needs

- ❖ The importance of a separate 'powerbase' – people not participating as individuals but as representatives of a community

- ❖ Ensuring that people's own local agendas are being addressed

- ❖ Honesty – people appreciate openness about what is open for community input and what is not

- ❖ Incentives for participation – it is not a good in itself; people need to see that their participation will lead to positive outcomes, for example by attaching money for implementing plans.

- ❖ Induction packages – not only to promote understanding of the structures, but to develop confidence and skills ("Channels are one thing, having the time, skills and the ability to use them effectively is another")

- ❖ Building the capacity of civil servants as well as that of communities.

The following suggestions were made regarding effective practice:

- ❖ Holding events instead of having (dry) meetings

- ❖ Ensuring that the roles of all involved are clearly defined

- ❖ Having enough time available so that the process is not rushed

- ❖ Continuity – the same person meeting with community reps

- ❖ Choosing the people representing you; perhaps by advertising as for jobs

- ❖ Patience!

The following suggestions were also made, about how people who want to participate but are not finding it easy, can make the most of the process.

- ❖ Good networks – trust and longstanding relationships

- ❖ Perseverance, not giving up

- ❖ Plenty of hard graft

- ❖ Allies within organisations

- ❖ Organised community support (for example, briefings before meetings).

## *Community Cohesion in Practice*

Between 2002 and 2003 Community Cohesion practice began to develop through the NRU community facilitation programme and through the Pathfinder programme, as well as under the umbrella of local authority Community Cohesion strategic plans. Additionally, a number of interesting voluntary and community sector organisations, some with a long history of this kind of work and others new to it, began to work under the Cohesion umbrella, though as we have seen often unsure of its meaning.

The views of conference participants on the realities of Cohesion work, and connected to that, on what makes for effective participation, are reproduced on page 29. These pages summarise, through experiences of what works and what doesn't, practitioners' views on Community Cohesion in practice. They represent a depth of understanding of what it means to work within this agenda. This section adds a brief reflection on the local authority experience.

In the first instance, the local authorities where the riots had taken place were asked to prepare Community Cohesion strategies (subsequently other authorities were asked to do the same), which developed according to local context and politics. The responsibilities of local authorities and Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) on cohesion were clear. Section 4 of the Local Government Act 2000 had placed a statutory responsibility on local authorities to produce a strategy for promoting the well being of their local communities to be implemented by the LSPs and its members. Requirements around Community Cohesion were part of the accreditation requirements for the 88 Neighbourhood Renewal Fund LSPs. However, the relationship between LSPs and local authorities was not always as clear. The power, resources and autonomy of LSPs has been very uneven according to area, and this has impacted on their capacity to deliver a cohesion agenda, especially where the commitment of the local elected government is not complete, or where it interprets cohesion priorities differently.

The politics of this have been critical to the support given in each area to Community Cohesion. For example, in Bradford, where the chair of the LSP was also the leading figure in the local authority, the Community Cohesion team in the LSP found themselves constantly defending the terrain and the budget. The Community Cohesion Task Group that was set up was frequently slowed down by divergent policy priorities between the local authority and the LSP Cohesion team, and fears were often expressed that the agenda was being aligned with community safety and crime and disorder issues, risking a loss of momentum around Community Cohesion itself.[31] This was a local expression of a wider issue, which saw Community Cohesion closely associated with community safety across the country. This was often felt as a tension between efforts to address root causes, and attempts to keep a lid on problems that could express themselves as street conflict.

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[31] A similar concern was expressed by the Chief Constable of Leicester, but in relationship to the attention given by LSPs to social cohesion. He told the House of Commons ODPM Committee: '…..I think partnerships are very much localised within what I call crime type approaches, tackling robbery burglary, drugs, as discreet entities. If you look at, for example, their priorities, very few actually choose social cohesion or priority neighbourhoods as critical to their agenda, because they are very localised. I think the development of much more comprehensive partnerships, structures and approaches which deliver real change in some of our most deprived neighbourhoods is utterly critical' House of Commons (2004)op cit. p. 47

Weakened levels of commitment on the part of some local authorities can be contrasted to the statement made by Rodney Green, the Chief Executive of Leicester City Council to the House of Commons ODPM Committee on Social Cohesion:

> *The local authority is the single most decisive factor in leadership on Community Cohesion…Leicester City Council spends about £650 million a year. If you understand that Community Cohesion is about housing, it is about culture, it is about economic performance, it is about faith issues, it is about housing and so on, the way that money is spent is bound to be extremely significant. That is why the City Council is the biggest player. The second issue is to do with partnership. We are the key link to police, the voluntary sector, the private sector, on the local partnership, and if we are working well in partnership with them it is not just the £650 million spent; it is the orchestrating of the other spend that can be done in a way that promotes cross-community links or inhibits them. We have a heavy responsibility.*[32]

The attitude of local authorities was thus clearly critical.  Other factors affecting the local experience have included local relationships between the community and voluntary sector and other agencies, and the nature of all agencies engagement with the broad government framework.

The Community Cohesion Pathfinder programme has recently come to an end; learning from this, encapsulated by the Local Government Association action guide,[33] is providing valuable insights into the nature of the difference that the Cohesion agenda has made on the ground. While publicising the learning through high-profile conferences, the Home Office is making it clear that there is no new money available for this agenda, and work will have to be continued through mainstream provision.[34] This clearly will have an impact on the ways in which the agenda is 'owned' and implemented by local authorities.

## *Progress and Pitfalls*

Conference participants made it clear that, despite confusion, doubts and disagreements, many voluntary, community and statutory bodies recognised that the Community Cohesion agenda contained some important ideas. The following section of the report supplements their views with evidence from the ODPM House of Commons Committee report on *Social Cohesion* (May 2004) and the Community Cohesion Panel report, *The End of Parallel Lives?* (July 2004). From this, a reasonable national picture emerges of the progress and pitfalls surrounding the Community Cohesion project.

The brevity of the section below on progress should not be read as indicative of its absence. Evidence of progress is available in the reports above which offer illustrative cases of innovative and creative efforts to develop projects on the ground which build cohesion in direct and indirect ways. It was felt more useful in these conclusions to draw attention to the obstacles which still prevent further progress. The Cohesion Panel share a major conclusion of the ICPS conference that cohesion

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[32] House of Commons (2004) ODPM: Housing, Planning, Local Government and the Regions Committee, *Social Cohesion* House of Commons: London p.10.
[33] Local Government Association (2004): *Community Cohesion – an action guide*, LGA Publications.
[34] Fiona Mactaggart MP, speaking at the Home Office conference: *Community Cohesion Action and Learning Summit*, 2nd November, 2004.

is a long term activity: 'there are no 'quick fixes' and community relations are dynamic'[35].

The illustrative cases and innovative projects which have been highlighted by the Panel and the ODPM House of Commons Committee as examples of progress are not yet part of a concerted, locally owned, nationally promoted, strategic endeavour. They are rather flagships for 'good practice' which might influence and guide others already converted to the importance of this area of work. They reflect partial commitment in some areas of government and in some local authorities or LSPs. Will the promotion of cohesion become embedded in national departments and agencies and local authority practice across the board? And can it do so, while cohesion remains conceptually weak as an idea and intellectually and politically contested by many?

## Progress

- While Community Cohesion remains a confusing concept to many and unacceptable to some, it has generated much new thinking and practice. If, as ICPS conference participants pointed out, it is seen as a process and not a project, then it can be said that a process has begun.

- The debate on citizenship and identity has also started to happen, and while it remains incipient and mostly takes place amongst the cosmopolitan intellectuals at present, there is every chance for it to be developed.

- There is now a body of practice around cohesion work. At present this reflects the multiplicity of potential approaches. These range from 'celebrating diversity' and building communication between communities and neighbourhoods who might otherwise have no connection to projects aiming to build the esteem of poor communities in their localities. We do not have a sufficient body of experience or impact assessment measures that enable us to learn from these efforts and to improve practice. However, it is creative initiative in local contexts that will help build more systematic approaches and this has at least begun.

## Pitfalls

The pitfalls could be divided into four areas:

   I. Conceptual weakness and disagreements
  II. Embedding and Mainstreaming
 III. Partnership and Participation
  IV. Funding regimes

### I. Conceptual Weakness and Disagreements

- Conceptualisation of Community Cohesion remains weak. While for some practitioners that is a strength, in that it allows space for creativity, for others it perpetuates confusion and uncertainty.

- Evolution of the cohesion concept must take on board the sharp criticism of many that it can easily become vacuous, avoiding or sidelining key issues of

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[35] Community Cohesion Panel (2004) op cit p.13

social and economic inequality and race discrimination. For instance, critics of the cohesion agenda point to changes in anti-discrimination legislation which have favoured employers over employees, and contradict commitment to race equality[36]. This, they argue, proves that cohesion is too weak and ambiguous an idea and will discourage hard legal measures that are still required to promote equality. Some even believe that a malign intention to erode gains of the racial justice lobby is behind the concept.

- There are fears that 'building shared values' really means accepting a 'hegemonic' value system of the mainstream culture, assimilation rather than a true process that values the rich diversity of views. Muslims are particularly sensitive to this. Some aspects of that mainstream culture, particularly the secularising features, contradict key religious tenets and they argue will threaten the 'cohesion' of British Muslim communities by exposing their youth to non-Islamic values. In this sense 'cohesion' may be seen to be about silencing alternative visions of the world. Real participation guards against this containing vision of cohesion. Giving space for all voices to be heard conflicts with homogeneity; it is unlikely to lead to 'tolerance' of diversity, but does offer the chance to understand and engage with diversity.

- The building of 'shared values' is meaningless if there is no serious debate about what these might be. Such a debate must involve tackling the hard issues, such as how to build a society which contains world views that are incompatible. It also implies changes and compromise by the 'majority' as well as the 'minority' communities, and this is likely to be problematic and resisted by 'supremacist' groups within the mainstream culture. One example of this can be found in the recent local election successes of the BNP. It is also likely to be resisted by fundamentalist religious groupings.

- Since the 1950s and the first wave of post-war immigration, there have been many visions of citizenship in Britain, attempting to update its meaning as Britain has become a more multi-ethnic society. At different moments, these have stressed: assimilation, multiculturalism, 'community of communities' and integration around 'core British values'. It is unlikely that 'cohesion' can progress conceptually without building some consensus around the vision of citizenship that will underpin it. Such consensus is very distant at present, as the debate is still limited to a few. A wider, popular and informed debate needs to be promoted in ways that are meaningful and comprehensible to all.

- There needs to be a space for social change practitioners close to grass roots processes to make inputs from their experience into this debate. Silences and fears are currently exploited by extreme right groups such as the BNP. As a result, there is an ever more urgent need to develop safe spaces for discussion and to take risks over issues that are controversial, a need to create spaces for addressing these fears in a way that does not play into the hands of extremists. Schools are one space where such discussion could urgently begin, creating the basis for an informed citizenship of the future. The Cohesion Panel's publication *The End of Parallel Lives?* expressed concern about the limited impact of compulsory citizenship education in schools.

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[36] This was the message of a conference in the Carlisle Business Centre, Bradford, on 16/9/04, entitled Race: the New Agenda. It was organised by the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust, the 1990 Trust and JUST, and reflected growing concern with racial justice issues in West Yorkshire and in particular reversals in terms of employment rights for those from black and minority ethnic communities.

- There is still a strong reluctance to debate segregation as such. Many still focus on a class interpretation of segregation, to the exclusion of factors relating to culture and/or ethnicity. Given the significance of segregation to the cohesion agenda and its conceptual underpinnings, the issue of segregation needs highlighting, with more research and reliable data on what is happening in our towns and cities. Some might argue that people will inevitably try and live with 'like'. However, there are dangers if people do not mix socially and culturally. One of these is that segregation can degenerate into polarisation in some circumstances (Northern Ireland is an example). Can a policy of 'integration by choice' be promoted, as Brendan McAllister of Mediation Northern Ireland has argued, and what would that entail in terms of the key discussions within the cohesion agenda?

## II. Embedding and Mainstreaming

- The mainstreaming of Community Cohesion is a fraught issue at many levels. There is widespread recognition that promoting cohesion should be embedded across ministries, local government sectors, statutory agencies and within the community and voluntary sector. In practice this embeddedness is very difficult to achieve, as attitudes and institutional cultures are often resistant to change. The *End of Parallel Lives?* report found that this is true even within government: 'Whilst the Home Office has been pursuing a cross departmental agenda, there is not yet the ownership within other departments and most have failed to integrate Community Cohesion and equality…We have learnt that a Government policy led by one Department does not always have the ownership of others and, indeed, may be resisted by them as it is seen as 'just a Home Office issue'[37]

- If there is a problem of ownership and mainstreaming in central government, that problem intensifies throughout all the institutional spaces in localities. The extent to which local leadership favours the cohesion agenda will often determine whether it moves forward. Local leaderships will be responding to party political divisions and other power rivalries. Shifts in local governance have led to an ambiguous relationship between the LSP and Local Authorities, which varies throughout the country. In many northern cities, the latter have considerable control over the former. If the Local Authority does not support the cohesion agenda it can be a major obstacle to LSP implementation strategies and to mainstreaming cohesion locally.

- Mainstreaming raises the question of cohesion expertise and professionalism, versus community knowledge and experience. Should Community Cohesion be professionalized (an example would be the NRU conflict resolution team) or be left to develop creatively according to local processes and activities? There are always dangers when the promotion of social process becomes associated with professionalisation, in the sense of developing a generic response or approach that concentrates 'expertise' in the hands of a few (as opposed to the beneficial valuing of professional skills and knowledge). Embedding cohesion in community life and practice will therefore require some caution regarding the process of professionalisation. Without such caution, cohesion will become 'something done by others', rather than a

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[37] Community Cohesion Panel (2004) op cit p. 18

social process taken forward within and by communities. It can also become separated in a professional enclave from other areas of work that impinge on the material conditions for promoting cohesion. The comment of an ICPS participant quoted earlier should be recalled here:

> *I believe that Community Cohesion is an outcome of good community development work – that is to say that long term development, bringing all sections of the community together in a collective effort to bring about desired improvements, in an equal partnership. It is not an end or a "thing" in itself, and top down strategies to address this, in isolation from other issues that face communities, will not work. Poor housing, unemployment, poverty, ill health are the fuel that feed prejudice, discrimination and entrenched views.*

- Nevertheless, there are a myriad of tension points at the local level and there is an issue of who is in the best position to deal with those. Can the expertise of mediators and conflict resolution practitioners be enlisted here, to help with 'emergency cohesion' interventions? But once again, the question is, are the best people for that task centrally trained or locally embedded and trained?

## III. Partnership and Participation

- Partnership and participation have been highlighted by the ICPS conference participants as problematic areas. The government is encouraging partnership working but institutional cultures are once again often resistant to this. To truly engage local organisations with policy makers, the former do need to feel they have a genuine say and can make changes to policy not just practice. Policymakers often agree rhetorically with the principles of partnership and participation, but have to combine it with a parallel impetus, that of meeting delivery targets in the shortest amount of time. Local organisations become rapidly disillusioned and frustrated as a result creating lasting damage to partnership relationships.

- The Community Cohesion agenda is being grafted onto the problematic character of existing partnership arrangements and competing understandings of the meaning of participation. Developing the agenda must involve confronting this situation. If cohesion cannot be delivered 'from the top-down', but must engage groups and organisations from the 'bottom-up' and enable them to shape that agenda according to local contexts, then partnerships and participation must be taken seriously by all involved.

## IV. Funding Regimes

- Funding regimes need to adapt to the long term process involved in cohesion work and acknowledge how little is yet known about how to overcome segregation and prejudice in practice. There must be room for creativity and learning from failure. Output and measurement of achievements is important but should be linked to funding renewal in ways that allow for learning through mistakes. Indeed, no project on its own can easily 'deliver cohesion' in a national and global context that can often undermine it. Similarly, statutory bodies are often facing multiple challenges, both internal institutional resistances to change as well as externally generated problems such as

inequality and poverty. Funding regimes need to recognise these constraints and encourage the long term commitment to overcoming them.

- If the promotion of cohesion is to become a normal imperative of all local authority expenditure, then local authorities need a cohesion 'measure' for all budgets, agreed by all involved, from housing to education to regeneration.

- In the field of regeneration there has been recognition of the divisive character of area-based initiatives in terms of Community Cohesion. This was first highlighted by the Cantle report and by the end of 2003 it was publicly acknowledged by the Home Office that a new, cohesion-friendly approach to regeneration was required, resulting in guidance for those designing, developing and delivering Area Based Initiatives[38]. The aim was ensure that relationships between recipient communities and their neighbours are not harmed through such Initiatives, focusing closely on community involvement, good communication between statutory organisations and communities and opportunities for different communities to interact in positive and practical ways around regeneration initiatives. The Panel expressed some disappointment, however, that these recommendations have not been sufficiently incorporated into Government departments and agencies. It suggests that their significance has not yet been fully appreciated. This in itself is a reflection of the fact that Community Cohesion, while hailed as a 'new social policy agenda' is not yet embedded within Government itself and departments and agencies which need to think about it when building policy.

- The Regeneration Practitioners Group of the Panel, meanwhile, are continuing their work, and have turned their attention to 'transformational regeneration', and how Community Cohesion can be addressed in areas with new populations and incorporated into plans for 'sustainable communities'. They have recommended that a framework for Community Cohesion impact assessments be developed for local authorities and regional bodies with measurable objectives.

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[38] Community Cohesion Panel (2004) op.cit. p. 47

# Conclusions

Our conference highlighted that while many were prepared to engage with the concept in innovative and practical ways, comprehension and ownership of it was still limited in February 2004. Our ongoing work suggests that, one year on, this is still the case.

For many conference participants, equality and poverty remain the cornerstone of work on Cohesion, alongside a determination to ensure that the focus on prejudice, and, in particular, racism, does not get sidelined by a more multifaceted approach to difference and diversity.

While there is a degree of acceptance for an approach that takes account of the many different facets of identity, this is tempered by the fear that Community Cohesion may be the vehicle by which attention is deflected from these serious issues. By contrast, as we have seen, the government's focus has come to rest much more centrally on identity and citizenship as the key concept for Cohesion. The thinking behind this is demonstrated by Denham's clear challenge to the voluntary and community sector at our conference, to face the difficult questions generated by these issues. In response, some would argue that the first view focuses attention on systems, attitudes and individuals who perpetuate injustice and discrimination, while the second is open to the danger of focusing it on those that experience it.

This complexity of different views, and the variation in focus that these views lead to, indicate the tension between the need to push forward the cohesion agenda as a 'central aim of government'[39] and the need 'to involve local people in the process of developing future policy'[40]. The civil renewal agenda attempts to address this tension, but it remains to be seen whether the reality satisfies the critiques of practitioners on this front.

Our conference suggested that participation in the theorising as well as in the practical development of the cohesion concept could help address this tension. But what *kind* of participation?

Our conference showed that there was a groundswell of rejection of tokenistic participation, participation as consultation rather than change. Serious participation means commitment to argument deciding outcomes, rather than power determining them. Therefore it means creating safe spaces for reasoned argument, systematising learning and study as well as spaces for debate with decision makers so that local context and practice genuinely shapes policy.

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[39] Home Office, *Report of the Ministerial Group* op. cit. p.2
[40] Ibid p. 10

A commitment to creating spaces for argument rather than simply for 'cross-cultural contact' has the important implication that participants must be responsible for their opinions, for forming and defending them – and perhaps allowing them to change. This is participation as engagement, not consultation.

This is not to suggest that participation as spaces for people to express their views is not important – however, cohesion requires more than this. Consultation allows people to air their views – setting out the issues in this way is an essential part of the process. However, if the process ends there, without efforts to address incompatible views, it may simply generate further tension. It is no easy task to move beyond this, but that is what a focus on cohesion entails. Real participation must be an opportunity for those who hold oppositional views to address their conflicts in a managed way, rather than allowing them simply to air, and perhaps reinforce, those views.[41]

It remains to be seen whether this strong understanding of participation finds its place in central policy development as well as in local contexts.

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[41] Bradford University's Programme for a Peaceful City recently held a 'safe space' discussion on the theme of 'the Pub'. Pub closures in Bradford are closely associated with the changing cultural make-up of particular areas, an issue generating strong views overlaid by cultural beliefs and assumptions. The aim of the discussion was not just to hear these views, but to create a space where assumptions could be challenged, and where participants could reflect on their own position.

# Summary of Recommendations

- Further debate and conceptual clarification of 'Community Cohesion'. If this is to have any meaningful impact, it must be promoted in spaces and language accessible to grass roots activists and practitioners. This would both ensure that the debate benefits from their experience, and improve the prospects for ownership and implementation of the vision.

- The debate must include the meaning of citizenship in contemporary multi-ethnic Britain. It should go beyond the 'celebration of difference' and address some of the difficult issues and trade offs around building 'shared values' in the context of potentially incompatible worldviews. Again, this debate will not have an impact if it is restricted to the privileged few. Informed citizenship could begin through the participatory debate of such issues in schools.

- It must acknowledge that racial injustice and social inequality in the broadest sense remain unfinished agendas in the UK, and that Community Cohesion cannot be seen as replacing this unfinished business or diminishing its ongoing significance. These issues must be highlighted in addressing issues of segregation.

- If Community Cohesion is to become part of a strategic national vision on the basis of the conceptual clarification through debate as outlined above, it must also be mainstreamed and embedded throughout central and local government and in the various agencies and organisations that operate at the community level.

- Community Cohesion cannot be left to free floating 'professionals' whose knowledge is deemed to be generic and transferable; embedded practitioner knowledge of all kinds must be respected and enabled to influence the content of the agenda.

- This will only happen if partnerships between policy makers and practitioners are real and participation enables changes to take place. The cohesion agenda requires changes in majority as well as minority communities, and in institutional as well as community sector cultures.

- Local Authorities should be supported in promoting cohesion as a normal imperative of all statutory activity, through a 'cohesion measure' for mainstream expenditure in all areas.

- Funding regimes must allow time for learning from failure at the same time as they encourage impact assessment.

- Funding should be cohesion-friendly, i.e. it should, as advised by the Regeneration Practitioners Group of the Cohesion Panel, maximise collaboration across communities, minimise divisions and enhance cross-cultural contact.

# Appendix A: Community Cohesion and Participation Presentation by John Denham MP
## 25<sup>th</sup> February 2004

I'm very pleased to be able to speak to your conference today.

Two and a half years ago, David Blunkett asked me to take the ministerial lead in responding to the series of disturbances which had taken place in a number of northern towns and cities, and a number of 'near misses' in other towns.

As part of that work I lead a group of Ministers who oversaw the government's initial response. I also asked Ted Cantle to lead the Community Cohesion Review Group whose report remains, I believe, the best analysis of the events and their causes. In due course the Community Cohesion Unit was set up in the Home Office and a string of short and longer term initiatives set up to respond.

It was always pretty clear, however, that central government had only part of the responsibility of responding. Many of the failures had occurred at local level. Problems had not arisen in every area with similar demographics. And any response would fail that was not locally owned and lead.

For a variety of reasons, I have not been deeply involved in these issues for a year and a half. So to some extent I feel a fraud being your key note speaker. But it is also stimulating to return and get a sense of what has been happening.

For someone who was involved at the outset of the Government's Community Cohesion work, the background document to the conference was fascinating and enlightening – but also a little disappointing. In all the definitions and understanding given of community cohesion, none picked the centre conclusion of the report on community cohesion produced by Ted Cantle and his team. To them – and to me – all the detailed recommendations stemmed from a central concern about the need to build a common identity between people from different communities.

Not multiculturalism – simply understanding each other better, important though that is. Not working together on joint projects and activities – important though that is.

But, as Ted's team put it:

> There has been little attempt to develop clear values which focus on
> what it means to be the citizen of a modern multi-racial Britain….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.*

Meetings alone do not do the trick. "Meetings are one thing, an open and honest dialogue are quite another. We found little evidence of such a debate and, rather, a reluctance to confront the issues and finds solutions. It was evident that this failure ran through most institutions, including the political parties and even voluntary organisations."

The Review Team put this debate at the heart of their response to the riots. Other policies – for education, housing, regeneration, employment and other programmes should come from the shared principles of citizenship that came out of this debate.

I still believe that the Review Team were right to put the challenge of identity at the heart of their report. And I believe that challenge of creating a modern British identity for the 21st century is even more pressing today than it was two years ago. Indeed, though no one political party can create a national identity, I hope my party, the Labour Party, will make it a central aim of our third term to create a clear shared 21st century British identity that expresses the core values, shared histories and future vision for Britain.

The thing that frustrated Ted and his team was the reluctance to tackle the difficult debates about identity – local or national – head on. People preferred to talk around them, to deal with other issues.

In politics, the centre left has hoped that traditional values of tolerance, coupled with action against discrimination, would be sufficient to make a diverse and multi-racial society work. People have felt awkward talking about a British identity because its traditional association with white and imperial history does not fit a modern multi-racial society. They have worried that talking about being British encourages the far right who define British ness in racial terms. Sometimes there has been a fear of confronting white racism directly. And there has been confusion about where encouragement of diversity and respect for others' values ends, and the tolerance of quite unacceptable values begin.

So the centre left has preferred to concentrate on its traditional concerns of equality, and tackling poverty and social exclusion. This has been a mistake. By not taking up this challenge, the left is helping leave the field clear for the right to define British ness in backward looking and narrow terms.

Many members of the white majority community are uncertain how their sense of British identity relates to the British ness of minority communities, whilst many third or fourth generation members of ethnic minorities still uncertain about their place or acceptance in British society.

In a global world, where change is happening every more rapidly, the deep sense of insecurity, lack of confidence and uncertainty about the nature and future of Britain is now creating a real obstacle to the pursuit of many Government aims:

- It creates difficulties for any positive agenda towards the European Union and the Euro. Instead of looking confidently towards Europe the Government is constantly having to reassure a nervous population
- It ensures that real but essentially minor problems like the risks of EU accession become major and poisonous issues of wide public concern

- It takes the issue of asylum abuse from a challenge to be met to a dominating issue in political debate
- It obstructs the healing of the deep divisions that underlay the northern riots of 2001 and which could cause problems again in the future
- It weakens the community cohesion and resilience needed to deal with serious crime and terrorism
- The sense that public resources are not distributed fairly or are open to abuse undermines a consensus for good levels of tax funded services

The left's insecurity is highlighted shown by the recent broadsheet debate prompted by David Goodhart's article. On the one hand, a liberal intellectual argues that very diverse societies can't hang together because they don't have a sense of identity. On the other hand, the Chairman of the CRE says we shouldn't be worried about identity. In fact, a diverse society can be a cohesive society but only if it has a common core of values and vision. But we will have to create that British identity.

We won't find the modern British identity in the history books, though it must draw on the histories of all the people who live here. A British identity is above all the story we tell about ourselves; how we would like to be described by others.

Politicians have to lead the debate about how we want Britain to be. We've got to go beyond generalised statements. We have to be able to highlight the gap between what we would like to be and what we are really like today.

Of course, not everything is bad. There is a good case for saying that our most diverse cities are our most tolerant, and the worst problems exist in the most divided communities.
But could we really say:

*The distinctive thing about Britain is how much pride and pleasure people take in meeting, mixing, working and forming deep personal friendships with people other races, religions and social class.*

Or

*The strongest protection against unfair and unequal treatment in Britain is not the law, but the deep British dislike of intolerance and discrimination in any form.*

Or

*Most British people think being society with people with roots in many different countries and cultures gives our country a huge advantage in competing in the modern world.*

Or

*Britain has many different cultures but we do share a common understanding of what the rights and responsibilities of every individual are.*

These are all statements of how Britain could be.  They are all on positive traditional British values – fair play, tolerance, live and let live, respect for others. But it isn't how most people would describe Britain today.

If this is how we want to be – and that is a debate in itself - than we need frank discussion of why it isn't yet true. And how we move in that direction.

This will be a difficult debate. There are people in every community who have reason to fear the debate because it would challenge the way they live at present. But, unless we do, unless we have the courage to be positive and to imagine a better, stronger, more positive British identity, we will continue to be plagued by the insecurity, fear and lack of self-confidence we see so often today.

In that passage I've talked a lot about politicians and national politicians in particular. But Cantle was critical of local politicians; local institutions and community leaders, and the voluntary sector. So my message is also aimed at them; and indeed at the people who now actively work directly or indirectly on community cohesion.

There has been a deep resistance to taking on board the challenge of identity. It is always easy to carry on with what we are familiar. Even to argue that what we are doing is really the key.

Of course a huge amount of good work is happening. Ted confirmed that to me last night.

But – and the background document makes this clear – not everyone is fully engaged. I understand this. It has happened at national level.

Some good things have happened:
- The Home Office/LGA guidance on community cohesion.
- The guidance on ABIs.

But, apart for the NRU guidance, there has been virtually nothing from the ODPM despite its critical role in sustainable communities, housing and regional development.

There has been nothing from DfES, even though the problem posed by mono faith, mono-ethnic schools was a real concern to both ministers and the review team.

And we see at local level a tendency for those who work on social exclusion to say that the real answer is tackling social exclusion; those who work on equality, to say that the real issue is discrimination; those who work on regeneration to say the key is regeneration and so on.

But we will never tackle the issue by talking round it. I did quite a bit of work with Peacemakers from Oldham. I liked the approach because they went straight for the jugular. Bringing people together with the explicit aim of bridging differences and divides. And we need more of this.

Your conference is looking at participation.

I don't think I can help solve the familiar problems of aligning the pace and direction of community consultation with the implementation of major spending programmes or strategic policies. But I would point you to the guidance on assessing community cohesion. These centres on the very simple concept of what do people say apart the areas in which they live. It means getting people to talk about their area and their relationship with the others who live there and nearby. It provides the opportunity to raise the question – as I tried to do earlier at national level – how do people want to feel about their area; how would they like to be able to talk about it; what are the obstacles to achieving that, and how do we move forward.

# UNIVERSITY OF BRADFORD

*MAKING KNOWLEDGE WORK*

**Appendix B: Participation and Community Cohesion: making the connections**

**Thursday 26 February 2004**

## List of Participants

| | |
|---|---|
| Akhtar, Noreen | Bradford Metropolitan District Council |
| Akram, Sadia | Community Cohesion Agency, Oldham |
| Alipoor, Margaret | University of Bradford |
| Astin, Sarah | Pendle Borough Council |
| Baines, Martin | West Yorkshire Police |
| Barn, Gill | Yorkshire & Humber Assembly |
| Barnes, Jo | North East Lincolnshire Council |
| Barwick, Steve | North West Regional Assembly, Wigan |
| Basson, Sharan | Middlesbrough Council |
| Bellwood, Maggie | Leeds City Council |
| Bhuhi, Karamjeet | Government Office for Yorkshire & the Humber |
| Birks, Chris | Sheffield City Centre SRB 5/6 Programme |
| Bishop, Simon | Racial Harassment Prevention Team, Newcastle |
| Blaker, Katherine | Refugee Council, Leeds |
| Brand, Helen | Scargill House, Kettlewell |
| Bujra, Janet | Programme for a Peaceful City |
| Bullimore, Sal | Royds Community Association |
| Carling, Alan | Programme for a Peaceful City |
| Cela, Lorik | Bradford Action for Refugees |
| Chard, Liz | Cleveland Police |
| Choudhury, Fakrul | Community Cohesion Agency, Oldham |
| Churley, Michael | Bradford Vision |
| Cockburn, Tom | University of Bradford |
| Cook, Tracey | Leeds Refugee & Asylum Service |
| Cooper, Tina | Leeds Refugee & Asylum Service |
| Cromarty, David | Durham Police |
| Crystal, Celia | SOAR, Sheffield |
| Devlin, Liz | Bradford Community Housing Trust |
| Dixon, Andrea | Lancashire Sport |
| Done, Karen | Bradford Council |
| Duffy, Clare | Government Office for Yorkshire & the Humber |
| Dunwell, John | Freelance Consultant / Trainer |
| Fitch, David | Programme for a Peaceful City |
| Ford, Linda | West Middlesbrough Youth Inclusion Project |
| Fox, Allison | Doncaster CVS/NDC Team |
| Garner, Lesley | Hull City Council |
| George, Zoe | West Yorkshire Police |
| Grant, Maureen | The Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust, Bradford |
| Green, Sarah | Community Alliance, Burnley |
| Hadfield, Annie | Scarborough Borough Council |
| Hall, Mary | Brunshaw Estate Management Board, Burnley |
| Hampton, David | Neighbourhood Initiatives, Telford |
| Hanney, Liz | Bradford Vision |
| Haq, Jackie | Twafa, Newcastle Upon Tyne |
| Harpin, Julie | Leeds Metropolitan University |
| Hawkins, Debi | South Craven Community Action |
| Headland, Gary | Help the Aged, Leeds |
| Hobbiss, Ann | University of Bradford |
| Holdsworth, Janet | Bradford Metropolitan District Council |
| Horsman, David | Leeds Voice |
| Horton, Marion | Marion Horton & Associates, York |
| Howe, Steven | Northumbria Police |
| Husein, Fabbeh | Bradford College |
| Hussain, Sorayya | Cape UK, Leeds |
| Imtiaz, S M Atif | Bradford |
| Iqbal, Tahira | Calderdale Metropolitan Borough Council |
| Ishtiaq, Mohammed | Community Alliance, Burnley |
| Johnson, Paul | Bradford Metropolitan District Council |
| Johnson, Rebecca | Hyndburn Borough Council |
| Jones, Michael | The Children's Society, Liverpool |
| Karam, Nisar | Asylum Team, Halifax |

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| Kenny, Oriel | Leeds Metropolitan University |
| Kent, Lynne | Shipley and Baildon Volunteer Bureau |
| Kershaw, Angie | North East Lincolnshire Council |
| Khan, Shazia | Calderdale Metropolitan Borough Council |
| Lakin, Gordon | Bradford College |
| Lawrence, Mandy | Bradford Community Accord |
| Lewis, Fiona | SOAR, Sheffield |
| Maqsood, Shamus | Community Cohesion Agency, Oldham |
| Martin, Rob | Programme for a Peaceful City |
| Matthews, Rebecca | Regional Public Health Group, Leeds |
| McHugh, Ian | East Lancs Together |
| McLaren, Vic | Community Development Foundation, Sheffield |
| Mead, David | Cleveland Police |
| Minton, Victoria | Common Purpose, Batley |
| Mirza, Nadira | Programme for a Peaceful City |
| Mirza, Waseem | Bradford Early Years & Childcare Service |
| Moran, Anne | Wakefield Metropolitan District Council |
| Moss, Joanne | Lancashire Sport |
| Mughal, Dominic | Active Faith Communities, Bradford |
| Mutch, Sandra | Newcastle City Council |
| Newaz, Shah | Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Council |
| Newby, Steve | Home Office, London |
| Owers, Ian | Active Faith Communities Programme, Bradford |
| Pickles, Jonathan | West Yorkshire Police |
| Pilkington, Chris | Yorkshire & Humber Assembly |
| Raja, Asma | Kirklees Neighbourhood Housing |
| Rehman, Faqir | Manningham Residence Association, Bradford |
| Reynolds, Elaine | Sunderland City Council |
| Rhodes, Sharon | Leeds Refugee & Asylum Service |
| Richmond, Jo | Oldham Metropolitan District Council |
| Robinson, Angela | Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Council |
| Robinson, Eric | Cleveland Police |
| Robinson, Julia | Kirklees Metropolitan Council |
| Rochester, Brenda | Community Alliance, Burnley |
| Saddiq, Ferzana | Kirklees Neighbourhood Housing |
| Sardou, Sarli | Hull Community Network |
| Schwaller, Caroline | Keighley Voluntary Services |
| Scott, Alyson | Leeds Voice |
| Shukla, Nitin | Gateshead Council |
| Slaney, Lesley | Environment Agency, Leeds |
| Smith, David | Calderdale Forward (LSP) |
| Smith, Zoë | Community Cohesion Agency, Oldham |
| Sohal, Parvinder | Hyndburn Youth Service, Accrington |
| Sunderland, Jeanette | Bradford Council |
| Taylor, Tom | University of Bradford |
| Tint, Karen | Environment Agency, Leeds |
| Ullah, Selina | Bradford District Care Trust |
| Vine, Ian | Programme for a Peaceful City |
| Wall, Judy | University of Bradford |
| Ward, Lisa | Wakefield Metropolitan District Council |
| Wass, Mick | Community Alliance, Burnley |
| Watkins, Chris | Durham Police |
| Webbley, Paul | |
| Webster, David | Doncaster Metropolitan Borough Council |
| Weldon, Jackie | Government Office North East |
| Whinnett, Anne | Leeds City Council |
| Wilkinson, Margaret | Neighbourhood Initiatives, Telford |
| Wilkinson, Sharon | Gowm, Manchester |
| Yacoub, Judy | Community Alliance, Burnley |
| Yarde, Marine | SOAR, Sheffield |
| Yate, Clara | Sheffield City Council |
| Zulfiqar, Ali | Bradford Early Years & Childcare Service |

# The International Centre for Participation Studies
## Department of Peace Studies
## University of Bradford

In May 2003, the International Centre for Participation Studies (ICPS) was formally established in the **Department of Peace Studies**. Participation is clearly a key component in building a peaceful society, valuing alternatives to violence as a means of pursuing objectives. But it must be critically explored. The aim of the ICPS is to become a **flagship academic and practical research unit** in the field of **participatory politics**, located in the Yorkshire and Humberside Region working at the local, regional and international levels.



Professor Jenny Pearce, Director of The International Centre for Participation Studies.

Professor Jenny Pearce is the Director of the ICPS. She is supported by Programme Officers Heather Blakey and Lucy Brill. Dr Graeme Chesters joins the team as a research fellow in Participation Studies in April 2005. The ICPS also has a number of Associate Fellows from within and outside the Department of Peace Studies.

As well as engaging in research and teaching, the Centre places a particular emphasis on the connection between academic knowledge and practitioner knowledge.

Key priorities for the Centre are:

1. Promoting practitioner access to academic knowledge and skills
2. Assisting practitioners in systematising their experience and knowledge
3. Encouraging the academic valuing of practitioner knowledge

The Centre's activities include research, teaching and providing support to practitioners engaged in work around participation.

The ICPS is currently developing, in partnership with interested employers, a Foundation Degree in Active Citizenship and Participation. This is a two-year workplace based degree, to be offered from September 2005.

For more information on this, to join our mailing list, or to find out about any other aspect of our work, please contact:

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