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Strength through Diversity:

Networking for community development

Alison Gilchrist

A dissertation submitted to the University of Bristol in accordance with the requirements for the degree of Ph.D. in the School for Policy Studies, Faculty of Social Sciences

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ABSTRACT

The thesis describes an inquiry into the processes of formal and informal networking used as a method of collective empowerment and community development. It explores gendered aspects of networking, and the use of networks in managing diversity and facilitating multi-ethnic, multi-agency approaches to alliance and partnership development.

The research adopts the methodology of human inquiry in action, incorporating concepts from a variety of academic and practice disciplines. The investigation began through reflection on my experience of community work and political activism. A case study of a political initiative in which I played a major organising rôle was used to identify core themes and questions, notably issues around power, accountability, inter-personal relationships and shared values.

These ideas were further and more systematically explored through a Panel Study involving 13 community work practitioners based in a variety of settings across the UK. There were four linked stages:
A) a postal questionnaire concerning the range and function of networks that community workers used to support their practice;
B) a period during which members of the panel recorded short narratives of 'critical networking incidents' at work and in their non-professional activities which contributed to community development outcomes;
C) individual interviews focusing on the skills and personal qualities which comprise networking 'competence'; and
D) a focus group discussion offering an opportunity to share and evaluate theoretical conclusions and identify implications for community development practice.

Evidence is presented illustrating the range of skills and strategies used by community workers and activists as techniques to establish and maintain links spanning organisational and sectoral boundaries. Such networks receive and transmit information across multi-agency fields and this allows flexible and rapid adaptation in uncertain and complex environments. Networking within and between formal structures allows for efficient use of scarce and often widely dispersed resources, without the necessity for formal contracts or exchange mechanisms, thereby avoiding costs incurred at the point of transaction.

Shared learning and co-ordinated activity enables risk and responsibility to be shared amongst a number of actors engaged in collective action. As a consequence of the versatility, multiplexity and relative informality of networks, this approach to organising is especially prevalent and effective in circumstances of high risk and innovation, voluntary involvement and accelerated time pressures.

Inter-personal processes which establish and sustain trust, loyalty, affinity and reciprocity are essential aspects of networks. Networking represents an investment of time, skills and resources in building personal and social capital. This yields useful outcomes which cannot necessarily be planned or predicted. Complexity theory is used to develop a model of the 'well-connected community' operating at the 'edge of chaos'.

Networking is a key strategy for community workers in creating the conditions for collective action and in sustaining the web of relationships which comprise our experience of 'community'. Community networks are primarily constituted as linkages between individuals who share a common interest and who are able to interact. In order to develop sustainable and resilient networks, community workers should be encouraged in their networking practice through training, work programme management and long-term funding. Their work in helping community members to develop, maintain and use informal networks needs to be given greater recognition and support.

This thesis is dedicated to:

my father, Andrew Gilchrist (1927-1989), who taught me the value of science and of perseverance,

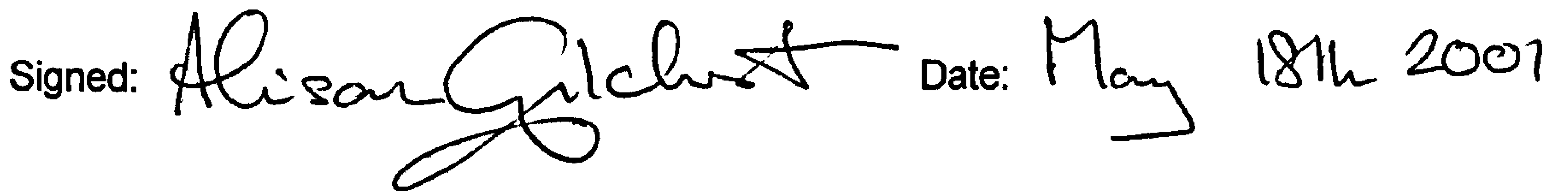
and to my brother, Neil Gilchrist (1961-1997), from whose life and death I learnt about humour, love and loyalty.

AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

I declare that the work in this dissertation was carried out in accordance with the Regulations of the University of Bristol. The work is original except where indicated by special reference in the text and no part of the dissertation has been submitted for any other degree.

Any views expressed in the dissertation are those of the author and in no way represent those of the University of Bristol.

The dissertation has not been presented to any other University for examination either in the United Kingdom or overseas.



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FOREWORD

The idea of community has often been regarded as overly sentimental, and dismissed as such. The concept survives, however, because it expresses something too important to ignore (Trevillion, 1993) which is about the ordinary experiences of interaction, attachment and mutual influence. The original medieval Latin word 'sentire' refers to feelings and opinion and in this thesis I contend that 'sentiment' is a vital aspect of 'community' that deserves greater acknowledgement within community development practice and social policy pronouncements on 'community involvement'. I see community not as an 'invented tradition' or some alluring but magical artifice (Donnison, 1993; Cohen, 1995). Community is a real dimension of people's lives derived from a natural human propensity to connect with others and to be influenced by their views and behaviour. Emotions are an important part of our social attributions, decision-making and consequent welfare (Hoggett, 2000; Damasio, 2000). The overlapping networks of relationships which constitute our 'sense of community' represent an accumulation of memories, aspirations and 'sentiment' involving other people, but which transcend any specific individuals or instances.

There is something intangible about the three central terms of my inquiry: 'community', 'development' and 'networking'. Each has proved difficult to define, let alone study. As Simpson (1965) said "how can we analyse something we cannot even identify?" Nevertheless, I have made an attempt to move from description and illustration, through analysis and towards an eventual explanation of why networking is so important for community development. The focus of the inquiry has been on the practice of professional community workers. This is not to say that others (paid and unpaid) do not contribute to community development, merely that my interest has converged on this rôle, rather than those people who I have chosen to call community members. By this I mean the residents, activists, volunteers, service users and 'ordinary people' who engage as 'active citizens' in improving the quality of their own lives and maintaining the fabric of their communities.

Just as communities themselves are complex and dynamic, characterised by unexpected connections and somewhat spurious boundaries, so has been the epistemological terrain covered by the thesis. The research process has seemed more of an odyssey than a journey, wandering between different academic disciplines, to gather pertinent ideas and evidence. I have been shameless in using (and extending) my own networks to gain access to expertise lacking in my own life, and to find 'critical friends' with whom I could test out my emerging theories. This networking approach to research has proved useful but generated an almost unmanageable volume of tenuously related facts and findings.

The challenge of creating 'order' out of this chaos has been curiously reminiscent of the task of making sense of the torrent of information flowing through community networks, and sometimes just as frustrating and exhausting. Transforming a web of knowledge, experience and values into a coherent linear argument (such as required for an academic thesis) has made it difficult to capture the inter-connectedness of much of the material and theorising over the years. Had I had the technical skills and had the University regulations permitted, it might have been easier to produce the thesis as a CD-ROM, complete with hyper-links !

In writing up the process and results of this inquiry I have tried to remain faithful to the spirit (and honest about the actuality) of the research journey (cf. French, 1993; Hoggett et al, 1994). I am grateful to the many friends, colleagues and family members who have helped me along the way with challenges to my thinking, signposts to new ideas or simply acted as sounding boards. This personal network of encouragement, practical assistance and professional advice has kept me going through the difficult times and is a perfect example of how what appears to be the achievement of one person is in fact the product of a myriad of conversations. My thanks and appreciation go to everyone concerned, especially those who are now absent from my life.

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Section One

Context and review of literature

Chapter One

Ideological roots and formative experiences

Chapter Two

The discourse on 'community'

Chapter Three

Community development – policy and practice

Chapter Four

The use and value of networks

Chapter Five

Networks for empowerment and participation

CHAPTER ONE

Ideological roots and formative experiences

"Who was that research I saw you with last night? That was no research, that was my life"
(from cover of Human Inquiry, Reason and Rowan, 1981a)

I embarked on this inquiry with limited theoretical knowledge about networks, but a great deal of practice in networking. My experience of political activism and professional community development had made me aware of the usefulness of personal relationships and informal networks in collective organising. I was concerned that the time and effort invested in creating and maintaining networks was rarely acknowledged. I felt that an important aspect of the community worker's rôle was being overlooked in favour of more tangible methods and outputs. As a consequence some of the core processes and principles of community development were becoming distorted or neglected altogether. I wanted to follow-up this 'hunch' and explore whether and, if so, why networks and relationship-building are so crucial to community development practice (cf. Fook, 1996a; Ingamells, 1996). This chapter sets out the rationale, motivation and values which underpin the inquiry. It serves as an introduction to the research journey and the thesis itself.

All my adult life has been involved in collective organising, as a political 'cadre', local volunteer or paid community worker. I acquired an ideological grounding in progressive thought through various social movements and the Marxist left. My experience includes political activity as a long-standing member of the Communist Party (CPGB) and more recently the Democratic Left. Over the years I have been involved in the peace movement, trade union work, women's groups, international solidarity and campaigns for democratic reform. Through these experiences and debates I developed my commitment to social justice and understanding of strategies by which radical change might be achieved in this country. I have been influenced by the ideas of contemporary Marxism, feminism, anti-racism, disability equality and by recent post-modernist developments around radical democracy and identity politics. My practical experience as a communist has taught me a number of skills and methods of organising. In particular, and despite its reputation for centralism, the approach adopted by the CPGB gave me an understanding of the importance of alliances and how to develop non-sectarian co-operation. In retrospect, I realise that the Communist Party in Britain at that time (the early 1980s) seemed influential beyond its means because of its ability to use networks to cultivate political allies throughout the broader movement. I recognised that maintaining positive, friendly relationships with people across the ideological spectrum laid a useful foundation for campaigning work and

was also enriching in its own right. Erstwhile comrades remain an important subset of my social and political networks to this day.

Figure 1. Communist Party social event circa 1984. Chatting or caucusing?

Much of this understanding transferred to my professional involvement in the field of community development, mainly at the level of neighbourhood community work. My preference for working in the voluntary sector can be traced to a rather basic Marxist analysis of the state, whilst my commitment to community organisations as elements of civil society derives from an understanding of Gramsci's model of hegemony and the 'war of position' (Simon, 1982). For me, politics was about people, power and places – the processes by which people negotiated or expressed their rights and identities in a world fractured and structured by gross inequalities and exploitation. Community action seemed simply a microcosm of this wider struggle. My ideology could be summed up thus:

> "At its heart, socialism possesses a unifying vision of human beings as social creatures, capable of overcoming social and economic problems by drawing on the power of the community rather than simply individual effort" (Heywood, 1992:96)

I saw community development as contributing to long-term political transformation as well as providing a strategy for achieving relatively short-term social goals. The values of participation and empowerment encouraged me to use my rôle as a community worker to enable people to work together to

- challenge the inadequacies of state provision,
- develop self-help activity and
- make links with others which promoted mutual respect and understanding.

As such it was about laying the foundations for a more participatory democracy and a less unequal society.

Or at least that was the theory. The reality was more problematic in terms of achieving progress towards measurable goals and targets. To some extent, the emphasis within community development on **process** let my naïve radicalism 'off the hook'. I believed that my interventions as a community worker encouraged people to reflect on their experience and draw conclusions about the nature of the society in which they lived. Involvement in community projects, as activists, volunteers or members of management committees, was a learning experience providing opportunities for people to develop skills in collective organisation and to challenge the decisions and assumptions of others in more powerful positions.

I had an analysis of society that recognised the dominance of class interests, but also recognised structural inequalities based on gender, race, disability, age and sexual orientation (cf. Guillaumin, 1995). Exploitation and discrimination operated in people's lives in ways that were oppressive, psychologically damaging and wasteful of their economic and intellectual potential. In addition, I believed that organising for self-help and political influence were realistic strategies for achieving change in people's immediate circumstances. I imagined that community development could operate on these two different, but complementary levels; tackling the problems of everyday life, whilst simultaneously developing the capacity for wider (more political) collective organisation on the basis of equality, democratic participation and solidarity.

DISCOVERING NETWORKS

Much of my experience as a community worker was in neighbourhood development, supporting community-based organisations in the inner-city of Bristol. Amongst many other things, I have helped people to set up and run community newspapers, parent and toddler groups, social clubs for older people, youth groups, playschemes, festivals, and local campaigns. It might appear that the focus for much of this work was parochial and small-scale but by being involved myself (and attempting to involve the people I was working with) in wider forums set up at city level around particular issues, such as play, anti-racism, housing policy, voluntary sector funding, or whatever, I was able to plan my interventions within a wider context.

Networking seemed a natural and relatively effortless method of getting things done, building alliances and breaking down barriers between people from different traditions and ideological perspectives. However, at the time, networking was not generally acknowledged as the vital, almost fashionable, activity it is these days. My intention in doing this research was to render networking visible as a core aspect method of community work, and one at which women were particularly adept. As the European Union's Department for Employment and Social Affairs (1997) identified, job evaluation schemes often omit the caring and social skills carried out by women. This results in incomplete job descriptions and relatively low pay for posts traditionally seen as 'female'. A second concern was that despite a common perception of networks as elitist and exclusionary, I felt that this was not inevitable and that networking could just as well be used to promote equality and empowerment amongst disadvantaged sections of society. I believed, furthermore, that networking was an essential tool within a profession where jobs were often isolated, under-resourced and misunderstood.

The journey of inquiry has traversed a varied landscape of knowledge and experience (Healey, 1996). I have used a range of paradigms and techniques from qualitative research methodology and sought guidance from many people within my own networks who have directed me along certain pathways or helped me overcome obstacles encountered along the way. In assembling a 'bricolage' of theory and evidence to represent my "images, understandings and interpretations of the world and the phenomenon under analysis" (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994:3), I have adopted the methods and values of participative research, synthesising the three approaches identified by Reason (1994) as co-operative inquiry, participative action-research and action science.

The starting point has been my own values and experience (cf. Williams, 1993). These are reflected in the range of questions in my original research proposal (Appendix A), namely:

- What are the qualities which characterise effective networks?
- How has the concept of networking evolved and how is it applied in practice?
- How do community workers use and promote informal networking?
- What skills and circumstances support effective networking?
- What are the outcomes and how are these achieved?
- What are the skills and personal qualities which underpin good networking?
- What are networks good for, and how do they compare with other forms for organising and communicating?

- How are networks organised? What benefits do they bestow on participants and what difficulties are encountered?
- How open and "democratic" are networks?
- How are networks different at different levels of organisations (local, national, international, identity-based, etc)?
- What values underpin the operation of networks? What are the contradictions in these?
- What relevance do networks have for social policy, especially in the fields of community development and community care?

Contrary to conventional advice, I set out without a clearly focused research question or hypothesis (Black, 1993; Janesick, 1994:210). I was interested in the function of networks within community work practice and was curious about the informal, apparently serendipitous nature of many of these interactions. I imagined that I would be following a broad band of thinking, which would lead me through the literature on community development and organisation theory to a clear destination of truth and proof where networking would be 'surfaced' (Argyris et al, 1985), explained and appreciated as a core process of community work practice. I anticipated that the bulk of the research could be contained within a defined academic field.

The actual experience has been very different. The processes of discovery recorded in the research journals I have kept over the past 6 years reveals a networking approach to investigation rather than a systematic process of model testing through experimentation. It has felt more like spinning a 'dense web of knowing' (Reason, 1988a:11), which attempts to capture the 'artistry' of community development, based on experiential knowledge and intuition as well as using more rigorous collection and analysis of evidence (cf. Fook, 1996b). In creating this 'network of understanding', I have visited a sometimes bewildering range of experiences and academic disciplines some of which were more familiar to me than others. I have since learnt that this approach has been termed 'consilience', a synthesis of facts and theories across different scientific fields to achieve a coherent explanation of events in the world (Whewell, 1840; Wilson, 1998). In the course of my journey I have been challenged and educated in the fields of social psychology, sociology, social policy, cybernetics, anthropology, mathematics, organisation studies, genetic biology, quantum physics and the philosophy of ethics. The links I have made across these, culminating in the application of chaos and complexity theories to notions of 'community' have stimulated new ways of thinking about how and why people voluntarily (spontaneously?) organise themselves to support, share and sustain collective initiatives. The focus has been on

the rôle that community work practitioners play in helping people to make useful connections with one another, a function which I have come to call 'meta-networking'.

DEVELOPING PRAXIS

The preliminary phase of inquiry preceded my formal registration with the University. As Rowan (1981:98) indicated "the process begins and ends with subjective contemplation." I can identify at least two 'moments' which sparked off the process of reflection. The first was a conversation with the Chair of the Community Association for whom I then worked as Community Work Co-ordinator. I had been complaining of over-work and the need to limit the number of groups and projects I was supporting. He advised that I reduce my workload by not attending meetings of the Bristol Community Groups Network. I felt very resistant to this advice, but struggled to understand and justify my reluctance to withdraw. In the ensuing weeks I became aware of the many ways in which the contacts and conversations that occurred at these tri-monthly gatherings enabled me to be more effective in my practice and in furthering the aims of my employers. I realised that participation in BCGN gave me access to a reservoir of expertise, facilities, support and information which were not available within my immediate workplace (a typically under-resourced neighbourhood organisation). A relatively small investment of time and effort allowed me to develop good working relationships across the city and to maintain an overview of the local voluntary sector, its key actors, issues and policy environment. Involvement in this network provided a vital foundation for my work within the local community and my development as a professional community worker.

The second moment of insight occurred during a study of multi-racial community initiatives for the Home Office in which our Community Centre (and concomitantly my practice) became a focus for someone else's inquiry (Harrison et al, 1992). During an interview with Paul Hoggett, in which I was encouraged to reflect on my strategy as a community worker within a culturally diverse environment, I realised that a fundamental aspect of my approach involved the creation of opportunities for people from different ethnic communities to meet as 'equals' on common ground and around shared interests. In order to do this, I had had to forge links with a number of organisations (locally and city-wide) and, initially through formal liaison, to develop trusting and constructive relationships with key individuals from those communities or agencies. I began to recognise that networking was a vital aspect of my practice, and that it was also a purpose in itself. The development of 'community' was about 'weaving a web' of inter-personal relationships and organisational co-operation, which created new, as well as traditional patterns by celebrating rather than camouflaging

differences. It was also about empowerment and equality, but these could only be achieved through developing mutual respect and a negotiated tolerance of diversity. By putting people in touch, bringing them face-to-face across cultural and political divisions, I aimed to create a (somewhat fragile) arena for cohabitation in which to build mutual understanding and a precarious solidarity amongst residents sharing the same streets, schools and shops.

Figure 2. Me standing in front in front of a display showing the range of Community Centre activities

My thoughts around networking and anti-discriminatory practices were further developed whilst I was writing a pamphlet on Community Development and Networking (Gilchrist, 1995a). This involved a great deal of reflection on my previous experience, discussion with colleagues and observation of my concurrent rôle as co-ordinator of Bristol's first Festival Against Racism, which subsequently became the basis for the case study. The simultaneous processes of writing whilst organising the Festival honed my initial ideas around networking and reinforced my belief that this was an aspect of community development that has tended to be over-shadowed by the more visible outcomes of project management, information exchange, organisation development and the 'delivery' of events, activities and services.

During this period (1993-5), I was engaged in training, teaching and writing (Gilchrist, 1993; 1994a) about networks and networking. I delivered regular sessions on "networks and multi-agency working" within an undergraduate course in Community and Youth Work and ran workshops at a number of community work conferences. Preparation for these and

discussion with participants contributed to my early theorising, clarifying my ideas and raising issues which would need to be addressed in practice and in the research. As Reason (1988b) wrote "in co-operative inquiry, education and social action may become fully integrated in the research process." That was indeed my experience and my aspiration. The research process involved a dialectical cycle of reflexivity and reciprocity (cf. Steier, 1991), adopting a subjective and participative approach to the inquiry (Stevens, 1993). I felt this to be important at an intuitive level and it was reassuring to discover a body of literature devoted to the 'new paradigm' of human inquiry in action (Reason and Rowan, 1981a).

The foundation for my inquiry was laid during six months of hectic political activity and writing under pressure to meet publisher's deadlines. It was this forced juxtaposition in my life of action, emotions, theory and research which generated the most exciting ideas and questions. Unwittingly, I had adopted Hearn and Parkin's (1987) approach by allowing the boundaries between the objects of the research, research method and personal life to break down. Heron (1981) similarly promotes the value of experiential knowledge, acknowledging the inevitability of the researcher's experience intruding into the field of inquiry. My chosen research topic emerged from my experience as a practitioner and I was determined that the results of my inquiry should be relevant to practice.

This intertwining of experience, reflection, training and writing resulted in a gradual shift in my interest from networks as organisational structures towards networking as a strategic process. Like Colebatch and Lamour (1993) I saw organisation as something that people do and wanted to examine how and why people invest time and effort in creating particular patterns of connection and affiliation. In particular, I was curious to explore how relationships were maintained and mobilised for a variety of purposes including individual needs as well as collective goals.

DEFINITIONS AND VALUE BASE

Although when I began the formal stages of the inquiry I was no longer directly engaged in community work practice, I remained in touch with current thinking through my involvement in the Standing Conference for Community Development (SCCD) and as Chair of the Avon Community and Youth Work Accreditation Trust. I have continued to attend conferences and engage in debates about the changing nature of the professional rôle, contributing actively to formulations and standards around community development practice adopted by the major national bodies. I have never been a neutral observer and make no claims to academic objectivity. I have been influenced by,

and influential in discussions within the field. These are reflected in the values and definitions which frame the current inquiry.

I espouse a model of community work practice which is anti-oppressive, which recognises that development takes place at a number of levels (personal, political and organisational) and which values mutual co-operation rather than competitive individualism. The three major UK-wide national community work organisations have similar statements setting out the purpose of community development. The Standing Conference for Community Development believes that "community development is about the active involvement of people sharing in the issues that affect their lives. It is a process based on sharing power, skill, knowledge and expertise." Its Charter states that "community development is crucially concerned with issues of powerlessness and disadvantage ... [and] part of a process of social change." Community development prioritises work around equality, disadvantage and participation, within a framework of democratic pluralism and mutuality. The Community Development Foundation's (CDF) recent Annual Report (1998) describes community development as "a structured intervention that gives communities greater control over the conditions which affect their lives" through an emphasis on self-help and volunteering. According to CDF the aim of community development is "to release the potential within communities by bringing people together on issues of common concern. This draws out a great wealth of untapped energy and experience, and promotes voluntary activity at a local level by developing people's skills and confidence." The Federation of Community Work Training Groups' (2000) definition of community work is more overtly political and has a greater focus on developing and supporting collective action. It asserts the key purpose of community as "working with communities experiencing disadvantage, to enable them collectively to identify needs and rights, clarify objectives and take action to meet these within a democratic framework." It refers to "the need to celebrate diversity and differences and actively confront oppression however it is manifested."

All of these statements are derived explicitly from principles which value equality, participation and democracy. Furthermore, they acknowledge that poverty, discrimination and prejudice restrict life chances and disfigure society, but can be addressed through community development work. This thesis starts from an equivalent position, adopting a 'real world' approach (Robson, 1993) in attempting to demonstrate how networking might contribute to community development processes of empowerment, combating oppression and promoting collective action for social justice. Like Pantazis and Gordon (1999) I regard social problems and inequality as caused by unequal and unjust relationships, as well as structural factors.

OVERVIEW OF THE DISSERTATION

The thesis is divided into five sections, including the appendices. Section One considers some conceptual problems arising from the inherent 'fuzziness' of each of my central themes: "community", "development" and "networking". In the following chapters I review the literature relating to these terms and explore different perspectives ranging across a number of academic and professional disciplines. Section Two explains, describes and evaluates the research process. It sets out the methodological rationale, considers issues around my rôle as a participant researcher and summarises the case study and the four stages of the Panel Study.

In Section Three I present the findings which indicate how networking is used within professional practice to communicate and learn, to build relationships, to develop collective action and generally to pursue the aims of community development. I identify the abilities and qualities used by effective 'networkers' and consider whether networking should be regarded as a professional competence that can be enhanced through training or whether it embodies personal characteristics which are genetically determined or acquired in early life. Professional issues and ethical dilemmas raised in the case study and by the practitioners are explored, including implications for practice and policy.

The chapters of Section Four consider how and why networking might be important for community development within the wider social context. The main recommendations are set out, including an original approach to the notion of the 'developed community'. This draws on complexity theory to propose a model of the 'well-connected community' poised at the 'edge of chaos' and providing a social environment for dynamic, creative problem-solving and organisational development. The thesis concludes with a summary of the key findings and some suggestions for further research. Section Five contains appendix material, including the research instruments and related publications.

CHAPTER TWO

The discourse of 'community'

"Community - our endless connections with responsibilities to each other"
James Baldwin

This chapter considers the term 'community' and begins to explore its influence in policy and practice. Chapter Three continues this examination in more detail by looking at past and current models of community development.

Despite many years of sociological debate regarding its 'true' definition, the 'community' concept survives within academic discussions and everyday discourse. As Williams (1976) noted, 'community' remains a "warmly persuasive word...[which] never seems to be used unfavourably." It raises expectations of loyalty, support, social cohesion, mutuality and affirmation. Under New Labour we have recently witnessed its resurgence (especially promulgated by the thinktank Demos) as a core value within a philosophy of 'communitarianism' underpinning policy developments and informing high profile initiatives around crime reduction, urban regeneration, social exclusion and democratic renewal (Leadbeater, 1996). Tony Blair declared the first ten years of the new millennium to be the 'decade of community' (at the NCVO annual conference in January 1999) and many current government initiatives requires significant levels of community involvement.

PERCEPTIONS, INTENTIONS AND INTERPRETATIONS?

The debate about the meaning, function, or indeed very existence of 'community' continues to exercise social scientists, even whilst the word itself remains firmly embedded in popular discourse and political rhetoric. Like many useful words in common parlance it is an ill-defined term, widely used but enduringly resistant to precise specification. It refers to an aspect of human life which appears across all societies and eras, namely that realm of social interaction which extends beyond the immediate household, but is governed by neither statutory regulation nor financial transactions. 'Community' manifests itself in different forms depending on local circumstances. Its specific features are shaped by political, economic and environmental factors, but the core concept contains a defining assumption of regular and mostly co-operative interaction amongst a set of people over time (Hillery, 1955; 1963). The modes and meanings of these interactions reflect power differentials

operating in society as well as the mechanisms available for people to make and maintain their ties with one another. Historical struggles and changing technology have profoundly shaped patterns of connections, but the idea of community persists as a significant, contested but seemingly desirable dimension of social life (Mayo, 1994:Ch.2; Hoggett, 1997:Ch.1).

Whilst the term certainly suffers from overuse as a `spray-on' gloss for otherwise unpalatable policies, nevertheless I will adopt Wittgenstein's approach to semantics which asserts that the meaning of a word is identified from its usage, not its lexical tag, nor formal definition (cf. Plant, 1974). I believe that 'community' can best be understood as a fuzzy concept (Kosko, 1994) with overlapping and shared understandings. In many cultures 'community' is regarded as a pre-eminent aspect of collective wealth (Marcel-Thekaekara, 1999), which in the west we are learning to call 'social capital'. The United Nations Declaration on Human Rights includes an Article (29) identifying "duties to the community" as part of its framework for guaranteeing the "free and full development" of individuals. The idea of 'community' is clearly something which enjoys almost universal acknowledgement and appreciation.

'Community' usually refers to a quasi-public realm in which familiar, but not intimate, interactions occur on a fairly regular basis, involving some kind of recognition and response, however casual or tenuous. Hunter and Suttles (1972) call this a "community of limited liability" or "face block" referring to the city block in which most daily transactions and activities appeared to take place. In many respects, community can be seen as a microcosm of civil society acting as a buffer or interface between the individual and the state (Eldridge, 1996). In policy guidelines it is often used as a synonym for 'deprived neighbourhoods' or 'disadvantaged sections of the population'. In the past it has referred specifically to Black and minority ethnic people.

The co-existence of different understandings is not, however, always clearly articulated within political discussions. 'Community' is used as a portmanteau term, conveying a value or discourse which encompasses the virtues of trust, mutuality and solidarity (Wilson, 1977; Frazer and Lacey, 1993), whilst simultaneously, and often surreptitiously, asserting underlying notions of 'us' and 'them'. There is a strange conundrum about a word which reverses its connotations when used as a noun (e.g. the Sikh community, excluding non-Sikhs) or as an adjective (e.g. community school with porous boundaries, open to everyone). These confusions and contradictions are

reflected in the different models of community development to be explored in the following chapter.

COMMUNITY LOST AND FOUND

Most people aspire to belong to some kind of community and 'the community' is expected to play an increasing rôle in the design and delivery of what used to be public services, either through self-help or in partnership with local government and the private sector (Holman, 1999). In this respect, the use of the term has recaptured its original meaning of 'pertaining to the common people', as opposed to those of rank in society. Early sociologists such as Tönnies (1887) and Durkheim (1893) emphasised the emotional aspects of local life, arguing that common experiences, shared values and mutuality were key features which distinguished 'Gemeinschaft' (community) from 'Gesellschaft' (society). Both these sociologists were concerned with the impact of urban industrialisation on late 19th century society. Tönnies' model of 'community' refers to "all intimate, private and exclusive living together." He saw community as 'home life', contrasting this to the public, commercial sphere of society. Interestingly Tönnies acknowledged both the Gemeinschaft of shared habitat (physical life) and of the mind (mental life). Community exists "wherever human beings are related through their wills in an organic manner and affirm each other" (p.9 in Readings). It represents a "truly human and supreme" form of living. Durkheim likewise attests to the importance of 'organic solidarity', binding together social formations based on resemblance and inter-dependence, enabling people to navigate the "general torrent of social life" (1964:28) by providing some protection from the state. These concerns find an echo in recent discussions of the turbulence and atomisation of modern society (e.g. Marquand, 1998; Epstein, 1998).

Early sociological investigations into what was assumed to be the changing nature of social life, had a particular focus on urban living. The Chicago School pioneered the use of participant observation techniques to examine the "mosaics of little worlds" found in local interactions at neighbourhood level (e.g. Park, 1925 and 1929; Wirth, 1928 and 1938; Whyte, 1943). Their ethnographic approach compared urban to rural life (e.g. Lewis, 1951; Redfield, 1955) and sought to demonstrate the development of more 'complex' social configurations in the transition from predominantly peasant forms of life to urban existence. This taxonomy dominated community studies for several years and inspired a 'quest for community' (Nisbet, 1953) deemed to be nestling within

the 'mass society' that was spreading across the suburbs and 'ghettoes' of modern towns and cities (Kornhauser, 1959).

What became known as the Manchester School continued this style of investigation with a series of anthropological studies based in other cultures, notably African townships (see Mitchell, 1969). The 'community lost' thesis was already being challenged by studies of urban neighbourhoods which purported to 'discover' that 'community' had merely been eclipsed by some aspects of modern life (Stein, 1960) and that in its essential features 'community life' had survived substantial disruption to patterns of settlement (Janowitz, 1967). Early investigations were based predominantly on detailed case studies of specific localities. They observed the 'comings and goings' of geographically well-defined communities - an island (Barnes, 1954), specific villages (Frankenberg, 1957; Littlejohn, 1963), small towns (Stacey, 1960; Rosser and Harris, 1965) or urban neighbourhoods (Young and Willmott, 1957). Community studies examined the ways in which the physical environment and local traditions contributed to people's sense of 'belonging', shaping interactions and perceptions amongst residents. This theme of locality has been further explored by Massey (1991) and S.Ardener (1981) in their considerations of territory and the use of public space for processes of interaction and the construction of local identity. Other studies have similarly taken a geographic community as their starting point but have examined this through different lenses, such as kinship (Bott, 1957), class or (male) occupation (Dennis et al, 1956; Tunstall, 1962; Newby, 1977), ethnicity (Gans, 1962; Patterson, 1965; Cohen, 1974; Pryce, 1979; Anwar, 1985; Wallman, 1984; 1986), youth style (Back, 1996) or gender (Roberts, 1984: Campbell, 1984, 1993; Sharpe, 1984).

Many of the early studies have been criticised for approaching their subject with a degree of rose-tinted nostalgia which tended to disguise the more unpalatable aspects of communal life (Bell and Newby, 1971). The studies presumed and presented a normative view of 'community', whilst neglecting operational definitions. This vagueness made it difficult to compare findings across time and geographical distance (Simpson, 1965; Kent, 1981) or to draw any meaningful conclusions about the changing nature of society (Byrne, 1989). Nevertheless, these studies tapped a rich source of data describing a hitherto neglected facet of 'ordinary people's everyday lives' (Crow and Allan, 1994). Although the first studies were later considered to be somewhat idealistic, there was increasing recognition in the 1960s of the more problematic aspects of community life: the fissures, antagonisms and divisions arising

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when people with different cultures and origins occupied the same or overlapping territory (e.g. Elias and Scotson, 1965; Rex and Moore, 1967).

A more complex version of 'community' was emerging which recognised the existence of 'urban villages' characterised by peer group gatherings (Gans, 1962). Typologies were developed around the differences that were being observed in different settings (e.g. Frankenburg, 1966; Bott, 1971), but there were still problems for the emerging *science* of sociology around achieving a satisfactory definition of the concept (Plant, 1974). Opponents argued that the term was so ambiguous and laden with "emotional overtones" (Bell and Newby, 1971:21) as to be useless (Stacey, 1969) or even dangerous (Williams, 1981). During this period it seemed that the popular idea of 'community' had been 'saved', even re-habilitated (Hoggett, 1997:5) and yet the term itself was constantly under attack. Astonishingly the first edition of Haralambos' (1980) standard text on sociological themes and perspectives does not even list 'community' in the index.

As a consequence of these semantic and epistemological difficulties, a more neutral phrase, 'local social system', was suggested and many sociologists embraced this seemingly more objective term, using measurement and mapping to analyse social networks (Scott, 1991), thus avoiding the hermeneutic issues associated with observation and interpretation (e.g. Laumann, 1973; Boissevain, 1974; Wellman and Leighton, 1979; Fischer, 1977 and 1982; Bulmer, 1985). Not everyone was persuaded to abandon the idea of neighbourbood communities (Dennis, 1968; Seabrook, 1984) and as Clarke (1973) observed, "if the concept of community is dead, it stubbornly refuse[d] to lie down." Despite reservations and disclaimers, many sociologists proceeded with their investigations, simply adopting a more cautious approach to operational definitions.

This change in focus from locality to patterns of social interaction revealed new dimensions to people's attachments and communication systems based on connection but not propinquity (Webber, 1963). It also indicated the extent to which choice, culture and circumstance affect how communities are actively constructed (and defended) by creating personal networks which express, but do not constrain an individual's social identity (Suttles, 1972). The search for 'community' in the modern world began to move beyond the neighbourhood or village, to acknowledge other spheres of activity which were salient to people in different ways throughout their lives. In his model of 'community liberated', Wellman (1979) argued that the notion of 'community', especially

in urban environments, needs to 'float free' from spatial proximity and accommodate the significance of voluntary associations and networks. Casual and informal interactions generate a "web of public trust and respect" which functions as a collective asset in times of personal or common need. This 'social capital' provides the basis for modern civil society and personal survival in the city (Jacobs, 1961; Sennett, 1970; Coleman, 1988; Tester, 1992). Fukuyama defines social capital as "the ability of people to work together for common purpose in groups and organisations" (1995:10). It derives from people's willingness and ability to associate and develop collective action strategies. This appears to relate to shared norms and values, and accumulates through increasing levels of interaction and co-operation (Routledge and Amsberg, 1996; Fukuyama, 1999). In the same way, 'community' can be seen as a benefit that accrues to people in proportion to the investment they make in self-help, mutual and philanthropic activities.

COMMUNITY AS STRATEGIC IDENTITY

The concept of 'community' as a collective human resource and motivator was extended by Anderson (1983) to explain the existence of attachments to abstract concepts such as nationality based on political or ethnic identities, which he termed 'imagined' communities'. The idea that 'community' could be chosen and created, rather than something that was given and circumstantial, represented an important shift in sociological thinking (Dahrendorf, 1979). Western modernity has been characterised as promoting differentiation and rationalisation within social structures (Giddens, 1991), seeing individual rôles as reflecting a kind of functionalist specialisation (Triandis, 1995). In contrast, post-modernism asserts the hybrid, reflexive and diverse nature of social relations. Post-modern accounts of 'community' focus on the situational, multiple and sometimes contradictory features of social identity, reflecting both fate and preference (e.g. Parma, 1990). They emphasise the need for flexibility in interpreting apparent rôles and membership (Rutherford, 1990; Cheney, 1991; Coleman, 1991; Squires, 1994:81). In its strong form, post-modernism argues that we live in a kaleidoscopic society, where moral values are relative: contingent on constantly changing circumstances (Squires, 1993), a "product of the complex intersection of specific histories, discursive formation and political articulations" (Weeks, 1994:11).

Some echo the earlier sociologists in their contention that 'community' is a dangerous myth of interpretation rather than reality (Squires, 1994:94). It combines fantasy and reality in a constant process of collective "recollection and forgetting" (Burns et al,

1994). Bauman (1991) emphasises the fragility of such communities, arguing that they can never be "cosy and natural homes of unanimity". Others assert the potential for new forms of 'communal solidarity', based on "cultural syncretism" acknowledging the impermanent "matrix of identifications" which shape many people's lives (Bhatt, 1994:141 and 164; Back, 1996; Watson, 1999). In this regard identity and community become political expediencies, building strategic alliances across different struggles (hooks, 1986; Rowbotham, 1992; Moore, 1993; Laclau, 1994:169). Identity reflects a strategic essentialism (hooks, 1990; Butler, 1990) used to combat oppression, whilst 'community' is constructed as a form of "intermediate collectivity", a vehicle for developing trust and mutual respect to exert and contest aggregate power (McKechnie and Welsh, 1994:69). 'Community' is explicitly about developing "wider solidarities" which encompass a "multiplicity of perspectives" and thrive on interactive communication, exploring and challenging the boundaries of difference, whilst searching out common cause (Young, 1990a; Phillips, 1994). 'Perspectivism' has particular significance for social categories based on shared experience of oppression (Burr, 1996), such as Black, Disabled or 'women' where political labels tend to suppress or obscure important differences within these groups (Adamson et al, 1988; Modood, 1992; Brah, 1992; Sawicki, 1991; Rattansi and Westwood, 1994; Oliver, 1990). Complexity theory has added yet another twist to the conundrum of identity with the idea of the 'quantum self', which leaps from one manifestation to another, entirely dependent on perceived (and often rather transient) connections (Zohar, 1990). The political philosopher Edward Said (1993) proposes identity as a personal 'jumping off' point for exploration, hinting at the way the concept combines both security and adventure.

'Community' provides the setting and motivation for the development and demonstration of individuality. The informally structured arena stretched between (and shaped by) the private household and the public state is the space where people can express their individual propensities and explore their sense of 'self'. The post-structuralist concept of inter-subjectivity (Bhabha, 1994) is able to accommodate the emotional and cognitive ambivalence of identity and social interaction, drawing on earlier thinking and experimentation by social psychologists to investigate the interplay between personality and situation in people's behaviour (Mischel, 1968; 1973). In contrast to these scientific, controlled group methods, Goffman investigated the "presentation of self" and the impact of perceived identity on social interactions in naturalistic settings (e.g. 1959, 1963). This quasi-anthropological tradition lay dormant throughout the ascendancy of experimental psychology until it was resurrected by

Harré (1979) in his exploration of 'self-hood' and group identification. Building on the work of Descartes and Wittgenstein, the philosophers Ryle (1949) and Bateson (1972) have also contributed to the debate of 'how we know who we are', seeing the mind as actively constructing notion(s) of self through processing a continuous stream of information generated by our engagement with the social world.

Social psychologists such as Tajfel (1981) and Abrams and Hogg (1990) drew on the much earlier work of Festinger (1954) looking at social comparison in relation to identity formation and group maintenance. They developed a model of collective behaviour known as 'social identity theory' which attempts to divine and explain the micro-processes of inter-personal interaction and social categorisation through experimentation with small groups. Dimensions of group membership were manipulated to examine what factors would affect collective behaviour and people's sense of belonging. Social identity has been related to reputation (Emler and Hopkins, 1990), group dynamics (Brewer and Schneider, 1990), stereotypes (Condor, 1990) and similarities within and between groups (Johnstone and Hewstone, 1990). These studies found that co-operation (rather than competition) can be enhanced if conditions (including group size, levels of anxiety and the nature of the task) encourage group identification, positive esteem and inter-dependency (Brewer and Schneider, 1990). This confirms the advice and practice already available to community workers in handbooks on effective group work such as Randall and Southgate (1980) and Jelfs (1982). Our sense of 'community' reflects and shapes our sense of self, and is a major factor in how we interact with others, individually and collectively.

The term 'community' has long been associated with notions of collective identity, derived from shared experience and common values. It assumes a basic commonality and stability which recent theoretical developments challenge with their emphasis on the ephemeral and dynamic nature of 'selfhood' and society. This is reflected in a growing emphasis within community development on managing difference, 'celebrating diversity' and achieving self-actualisation. The rights and obligations of individuals appear to transcend models of social support and solidarity, with 'community' seen by policy-makers as an arena for citizenship and volunteering, rather than a foundation for collective organising. Nevertheless, the community development field is finding ways of synthesising these two approaches through supporting both individual growth and organisational development (Standards Council for Community Work Qualifications, 2000; SCCD, 2001). Both of these recent statements pay more explicit heed to relationships and networking.

COMMUNITY AS COLLECTIVE EMPOWERMENT

In recent years, not only has the term 'community' been used to express a shared experience of being oppressed or excluded, but it has become a rallying point against such exploitation or discrimination by "making an individual/local case into an issue, turning issues into causes and causes into movements and building in the process a new political culture, new communities of resistance" (Sivanandan, 1989). This thinking is reflected in much of the politics of identity and cultural resistance around 'race', gender, disability, youth and sexual orientation (e.g. Bryan et al, 1985; Hall and Jefferson, 1975; Gilroy, 1982; Lesbian Oral History Group, 1989; Dorrell, 1990; Morris, 1991; Oliver and Barnes, 1998; Weeks, 1990; Mort, 1994). In this respect 'community' is used politically, as a vehicle for collective empowerment, articulating a particular perspective which is usually premised on an equal rights models of social change. Drawing on Marx's ideas of class-consciousness, awareness-raising strategies are seen as critical in recruiting people to 'the movement' and maintaining their commitment to the cause (Sivanandan, 1982). This approach has been adopted by identity-based political movements to develop political analysis through comparing individual experiences of oppression and an alternative signification of 'community'. Consciousness requires interaction (Morris, 1992) and is developed using methods which include semi-formal discussion (such as the women's groups of the seventies), cultural expressions of 'pride' (Gay Pride, Notting Hill carnival), or an exploration of historical 'roots' (Ohri, 1998). This may be reflected in lifestyle choices, linguistic codes, emblems and costumes. A 'new ethnicity' or alternative identity is adopted, representing Derrida's notion of 'différance' and articulating positionality in much the same way as 'Black' indicates a political stance against racism (Carmichael and Hamilton, 1969; Mercer, 1990; Hall, 1992:257; Shukra, 1995). In this respect community can be seen not as a series of concentric circles, with a power elite at the top, but rather as a mosaic of shifting allegiances and kaleidoscopic power relations (Knights and Vurdubakis, 1994).

Collective and personal empowerment is derived from processes of social interaction and decision-making which characterise informal networks (Saranson, 1974), organisations (Hosking and Morley, 1991), social movements (Schneiderman, 1988; Morris and McClurg Mueller, 1992), collective action (Kelly and Breinlinger, 1996) and protest mobilisations (Klandermans, 1997). These studies were interested in how the development of consensus (Gamson, 1992), consciousness (Oberschall, 1993) and

community (Ferree, 1992) constitute an emotional investment which underpins cultural identity and solidarity. Community as 'collective consciousness' is embedded in a cultural and psychological context of human interaction (Morris, 1992). People take part in communal activities not just for selfish reasons (Olson, 1965) but because they are connected with and to some extent identify with other people involved (Melucci, 1989; 1996) This may be especially true of women's participation (Ferree, 1992) and in its guise as a foundation for collective action, this is the essence of 'community'. The 'networks of everyday life' provide a vital resource and incentive for combined effort, especially where this is risky or highly demanding as is often the case when challenging injustice or exploitation. As Gramsci (1971:532) observed "each of us changes himself (sic), modifies himself to the extent that he changes or modifies the complex relations of which he is the heart." Negotiating our identity within this web of interaction involves both political and pragmatic considerations.

COMMUNITY AS BELONGING

There is an aspect of community which is more concerned with inter-personal relationships than formal organisations. Fellowship and compassion are core values, lubricating the flow of "advice, affection and tangible assistance" through informal networks (Baron et al, 1992:167). Community, as constituted by an individual's networks of relationships, bestows a collective and personal benefit (Eames and Goode, 1977). There is plenty of empirical and anecdotal evidence that 'belonging' (feeling connected) promotes mental health and healing (House, 1988), by providing some kind of emotional buffer against trauma (Hirsch, 1981) and generally enhancing recovery from crises so that we live longer and are more content (Gottlieb, 1981; Kadushin, 1982; Pilisuk and Parks, 1986; Flynn, 1989; Argyle, 1989; 1996b).

Community networks provide a collective mechanism for sharing risk and resources across kin and quasi-kin connections in situations of scarcity and uncertainty (Stack, 1974; Werbner, 1988; Monbiot, 1994). Sennett (1970) argued that what he terms "survival communities" are based on forced interaction and the necessary resolution of differences, simply because there is no escape. This enforced solidarity, sometimes viewed through rather rose-tinted spectacles, finds echoes in more recent notions of communities of identity. For example, sections of the gay population faced by the HIV/AIDS epidemic responded by setting up (through self-help and voluntary organisations), new forms of male friendship and intensive buddying mechanisms (Weeks, 1991; Sullivan, 1998). Hunter and Staggenborg (1988) suggest that "networks

of necessity" (p.253) are crucial mechanisms for the survival and sustenance of the urban poor and other oppressed groups (e.g. Shearer, 1986; Espinoza, 1999), those the government would now term 'socially excluded' (Furbey, 1999).

Studies of neighbouring reveal the extent to which residents help each other out with relatively mundane tasks, such as watering plants whilst away, taking in parcels, occasional shopping errands and the like (Abrams and McCulloch, 1976; J.M.Mayo, 1979; Ball and Ball, 1982) but that these favours do not generally extend to more intimate or sustained caring responsibilities (Bulmer, 1987). There is contemporary evidence that such acts of neighbourliness maintain 'weak ties' within localities (Henning and Lieberg, 1996), thereby contributing to social cohesion through mutual support and understanding (Hanson, 2000; Forrest and Kearns, 2001). The links "generated by daily transactions in the routine social life of human relationships" appear to provide support, affirmation and practical resources, which enable people to cope during times of adversity (Duck, 1992:197). But these exchange networks cannot be taken for granted nor are they uniformly present in all neighbourhoods or families (Williams and Windebank, 1995 and 2000; Roschelle, 1997). They need developing and tending (Vaux, 1990). By comparison kinship networks and close friends are likely to provide more intimate and long-term social care (Willmott, 1987; Roloff, 1988). Community connections provide a non-stigmatised welfare and advice service for help with day-to-day problems, circumventing or at least delaying the need for professional intervention (Gabarino, 1983). Informal transactions (swops, borrowing-lending, bartering) create a form of money-less social economy, which exponents of community-based skill-share schemes such as LETs or Time Banks have attempted to mimic or harness to combat social exclusion, though not always successfully (North, 1996; O'Doherty et al, 1997; Williams and Windebank, 1999).

Informal networks contribute to the survival of individuals as well as ensuring the stability of whole societies. The anthropologist, Murdock, identified 'community organisation' as a universal feature of human society (1945). There is, however, a continuing debate as to whether 'community' bestows an evolutionary advantage (Dunbar, 1996), or merely represents a principle which appears in response to transient conditions in the socio-political environment (Beresford, 1996). Ethnographic studies of the higher primates provide evidence of an instinctive sociability, which psychologists use to assert a genetic propensity to form community-type social systems, such as groups, clans and tribes (Saranson, 1976; Bronfenbrenner, 1977; Maffesoli, 1996). On the other hand, it is possible to conceptualise community and other social

configurations as merely the emergent by-products of small-scale interactions occurring amongst individual 'agents' within a complex system (Eve et al, 1997; Byrne, 1998). I discovered rather belatedly that this approach finds a parallel in Gidden's structuration theory (1976; 1984; Bryant and Jary, 1991) and its implications will be considered further in the concluding section.

COMMUNITY AS SHARED CULTURE

As early as 1922 the sociologist Simmel (1955) advanced the now common place notion that both propinquity and common interests could form the basis for community affiliation. Willmott (1986) suggested that networks based on shared identity, interests and attachment characterised many people's experience of 'community', transcending place of residence. The debate around whether 'community' represents myth or reality has progressed in recent years to an acceptance that the term reflects a genuine, if subjective, experience that most people seem to value and strive for in their lives. Models of 'community' currently range along a spectrum from structural to psychological theories, but these can be seen as complementary, rather than competing interpretations (Flanagan, 1995).

Figure 3. Members of Mukhto Dhara cultural society performing at Bristol Festival Against Racism

Cultural symbols, language, fables and style all convey 'community' as collective identity (e.g. Cohen, 1985; Hebdige, 1979 and 1987; Wong, 1986) variously based on heritage (Burns et al, 1994), 'roots' (Gilroy, 1987; Back, 1996), nationhood (Anderson,

1983) or citizenship (Modood, 1992; Lister, 1997) They define a sense of 'we', establishing boundaries of belonging and exclusion.

'Community' bestows a sense of social solidarity (Clarke, 1973), spinning a "web of significance" (Geertz, 1975) and emotional support (Weiss, 1994; Riches, 1995). The importance of 'community' as underpinning individual identity is reflected in the ethos of many cultures. For example, the Xhosa principle of "ubunto" conveys the meaning "I am because we are." As Archbishop Tutu explains "It embraces hospitality, caring about others...We believe a person is a person through another person, that my humanity is caught up, bound up and inextricable in yours" (cited in du Toit, 1998). Similarly, the Navajo tribe has no concept of individual 'sin' or sickness, rather a sense of someone being out of kilter within their relationships. Healing or forgiveness involved a form of ritualised communal participation designed to re-connect the person with their immediate social web (Sandner, 1979).

Culture provides an important theme through which to explore the ways in which 'community' is constructed and asserted. Hunter (1974) and Cohen (1986) emphasise the symbolic aspects of community life, whilst Finnegan (1989) explores involvement in music-related activities to map the hidden 'pathways' "embedded within a wider urban framework" (p.300). Many cultures practise ritualised giving and receiving of presents, such as the custom of *vartan bharji* in the Punjab (Eglar, 1961), which has been imported into Pakistani communities in Britain (Werbner, 1984 and 1990; Anwar, 1995). This exchange of gifts defines who belongs to the *biraderi* of the extended family, kin and quasi-kin acquaintances and indicates the matrix of reciprocal obligations between individuals in the web regarding status and nature of the connection. As the Roman poet, Martial, observed, "every gift is a hook".

Similar, though perhaps more blurred, patterns have been observed in strongly collectivist societies such as the Trobiander islanders in the South Pacific (Malinowski, 1960), the Jewish shtetl (Tajfel, 1978), Africanist and Hispanic cultures in the United States (Gaines, 1995) and the Japanese custom of *nemowashi,* whereby the elements of a caring relationship are established before important meetings. In Europe the borrowing of ceremonial objects and exchange of gifts and greeting cards to mark personal anniversaries, achievements, religious festivals and rites of passage continues this tradition (Barnard and Good, 1984; Cappaletto, 1998). Christmas cards are for many an important means of monitoring and maintaining social networks that might otherwise unravel through lack of contact.

COMMUNITY AS COMMUNICATION SYSTEMS

In addition to the flow of resources and energy, community networks operate as informal communication systems, carrying both information and opinion. Tolsdorf (1976) included 'advice' and 'feedback' as two of the core functions of personal linkages, allowing people to form judgements about themselves in comparison to others, an important form of socialisation and reputation checking (Fine and Rosnow, 1978; Emler, 1994). Such evaluations constitute a major component of the data processed through community channels as rumour and gossip (Waddington and Fletcher, 1997). These encourage critical dialogue which in turn challenge and unmask the 'taken for granted' (Freire, 1972; M.Smith, 1994:32). Community conversations provide a forum for 'public talk' (Schuler, 1996:134) and a means of covert inquiry (Ayim, 1994). They represent a system of local or tacit knowledge (Geertz, 1983a; Baumard, 1999) supported by informal research, reflection and recommendation encapsulated by 'old wives tales', the Yiddish figure of the maven and folklore. Fodor's (1975) concept of folk psychology and Böhm's (1994) 'collective intelligence' both rely on conversation and intuition to generate shared understanding by exchanging tacit and expert knowledge in order to co-ordinate joint activities, change attitudes and explain observed behaviours (cf. also Polyani, 1967). In the longer term community becomes a repository of collective memory and meanings (Maffesoli, 1996), embodied in myths and other cultural schemata (Lewin, 1993:15) or what some people might term 'memes' (Blackmore, 1999). The metaphor of community as 'collective brain' works well and will be returned to at a later point in the thesis (Morgan, 1986).

Recent developments in computer-based technologies have added a new (and somewhat contentious) dimension to the debate on community (e.g. Stone, 1991; Gordon, 1999), raising issues around personal authenticity, access and accountability (Rheingold, 1993; Jones, 1995; Schuler, 1996). Technology certainly appears to facilitate information flow and connection across the 'digital society', but can this replicate (or even replace) the emotional basis of face-to-face interaction which constitutes genuine 'community' (McBeath and Webb, 1995; K.Harris, 1999)? On the other hand, there is a plausible argument that services provided through computer technology (e-mailing, teleworking, surfing, shopping, virtual chatrooms and the like) actually improve communication (Wagland, 1994) and release time for relationships and serendipitous interactions within the neighbourhood and civil society (Mitchell, 1999; Thompson, 2000). The impact of cyber-society and commerce on our lives are

only beginning to be assessed empirically (Henley Centre, 1999; Wellman, and Guilia, 1999) although studies on the trade-off between time spent on computers and social activities are producing some interesting findings (Bouvard and Kurtzman, 2000). New developments in video-conferencing may similarly restore non-verbal communication to this arena. Whatever the merits of technology-assisted networking of all kinds, 'community' will continue to operate as an informal communication system, carrying information and opinion which may be risky or controversial, and cannot (yet) be articulated in the formal, public domain. It is this 'common sense' use of local knowledge or what Giddens (1984) terms "practical consciousness" which creates and revises a working model of the world (Weick, 1979:164).

COMMUNITY AS PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY

Information and discussion are vital prerequisites for all forms of democracy. The theme of community involvement and the notions of social responsibility that accompany it run through most modern urban and welfare policies (Butcher et al, 1993; Mayo, 1994). Underpinning values of mutuality, self-help and sustainability have continued to appeal to politicians of all persuasions (Green, 1995). The use of prefix 'community' softens the edge of state interventions, implying user-friendly, accessible services or partnership arrangements for the delivery of welfare to those sections of the population said to have needs which are particularly difficult to meet. Consequently, 'community' tends to refer to people who are disadvantaged by poverty, cultural differences, impairments or who choose 'deviant' lifestyles. In the 1980s these were the groups targeted by equal opportunities strategies (Cain and Yuval-Davies, 1990). As will be seen in the following chapter community development strategies have sought to empower disadvantaged communities as local (and cheap) problem-solvers and as 'partners' in regeneration programmes (Chanan and West, 1999; Henderson, 2000). The latest manifestation of this approach is the concept of 'Neighbourhood Management' espoused by New Labour's National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal (Taylor, 2000; SEU, 2000). 'Community', often in the guise of services and 'representatives' mediated by voluntary sector agencies, has been variously co-opted to deliver anti-poverty initiatives (Alcock et al, 1995), to support local economic development through intermediary labour markets and community enterprises (Twelvetrees (ed.), 1998) and to act as unpaid consultants in local authority and regional planning exercises (Chanan et al, 2000; Bridges et al, 2001).

In this respect, community, through civil society organisations, supplies the people's 'checks and balances' in relation to state power and the forces of market and profit. Community groups and voluntary associations provide a means for different interests and values to be articulated. As such they constitute a layer of collective organising which influences policy-making, as well as providing important services. In associational models of democracy (Atkinson, 1994; Hirst, 1997b), community becomes an arena for shared problem-solving through co-operative action or collective challenges to the status quo. As Crouch and Marquand (1995) observed, this requires an "elusive, but essential synthesis between solidarity and subsidiarity." Laclau and Mouffe's (1985: Mouffe, 1992) model of radical democracy is similarly founded on the idea of a pluralist political community of free citizens, juggling the tensions between particularist identities and universal rights. Much of this takes place through official mechanisms operating at the interface between participatory and representative forms of democracy. However, there is another, more clandestine dimension of decision-making flowing through the informal and labyrinthine networks of everyday life (Eulau and Prewitt, 1973; Laguerre, 1994). It is this more subversive and submerged aspect of community which has been the focus for my research (cf. Quartermass, 1993:49)

COMMUNITY AS SOCIAL CONTROL

Stable communities are frequently seen as a springboard for social progress, particularly when faced with complex and intractable problems (Taylor, 1997). Community has also been construed as the direct opposite: a repressive mechanism for controlling deviance and stifling enterprise, innovation and legitimate struggles in the name of social order and harmony (e.g. Miller and Ahmad, 1998; Leadbeater, 1999). Echoes of this can be heard in the links between communitarian thinking and government policies on social inclusion (Levitas, 1998). Exhortations around 'community' attempt to preserve social cohesion, especially during periods of upheaval or external threat, to the extent that community involvement is regarded as a palliative (if not a cure) for 'social exclusion' (SEU, 2000).

Community can be conceptualised as an integrating (or aggregating) mechanism (Hadley, 1987), imposing and engineering a "local moral world" (Oyserman and Packer, 1996) complete with shared values and sanctions. Heidegger's (1927) concept of 'selfhood' emphasises the temporal nature of 'being' and was exploited by the Nazis in the 1930s to construct the idea of a pan-German 'Volk' drawing on Nordic myths and legends to create notions of Aryan superiority. This can also be seen operating at a

global level, through the forces of an 'international community' invoked to maintain a Westernised version of 'world order' through sanctions, warfare and humanitarian aid, as we have recently seen in Iraq and Kosovo (Seabrook, 1999). In this sense, appeals to 'community' are used to suppress or punish deviance by providing not only a normative reference group but also feelings of mutual expectation and obligation (Triandis, 1995). Communitarian philosophers such as Berry (1984) and Etzioni (1988; 1993) resort to this ethical aspect of community to underpin their policies, especially in relation to crime reduction and family responsibilities. Community creates the possibility for strong local governance or 'voluntary authority', based on trust, familiarity and real or imagined shared interests (Streek and Schmitter, 1991; Tam, 1995; Jessop, 1997:102).

Community is expected to operate through local transparency and peer pressure rather than through the ægis of the state. Informal networks and processes (such as gossip, derision, ostracisation, even vigilantism) comment on or challenge deviant behaviour, attempting to assert common notions of respectability (Tebbutt, 1995). These forces of 'persuasion' may range from gentle admonishment or teasing through to the severity of 'tar and feathering', lynchings or anti-pædophile 'witch hunts'. Of course, fear of such punishment was usually sufficient to ensure that the majority conformed or at least found other, perhaps clandestine, arenas for their 'unacceptable' activities.

COMMUNITY AS THE INTEGRATION OF DIFFERENCE

Another way to see 'community' is as a mechanism for integration, rather than assimilation. It could provide an arena in which differences are tolerated, even celebrated, rather than feared or reviled. The idealism of communitarian models tend to emphasise unity as a important feature of community (Avineri and de-Shalit, 1992; Atkinson, 1994), but others are more critical of what Bhabha calls the "progressive metaphor of modern social cohesion – the many as one" (1990:294). Jenkins (1995) suggests that 'community' transcends a simple affirmation of similarity and mutuality in that it provides the arena in which diversity can flourish and individual relationships form (Ch.11). The concept of community is able to encompass and express both difference and unity (Murdoch and Day, 1995). The importance of diversity is well-understood in southern and eastern cultures, and is rapidly being acknowledged here. Mulgan (1997) cites Kao's law that "the power of creativity rises exponentially with the diversity and divergence of those connected into a network". There is an Akan proverb that 'in a single polis there is no wisdom' (Appiah, 1999) and as Gandhi insisted

"civilisation is the celebration of differences". Existing communities contain tensions and ambivalence, even where there is an appearance of unity (Brent, 1997). Burns et al remind us that community is also a "site of conflict, division and domination" (1994:243). In this respect the experience of 'community' weaves across different experiences and identities, creating a powerful alternative to essentialist models of oppression and liberation (Brah, 1992). It needs also to acknowledge the pluralist and intersecting layers of identity which characterise people's real lives, their histories, current pre-occupations, 'eccentric enthusiasms' (Bishop and Hoggett, 1986) and future aspirations (Modood, 1992). In constructing these multi-faceted communities shared rituals and conventions supply a *narrative framework* (Hinchman and Hinchman, 1997) and vehicles for social interaction. The assertion of ethnicity and 'roots' traditions are especially important for re-configuring communities that have been dislocated by migration and diaspora (Hall, 1990). The ability of a community to cope with crisis appears to be related to the quality of social interaction and mutuality amongst those affected directly and indirectly (Barton, 1969; Homer, 1995). There may also be cultural differences in communal coping strategies reflected in a "complex intertwining of situational, contextual, intra-personal and inter-personal factors" (Lyons et al, 1998:598). Shared adversity or a traumatic event can also serve to crystallise the ties of 'community' out of loose social connections (Marris, 1996), as was witnessed after the Aberfan disaster (Miller, 1974) or during the 1984-5 miners' strike (Waddington et al, 1991). This was in marked contrast to situations where local networks were obliterated as in the Buffalo Creek mudslide (Erikson, 1976; 1979).

COMMUNITY AS SOCIAL ENGINEERING

Utopian notions of community have ventured down many avenues. Throughout ancient and modern history there have been attempts to create exclusive and utopian communities (Kanter, 1972). These elective settlements have endeavoured to establish collective living situations which eschew private property and the niceties of 'family' units. The Israeli kibbutzim were an early example of state policy shaping residential and work patterns of the first Zionist settlers. For some these were liberating, whilst others found them oppressive. Communes and eco-villages result from more personal choices whereby a self-selecting group of people decide to pool resources to set up a village-like settlements based on agreed principles (rules even) for sharing space, work, resources and ethics (N.Taylor, 2000). The Findhorn Community in Scotland and New Hall commune in Suffolk are residual examples of a myriad of well-intentioned experiments in alternative living arrangements which draw on the original, and often

misunderstood ideas of Epicurus (de Botton, 2000). But as Brenner and Haaken comment "reconciling community solidarity and individual freedoms invariably generates conflict. Communities do make claims on people and constrain their range of freedom, just as they provide forms of support" (2000:340). The recent experience of the television 'castaways' on Taransay demonstrates that even carefully constructed and committed communities are not without tensions and escapees.

The built environments advocated in modern urban policies reflect the efforts of planners to discover and create the conditions which support 'good' community life. For example, early town planners such as Louis de Soisson and Ebenezer Howard (1905), pioneers of the garden city movement, prized open public spaces in their designs. Nye Bevan, Labour's post-war Housing Minister, advocated 'a patchwork quilt' approach to building the new estates, arguing that 'mixed tenure' would promote social integration and leveling tendencies across class divisions. In more recent decades this has been translated into the value of multi-ethnic diversity within urban neighbourhoods and the need for a variety of housing provision (Forrest and Kearns, 1999)

COMMUNITY AS INTER-CONNECTIONS

This review of the literature on 'community' confirms my view that it is relationships and informal but regular interaction that comprise the core of this problematic concept. Broadly speaking, the model of community developed in the thesis emphasises the significance of inter-personal networks as the foundation of community life, a view put forward by Simpson in 1965 and reiterated more recently by Milofsky (1988c) and Flanagan (1995). Chapters Four and Five explore the characteristics and functions of networks as structures for shared communication and collective organising, whilst the next chapter considers how different notions of 'community' are reflected in the field of community development.

CHAPTER THREE

Community development – policy and practice

"Community development is the process in which the efforts of the people themselves are united with those of government authorities to improve the economic, social and cultural conditions of their communities. It involves two processes: the participation of the people themselves in efforts to improve their living conditions with as much reliance as possible on their own initiatives; and the provision of technical and other services in ways which encourage initiative, self-help and mutual help, and make these more effective." United Nations(1963)

The history of community development in Britain reflects a multitude of policy initiatives and experiments of successive governments, each seeking to mend the disintegrating tapestry of late twentieth century society. As Jacobs (1994:24) noted "community work is not a fixed practice with a static theory, but rather an activity that has to continually re-define and re-construct itself to critically reflect our changing understanding of people's experience". Since the mid-sixties community development practitioners have been employed in various guises, often operating at the margins of local authority departments or in locally-managed community settings (Francis et al, 1984; Barr, 1991). Community work posts are usually located at the interface between the state and the lives of 'ordinary people', particularly those experiencing problems, such as adverse housing conditions, low incomes, discrimination, poor health, high unemployment and above average crime rates. Community development can be characterised as the process of weaving together a pattern of diverse aspirations, resources and motivations into the strong fabric of community life (Thomas, 1995). Inter-agency liaison and partnership have traditionally been advocated as an effective strategy for addressing such problems. In some quarters community development became linked to social planning as a means of delivering better co-ordinated and targeted welfare services (Perlman and Gurin, 1972), an approach now referred to as 'programme bending' (Twelvetrees, unpublished).

In an attempt to combat conditions of multiple deprivation, community development posts were established to ensure improved and more accessible local services and to facilitate self-help initiatives. The aims of such programmes were to promote social cohesion through more tolerant 'community relations' and to improve co-operation between different agencies working in the same 'patch' (Barclay, 1982). Broadly speaking, community workers were (and still are) employed as 'boundary-spanners' (Thompson, 1967), occupying liminal positions within organisations. They often act as interpreters and mediators between

different bodies operating within a given 'community', working to enhance the quality of engagement between community interests and public authorities through improved communication, negotiation and understanding. Community workers tried to ensure that social development and self-improvement occurred through enabling people to participate in collective activities and public decision-making. Their rôle was to build bridges between agencies and facilitate effective communication. This involves work with individuals, groups and organisations.

ORIGINS AND MODELS OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT IN THE UK

Community work is a relatively new profession, but draws on three traditions each of which are at least a century old. The first of these is that of informal self-help and solidarity, the reciprocal support and sharing which characterise small-scale forms of social organisation. The second strand represents a more organised form of mutual aid, whereby formal associations were established with a subscription to provide assistance and shared resources across a defined membership. Collective organisations such as the early craft guilds, friendly societies and trade unions are examples of these. The third strand differs from the others in that it is based rather more on philanthropy and voluntary service. It derives from a desire to intervene on behalf of others deemed 'less fortunate'. The 19th century charitable trusts and Settlement movement are representative of this approach, which often combined a campaigning dimension as well as explicit remedial education, 'character building' and a somewhat condescending approach to the relief of hardship (Barnett, 1888 and 1904; Clarke, 1963; Leat, 1975)

Community work as a professional intervention has come to be regarded as an instrument of state policy, designed to address perceived problems of what we now call 'social exclusion': poverty, disaffection and an apparent breakdown in public order (Miller and Ahmad, 1997). These initiatives have meant that community development has often appeared under different auspices (Henderson, 2000) but underpinned by a belief that 'community participation' or 'citizen involvement' are necessary and desirable pre-requisites for social progress and individual well-being (Leaper, 1968; Taylor, 2000b). However, behind this broad agreement lie three different models of community development, each related to contrasting political analyses of society and the state. The first approach assumes that there is a broad *consensus* about how these issues can be tackled and how society should be organised. Within this model, state sponsored community development projects have been devised to:

- foster local responsibility for and involvement in self-help activities,
- facilitate the delivery of welfare services particularly to marginalised sections of the population, and
- encourage community representation in 'democratic' processes of consultation and project-management.

Community workers have been deployed to foster community spirit (for example through cultural activities) and to work with statutory agencies to ensure that the services provided match local needs. The goal for this model of community development is social harmony and appropriately delivered welfare. Communitarian ideas around family responsibility and mutuality underpin this approach which is characteristic of central government thinking, especially in relation to volunteering, parenting and community involvement in partnerships with the private and public sectors. The political philosophy of communitarianism draws on earlier ideas of civic republicanism, Rousseau's (1946) social contract and 'natural' communion. It emphasises the role of civil society as the embodiment of 'active citizenship', collective self-help and voluntary forms of association. Although the 'moral authoritarian' version propounded by Etzioni (1993; 1997) and New Labour has tended to dominate current thinking (e.g. Tam, 1995), there exists a more radical model of communitarianism based on citizen solidarity and co-operatism (Jordan, 1992; Offe, 1992). Whilst these diverge in their analysis of the relationship between individuals and the state, they share a rather normative view of 'community regeneration', peer restraint of 'deviance' and the need for better governance. Although communitarian approaches have found their advocates within community development (e.g. Atkinson, 1994), there have also been criticisms of its reliance on ethics and consequent failure to effectively understand and counter structural inequalities and power differentials (Wilson, 1995; Henderson and Salmon, 1998).

An alternative approach, sometimes known as the *liberal or pluralist* model, contains a stronger sense that society consists of different interest groups and that these are competing to influence state decision-making and ensure that they receive a fair share of available resources. It aims for coherent public decision-making and social equity, but acknowledges that some sections of the population are disadvantaged in this struggle to be heard. The task of the community worker is to help these groups to organise themselves, to find a collective 'voice' and to put pressure on the policy-makers to pay more attention to *their* needs. This happens at local, regional and national levels, sometimes through specific campaigns but more often through sustained lobbying of democratic representatives such

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as Members of Parliament and local councillors. Voluntary organisations, being independent of the state, are important vehicles for this advocacy work, and they have also been instrumental in pioneering alternative forms of welfare or highlighting areas of unmet need. The pluralist model of community work is often to be found within local authorities in the job descriptions of neighbourhood workers or equalities officers, developing and supporting local or identity-based organisations to participate in advisory forums and consultation exercises. It is also mirrored in the work of more established voluntary organisations, underpinning their campaigning and advocacy rôle, especially when acting on behalf of particularly disadvantaged sections of the population.

A more *radical* version of community development explicitly identifies *conflicts of interest* within society and aligns itself with the poor and other oppressed groups (e.g. Baldock, 1977; Mayo, 1979; Ledwith, 1997). It argues that the causes of poverty and disadvantage are to be found in the economic system and reflect historical patterns of discrimination embedded in social and political institutions. It focuses on inequalities between different sections of society, addressing issues around exploitation, disadvantage and prejudice. Radical community work emphasises people's civil rights and strives for social justice, seeking to develop political consciousness and powerful forms of collective organising to change policies in favour of disadvantaged groups. Attempts to achieve greater equality and a re-distribution of power also occur at more local levels, for example within communities and organisations through the development of 'equal opportunities strategies' and raising people's awareness of how discrimination operates within their own lives. Community workers using this approach see themselves as advocates and organisers, helping people (individually and collectively) to challenge the roots of their disadvantage and to demand better or fairer treatment. Many current definitions of community work assert this model, but it is proving more difficult to implement in practice, usually because workers find themselves in situations where their best intentions are constrained by the expectations of external funders and employers.

FIRST STEPS

Although it could be argued that some of the early workers in the Settlement movement were operating as *de facto* community workers, the first designated posts did not appear until the middle decades of the last century. During major re-housing programmes community officers were appointed in some areas such as the new towns and peripheral London estates. They had a specific brief to work with newly re-located residents to help them set up autonomous groups and projects which would induce 'community spirit' and

revive collective strategies for helping people to help themselves (Heraud, 1975). A vestigial version of this approach still operates in Swindon. These workers were frequently employed by social services or housing departments and saw themselves as an 'agent' of the welfare state, acting on behalf of the relevant authority rather than the local residents. They played an important rôle in managing the links within and between groups and external bodies to improve social welfare (Goetschius, 1969:93). Through the establishment of autonomous voluntary groups, the 'community' was seen as protecting individuals from the impersonal institutions of the modern state and providing opportunities for democratic participation. A similar model of community development had also been used abroad to re-establish or create local infrastructure and smooth the transition of British colonies to independence (Mayo, 1975b). Much of the early community development work in this country drew its theory and inspiration from this experience.

During the 1950s and 1960s community work described itself as the preventative branch of social work, emphasising both individual development and collective welfare. Early writers and trainers advocated non-directive methods of intervention (Batten, 1957; 1962; Biddle and Biddle, 1965; Batten and Batten, 1967) and gradually a new profession emerged which combined two related approaches. The first saw the community as a resource, a partner, in the provision of welfare services. Problems which arose through increased fragmentation and alienation were addressed by involving local residents in developing collective solutions. Community associations and other locally-based voluntary organisations were seen as potential managers of projects providing social care for the elderly, health education, benefits advice and childcare (Reinold, 1974; Clarke, 1990). The second aim was similar, but placed more emphasis on personal growth, suggesting that community involvement per se was

- therapeutic (staving off mental health problems),
- morally worthy (encouraging mutuality and social responsibility) and
- educational (promoting the acquisition of skills and new understandings).

Adult education classes and cultural activities were seen as 'improving' in themselves, whilst recreational societies such as youth clubs and sports associations were encouraged as a means of diverting people from a life of crime, idleness and social isolation. This approach to urban policy has been maligned by some Marxist critics as merely *managing social problems* by dissipating legitimate discontent with the capitalist mode of production (and reproduction), as well as suppressing effective opposition to state policies (e.g. Corrigan, 1975; Miller and Ahmad, 1997). Grayson suggests (1997) that the early community

associations were set up as a counter to militant tenants' organisations in order to contain potential conflict and to integrate people from very different social backgrounds settling into their new lives on rather bleak housing estates.

ENHANCING DEMOCRACY AND CITIZENSHIP

Participative democracy has been a recurring theme and aspiration for community development, and contains both radical and conservative dimensions (Cary, 1970). Citizen action models such as Alinsky's community organising approach, have sought to challenge existing power structures through mobilising residents around local issues that bring them into conflict with economic interests or state institutions (Alinsky, 1969, 1972). A Marxist analysis of the impact of modern capitalism on working class neighbourhoods became highly influential in Britain in the 1970s, mainly through the fieldwork and research reports of the Community Development Projects (CDP, 1974; 1977; Mayo, 1975b; Specht, 1976) and a series of essay collections published by the Association of Community Workers. For those on this radical wing, community work was seen as contributing to the fight for socialism, through local, but militant community action (Baine, 1974; Fleetwood and Lambert, 1982). Many community workers writing at that time regarded their activity as an extension of the class struggle, with a particular focus on the level and distribution of the 'social wage', as reflected in the quantity and quality of state welfare provision (e.g. O'Malley, 1977; Corrigan and Leonard, 1978). There were increasing demands for the democratisation of the 'local state' (Lees and Mayo, 1984) and a belated recognition that the rôle of the community worker as an agent of change 'in and against the state' held tensions and contradictory accountabilities (London Edinburgh Weekend Return Group, 1979). There was an explicit rejection of the idea that the community worker was a neutral agent (Filkin and Naish, 1982), and a call to pursue confrontational (Cowley, 1977; Loney, 1983) and subversive tactics (Cockburn, 1977). Modern broad-based organising strategies carry forward this approach and are highly critical of the rôle played by community development professionals (Furbey et al, 1997).

The more radical community workers argued for the development of alliances with the local labour movement in order to campaign effectively for specific goals (Corkey and Craig, 1978), whilst others saw community politics primarily as a means for raising 'class' (and subsequently gender) consciousness outside the workplace. Community organising was about finding a balance between guidance and leadership (Mayo, 1979) to lay the foundations for a 'revolution of everyday life' (Tasker, 1975) which would equip people with the skills, knowledge, confidence and political 'nous' for challenging the root causes of

poverty and discrimination through their participation in democratic processes (Kay, 1974). More recent versions of this approach have asserted the transformative nature of democratic participation as a form of radical empowerment (Ledwith, 1997, Craig, 1998) and the means by which many different forms of oppression and inequality can be overcome (Dominelli, 1990; Burns (Diane), 2000). Shaw and Martin (2000) regard actions by people in their communities as the "essence of democracy" and consider community workers as "key agents in re-making the vital connections between community work, citizenship and democracy" (p.412). It will be interesting to see how local authorities engage with residents in the development of 'community strategies' and whether they recognise the need for a foundation of community participation and development (Chanan et al, 2000).

The foregoing approaches have in common an analysis of society as riven with opposing interests, and a belief that social justice can only be achieved through struggle and conflict, with one 'side' prevailing over the other. An alternative model co-existed during this period and endured the ravages of Thatcherism to emerge as the dominant approach within state-sponsored community development. This assumes a pluralist model of society in which competing interests vie with one another to persuade decision-makers to support their cause. The liberal approach, as it has been termed (Twelvetrees, 1982), views the state as a rational and neutral overseer of democratic processes. The 1970s witnessed a strong commitment from national government to public participation, ushered in by various pieces of legislation enacted at the tailend of the previous decade. Several official reports (e.g. Plowden, 1967; Skeffington, 1969; Seebohm, 1968; Redcliffe-Maud, 1969) published around that time urged greater citizen involvement in the planning and delivery of public services. Many community workers and activists saw this as an opportunity for marginalised local people to find a voice, to articulate their concerns and to have some influence over decisions which affected their lives (e.g. Barr, 1977; Symons, 1981). Participatory democracy was variously seen as complementary to the representative system of government (Twelvetrees, 1985) or a challenge to it (Hain, 1976).

Within the new profession there was agreement that community work had a fundamental rôle to play in promoting participation (ACW, 1978). For those with a radical analysis, removal of the barriers to participation for many in the most deprived communities of Britain constituted a core, but long-term goal of community development. There was a broad consensus that community work was concerned with social change and active citizenship, and that it had a primarily local dimension (Younghusband, 1968; Thomas, 1976; ACW, 1982). Influential community work 'texts' published around this time (Twelvetrees, 1982; Henderson and Thomas, 1980; 1987) focused on the neighbourhood as the most

appropriate level for community work interventions. The Barclay Report similarly advocated the 'patch' approach to community social work, stressing the need to integrate services across a fairly limited geographical area and arguing that a key rôle for the community social worker was to be an "upholder of networks" (1982:209). This small-scale approach was reinforced in the Community Social Worker's Handbook which recommended an area of between 4000-5000 households in order that the worker could effectively support community networks and liaise with local voluntary organisations (Hadley, 1987:67). During this period community work was seen as localised and generic, having an over-arching purpose of creating integrated and 'harmonious' communities, based on a kind of "parochial solidarity" (Baldock, 1982) and notional egalitarianism established through reciprocal trust and local networks (e.g. Heywood, 1983). The rôle of the community worker was twofold: to enhance a community's internal democracy by assisting local people in developing and managing their own organisations, and to enable the (preferably consensual) views of the community to be expressed to relevant decision-making bodies through representative leadership or participation in public consultation exercises.

RECOGNISING AND RESPECTING DIFFERENCES

As Popple (1995) has observed, this 'golden age' in the late 1970s and early 80s, with its relatively stable agreement regarding the democratic aims and objectives of community work was soon to be shaken by the appearance of identity politics and separatist strategies for achieving social change. Building on the experiences of the women's and Black movements of earlier decades (Ohri and Manning (eds), 1982; Mayo (ed), 1977), community work in the 1980s began to engage with the debate around different dimensions of oppression (albeit with resistance from some quarters). Marxist and patriarchal models of society were extended and challenged to consider the experiences and demands of gay and lesbians, Disabled people, Black people and the rights of older and younger people. Communities based on political identity or ethnic origin organised themselves separately to lobby for their interests on the basis of rights and equality, setting up their own community projects and representative organisations. Within community development and the more radical parts of the voluntary sector, these acquired legitimacy as strategies of both "resistance and emancipation" and were able to develop services and campaigns asserting *specific* (somewhat essentialist and sometimes competing) perspectives on a range of issues (Shukra, 1995). In more progressive local authority areas (mainly the GLC and metropolitan boroughs), they received recognition through funding, and status in consultative processes such as advisory forums or liaison committees. By constructing their own collective identity, 'communities of interest' achieved hitherto unknown levels of political

influence. This was earned through contributing particular expertise and experience to decision-making processes whilst simultaneously attempting to shift the balance of power and resources within society.

Over the years there have been bitter debates over tactics as to how 'equal opportunities' might be achieved (e.g. Cain and Yuval-Davies, 1990), but a majority view gradually emerged within mainstream community work that anti-oppressive strategies and positive action measures should be incorporated into notions of 'good practice'. By the 1990s equality had secured its position as a core value of community development. Funding for community-based projects became increasingly linked with equal opportunities policies and practice and many community workers moved into local authority equalities unit (Twelvetrees, 2001). Whilst this somewhat 'top-down' approach was contested in some quarters as being heavy-handed, 'politically correct' and ineffective, it did ensure that organisations were forced to consider issues around discrimination and access. Combined with ideas around participation and empowerment, equality perspectives became a powerful driving force within community development and related professions.

During the late 1980s and '90s community development moved from long-term state funding of generic posts, such as neighbourhood development workers or community centre wardens, to relatively short-term project-based activities. Earlier community workers had been able to respond to local issues as they became evident (or articulated) and help residents to organise campaigns around (for example) the closure of a nursery, sources of pollution, or unwelcome planning decisions. Much of the community work literature published in the 1970s and early 1980s is made up of case studies of local 'struggles' and alliances (e.g. Craig, 1974; Evens, 1976; Bryant, 1979; Smith and Jones, 1981; Bennett et al, 1982). However, these gradually disappeared in an era of local authority budget cuts when community and voluntary organisations were particularly hard hit.

Under the Conservative governments between 1979 and 1997 community work shifted its focus towards volunteering, self-help and service provision. Central government funding was made available for temporary posts designed to improve people's employability or to provide for specific purposes such as under-fives schemes or 'care in the community'. In the 1990s community workers were concentrated in projects designed to address specific issues (for example, homelessness, drugs, mental health support or whatever) with a clear set of targets to be met within a given timeframe. There was an inevitable emphasis on outputs (measurable performance criteria) rather than what Thomas (1995) terms system maintenance of social processes and organisational development. I experienced this as a

generic neighbourhood-based worker finding it increasingly difficult to do what I considered to be 'proper' community development, that is supporting local people in their efforts to set up autonomous groups and run services which met their needs.

Business plans were expected as part of funding bids, setting out targets which were closely monitored and checked by external scrutineers. Multi-purpose, flexible community work in the voluntary sector was replaced by issue-based projects, carrying out government strategies whose remit was tightly constrained by contracts or service agreements containing pre-determined performance criteria and mechanistic auditing procedures (Gutch, 1992; Power, 1994). At the same time local authority community work became increasingly concerned with monitoring grants, consultation exercises, service delivery and assisting with partnership arrangements and bidding procedures for regeneration funding (AMA, 1993). Consequently, work programmes were delivered and evaluated around much more rigid objectives, requiring a greater degree of formal record keeping and accounting. The space for experimentation, for research and development of innovative ideas was gradually eliminated or marginalised. Opportunities for more nebulous activities which did not lead to predictable (and measurable) outputs were severely restricted or abandoned altogether.

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT AND CAPACITY BUILDING

Since the advent of New Labour into government, there has been a revival of interest in community involvement strategies, coupled with an explicit commitment to ethnic diversity and social inclusion. Popple and Redmond (2000) recognise that this has created new possibilities for community development but also warn that this may be used merely "to placate disaffected communities" rather than as a strategy for social transformation. Community development as recently practised in Britain attempts both to accommodate and to resolve the tensions inherent in a culturally diverse and unequal society. Its most common applications have become concerned with combating social deprivation through community-involving partnerships and social planning approaches to 'mainstream' welfare provision and democratic decision-making (AMA, 1993; Blackburn, 1995). The past decade has witnessed increasing demands for community participation in consultation forums and multi-agency coalitions accompanied by a steady decline in the number of community workers who might facilitate this (Downer, 2000). Community workers have become adept at working across many organisational cultures and social environments. It has not been generally appreciated by the profession (or funders) that a key rôle for community workers is to provide and maintain communication channels linking different sectors, agencies and

population groups. The focus on working with voluntary groups and marginalised communities acknowledges that these groups probably need additional support in order to operate within organisational environments that are often dominated by powerful private and statutory interests. A major issue for community development is the continuing confusion over terms and the lack of cohesion within the field. Government policy prefers to use 'capacity-building' or 'community involvement' and it is unfortunate that, despite intensive lobbying and an explicit analysis of past failings in area-based regeneration strategies, the government's latest 'Action Plan' on neighbourhood renewal refuses to acknowledge the potential contribution of professional community development expertise, preferring to harness local energies and initiative through 'social entrepreneurs' (SEU, 2001).

Regeneration programmes aimed at tackling social exclusion have generally been concerned with developing the abilities of community 'leaders' to represent their constituency, in negotiations with statutory and private sector partners to draw up and manage 'community strategies' for local regeneration programmes (De Groot, 1992; Colenutt and Cutting, 1994; Mayo, 1997b; Carley et al, 2000). This has not always successfully included marginalised groups nor delivered genuine community participation (Brownhill and Darke, 1998; Duncan and Thomas, 2000; Anastacio et al, 2000). Community members will be appointed to 'Local Strategic Partnerships' and in a new initiative 'community empowerment' funding will be available to develop infrastructures to support these representatives and to hold them accountable. It remains to be seen whether this will achieve genuine community-led regeneration but it is certainly a step in the right direction and an improvement on previous models of capacity building. These tended to involve training in the skills, knowledge and language that local people would need to advocate on behalf of their community on the management boards of regeneration schemes. This rather individualised approach has been criticised from within the community development field and by local people themselves on the grounds that it cannot guarantee the kind of democratic and sustainable participation which policy-makers envisaged when they drew up their criteria for 'community involvement'. It also assumes a rather homogeneous model of community, which neglects minority or dissenting interests, and encourages 'clientilism' (Stewart, 1998b; Cebulla, 2000).

The existence of autonomous forums and vibrant networks within regeneration areas enhances communication, debate and representation. However, networks in themselves do not guarantee improved decision-making or better access to information. Their informal nature and lack of mechanisms for resolving conflict or ensuring a balanced representation

means that they are frequently elitist, unaccountable and homogenous in membership. If left to their own devices, recruitment and communication within networks is biased towards those already 'in the know' or whose 'face fits', whilst those who might bring a different perspective or competing interests are informally, but systematically excluded (Mayo, 1997b). It is here that community development, with its core values of equality, solidarity and participation (SCCD, 2001) can play a rôle in creating and maintaining accessible and diverse networks. Boundary-spanning activities have long formed a substantial part of the community work rôle, and a variety of skills and strategies have been developed to tackle barriers and manage differences.

NETWORKING AS AN OCCUPATIONAL COMPETENCE

Almost regardless of ideological context, community development has been concerned with developing and negotiating relationships. The early writings on the skills and methods of community work (e.g. Klein, 1973; ACW, 1975; Leissner, 1975; Smith and Pearce, 1977) recognised the importance of contact-making, communicating, convening and co-ordinating tasks, although the term networking appeared only in the early 1980s (e.g. Symons, 1981). Within patch-based or community social work, there was a growing interest in networking across agencies and rôle boundaries, a trend reinforced in the 1990s by care in the community and user involvement strategies (Beresford, 1993). Trevillion, an early proponent of networking for social care professions, argues that it promotes a 'culture' of community through

> "activities which enable separate individuals, groups or organisations to join with one another in social networks which enhance communication and/or active co-operation and create new opportunities for choice and empowerment for at least some, if not all, of those taking part" (1992:4).

This approach (and accompanying values) would already have been familiar to many community workers who are expected to be in touch with a sometimes bewildering range of individuals and organisations. Their integrative rôle in facilitating communication and co-operation within communities is alluded to in much of the early community work literature, in the guise of, for example, community newsletters, liaison meetings, tenants' federations and networks, festivals, resource centres, social gatherings and forums which were often serviced, managed (or entirely run) by community workers, known as 'street level bureaucrats' (cf. Taylor, 1980).

These were, and remain, prototypical vehicles for networking, enabling people to meet, to share ideas and information, and generally enter into dialogue with others. One of the earliest references to 'networking' as such is to be found in the constitutional report on setting up the European Anti-Poverty Network (Harvey and Kierney, 1991). It acknowledges that for networking to be an effective mode of organising, it needs a principled approach so as to avoid excluding those on the periphery (geographically and politically) or who find it difficult to participate for other reasons.

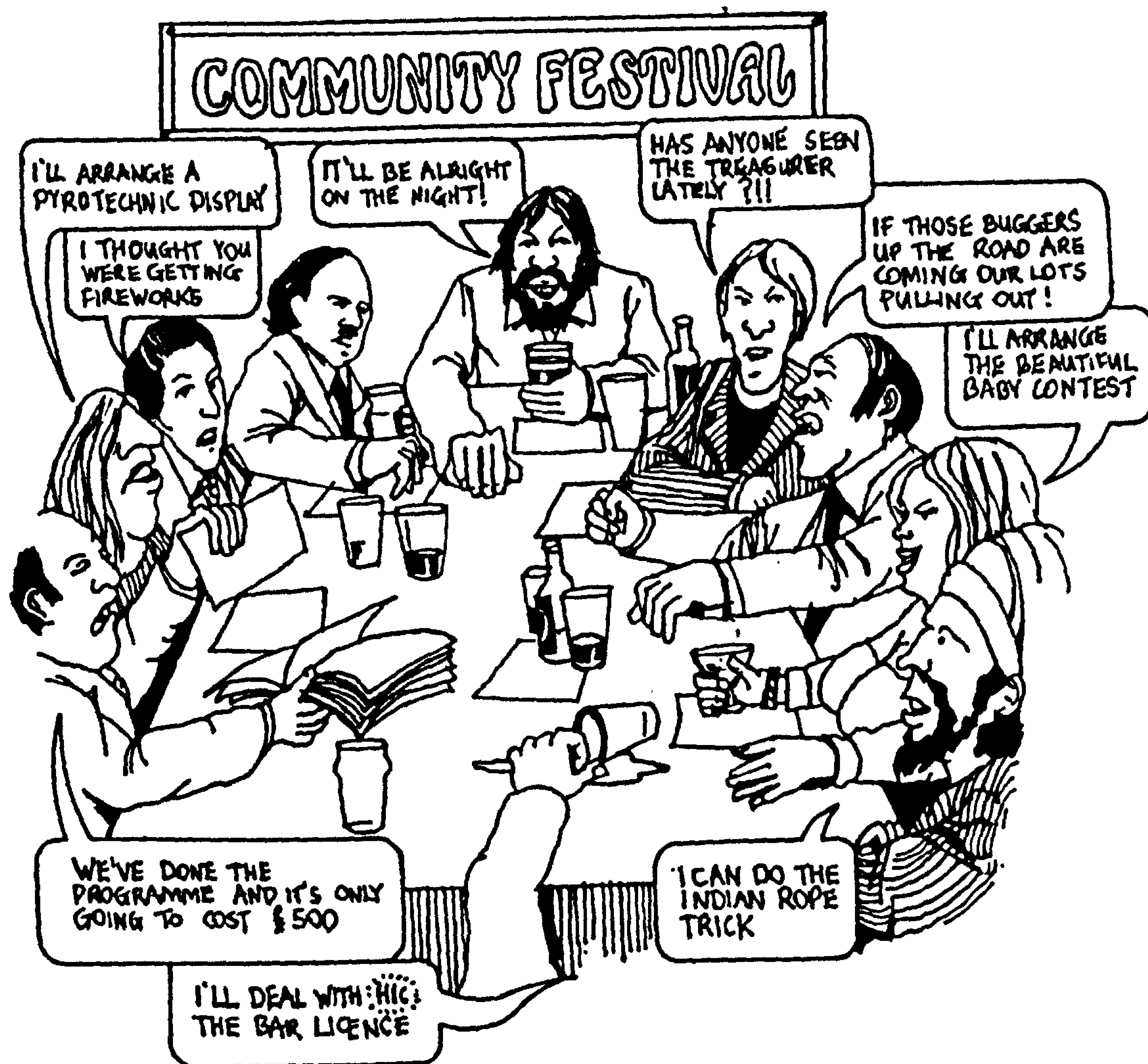

Figure 4. An early example of the community worker using local networks (from Social Work Today, 5 (22), 1975)

What has not been so generally recognised is the more informal and opaque business of assisting people to make their own connections and sustain relationships sometimes in the face of considerable opposition or practical obstacles. Repairing and strengthening the 'social fabric' is a "slow and painstaking process" (Bassinet-Bourget, 1991) and this form of 'networking' is more complex, requiring a sophisticated analysis of the 'web of affiliations'

which constitute society (Simmel, 1955). It also needs political awareness, emotional sensitivity and advanced inter-personal skills (Hastings, 1993:76). Eraut (1994:153) argues that strategic (i.e. expert) performance involves "an ability to look at a [problem] from several different perspectives." It involves comparison, deliberation, integration and judgement between options, often in consultation with others. Checkoway (1995) defines strategy as "the science and art of orchestrating resources towards goals." It entails anticipation, choice, and flexibility around rôles and styles of working. If networking is to be included as a component of community development practice, we need to be clearer about what skills, methods and personal qualities constitute competent performance in group situations (cf. Barrick et al, 1998). Community workers tend to operate within multi-organisational fields and turbulent environments. They need to be flexible in selecting appropriate aims and tactics (Hosking and Morley, 1991:145) and strategic in creating opportunities to link with others (Trevillion, 1992:101). Networking abilities are needed for individual community workers to survive and be effective in developing and maintaining the personal connections which underpin collective organising and multi-agency coalitions.

The idea that the 'essence' of community is to be found amongst relationships, rather than within the bricks and mortar of 'place' is not new (Popplestone, 1971: 86). Indeed as we saw in Chapter Two, the early studies of 'community' were very much concerned with describing the interactions and connections amongst residents. The debates around community work training in the early 1970s identified a professional rôle in fostering social cohesion through community activities and inter-organisational work. To do this an understanding of local social systems and skills in informal communication and contact making was needed (ACW, 1975).

Thomas (1983) identifies liaison as a key function in building multi-agency organisations such as "alliances, federations, standing conferences and more modest working groups at local level" (p.159). He emphasises the linkages between people within neighbourhoods and the need to "strengthen", "renew" and "nurture" existing networks. (pp.171–173). He argues that this aspect of community development provides opportunities for learning, promotes communal coherence and "systemic solidarity." These are seen as supporting the "development of political significance and political competence" through processes of sharing and dialogue. Both Thomas (1983) and Hadley (1987) suggest that fostering *informal* inter-personal and inter-organisational linkages within communities requires a particular expertise and a strategic approach. Both authors recognise that the development of effective integration and inter-connections may take time and effort. They acknowledged

that this can be stressful, isolating work which is best carried out from a secure team base, ensuring both accountability and support (see also Bell, 1992; Albee and Boyd, 1997).

Relationships are seen as fundamental to the helping rôle of the welfare professional (Perlman, 1979), establishing a rapport and empathy which encourages people to take action to help themselves. As Bob Holman writes in his powerful argument for neighbourhood work

> "empathy is a quality which expresses a genuine concern for others which is often expressed in understanding, politeness, sympathy and humour. Empathy does not mean being weak, walked over or manipulated. It does mean being encouraging rather than off-putting, firm without being nasty, strong without being rejecting" (1997:101-2).

Such attitudes and relationships also underpin organisational functions, such as communication and co-operation, especially in dealing with "some of the uncertainties and blurred boundaries which arise in community work" (Payne, 1982:133). A pamphlet published in 1981 as part of the debate on community work rôles and training described the job as a "general purpose facilitator of local initiative networks" (Poulton, 1981) and Francis et al's (1984) survey of community work as an occupation concluded that the community workers themselves represented a "significant network of skills and commitment." In these early accounts the rôle of the community worker tended to be described as discovering and utilising existing networks. In the 1980s a more proactive approach was adopted which recognised that the formation and transformation of networks was a legitimate (and desirable) focus for professional interventions. Henderson and Thomas (1980; 1987) devote an entire chapter to the skills and strategies of helping people to associate and maintain contact with one another, describing neighbourhood development as

> "about putting people in touch with one another, and of promoting their membership in groups and networks ... In the act of bringing people together, neighbourhood workers are performing an essential rôle" (1987:15)

Over the past decade and certainly in the period covered by this research project, networking has become increasingly recognised as an important aspect of community work and a necessary aspect of building partnerships generally (Powell, 1992; Means et al, 1997; Geddes, 1998). For example, the Council for Community Work Standards England (2000) includes relationship building within its framework and the latest national strategic

framework for community development has a whole section devoted to networking (SCCD, 2001). The functional analysis adopted by the community work occupational field for S/NVQ qualifications identifies building and managing relationships within and across communities as core elements of engaging and supporting disadvantaged communities in collective problem-solving (Mainframe Research, 1996). The level 4 requirements (which are generally acknowledged as equivalent to a professional qualification) specify the ability to *"co-ordinate networking arrangements with and between key people, organisations and communities."* The dynamic nature of these is recognised in the requirement that these be kept under regular review (section A.3.2). The significance of formal and informal networks is highlighted elsewhere in the NVQ framework, especially in relation to collaborative working and communication strategies. Many training courses and workshops now include sessions on networking practice, which aim to make people more aware of how they can use and develop their own networks.

Community workers use themselves as a resource or a tool in this process, but do not usually have a 'stake' in what happens as a result of those connections. They act as guardians or custodians of the networks, rather than using them to promote their own interests. This facilitative rôle involves enabling individuals to gain access (through the development of relationships skills and specific connections) and ensuring that the network itself achieves 'social capability' in becoming tolerant and integrative (Amado, 1993; Burton and Kagan, 1995). Responsibility for network development and management is increasingly recognised as a job in its own right, and three key roles have been identified – pulsetakers, hubs and gatekeepers (Stephenson, 1998). My experience and intuition suggest that community workers perform all of these functions, and probably more, in maintaining and monitoring the effectiveness of networks.

What is it about networks that they figure so prominently within the community and voluntary sectors? This question will be considered in the next two chapters which explore specific features of networks as a form of organisation and their relationship with wider social environments, particularly looking at informal voluntary activity. Until recently there has been surprising little research on the nature and function of community-based organising. What has been absent is data on the community groups, forums and semi-formal networks which provide the seedbed for the growth of more formal voluntary associations and campaigns (but see Milofsky, 1987; Chanan, 1991; Rochester, 1998; Elsdon, 1998, Humm, 1999). Voluntary, not-for-profit organisations have been well studied (e.g. Powell, 1987; Billis, 1993; Billis and Harris, 1996; Taylor et al, 1995) as have communities themselves. Whilst this inquiry focuses mainly on the practice of community

workers, it is based on an understanding that informal links and associations contribute as much to the regeneration of local social fabric as do formally constituted organisations. This is beginning to be recognised by government and despite a rather worrying emphasis on the rôle of individuals (social entrepreneurs, community leaders and champions), the Active Community Unit at least is demonstrating an interest in networks and investing to develop connections between and within communities (Inter-departmental working group on resourcing community capacity building, 2001:1).

CHAPTER FOUR

The use and value of networks

"Knowledge must be used to emancipate humanity, not to gratify curiosity, blind instinct and the desire for respectability" – Ruskin (1899)

The concept of networks as a form of organisation has gained in currency both as a metaphor and as an explanatory tool across a range of theoretical disciplines. The term seems to have been first used by Radcliffe-Brown in 1940 and early sociologists recognised its significance as an aspect of social living (e.g. Warner and Lunt, 1941; Levi-Strauss, 1976). As we have seen in Chapter Two, it offered a useful model for examining the interactions of daily life, mapping out the structures and processes of street gangs (Park et al, 1925), 'community' (Barnes, 1954) and kinship (Bott, 1957).

This chapter reviews the literature on networks as communication systems: their function, benefits, limitations and core features in respect of information processing. It includes studies from a range of disciplines on the function of networks in gathering, synthesising, comparing and storing data within and across organisations. It is particularly concerned with how networks enable information to be integrated from a variety of sources to produce complex, but accurate models of the world through mechanisms of mutual influence and cross-checking amongst network members. The following chapter examines networks as vehicles for collective organisation and empowerment, including the use of networking to influence decisions.

First it is necessary to distinguish networks from other configurations in order to define how I am using the term within this inquiry and explain why my focus is on the practice of networking rather than networks as organising structures or formal partnerships. As Easton (1996) explains, the basis characteristic of networks is their 'connected-ness' and the non-linear nature of the resultant patterns (Capra, 1996). A network comprises a set of nodes or actors (who may be individuals or organisational units) *and the linkages between them* (Wasserman and Faust, 1994). Skelcher et al (1996) emphasise the voluntary nature of network membership, through relationships based around some "shared concern, belief or value" but with indistinct boundaries and low formality. In so far as networks have structure, they can be represented as polycentric and dynamic patterns of interaction, which are neither random, nor explicitly ordered. The ties between 'nodes' are based on inter-personal relationships, as opposed to

formal connections, whilst modes of exchange emphasise persuasion and mutual benefit rather than coercion or contracts.

Networks are not groups, since not all members are either present or directly engaged with every other member. Neither are networks necessarily defined by any sense of common values or a shared project (although these may be implicit in actual membership and functioning). Instead they operate through flexible specialisation (Piore and Sabel, 1984; Sabel, 1989) with units carrying out simultaneous but differentiated activities, which are co-ordinated on the basis of autonomy and mutual respect (Bauer, 1997). There are often no clear affiliation mechanisms (Ahrne, 1994), and membership itself is a fuzzy category (cf. Zadeh, 1965), with shifting boundaries and allegiances. The tenuous nature of network connections makes it awkward to refer to network membership as if this were a defined category. Perhaps 'participant' is more appropriate term, conveying the idea that networks are actively constructed and maintained, even though 'membership' may sometimes be unwilling, unplanned or unwitting (Fineman and Gabriel, 1996: Ch.10).

NETWORK ANALYSIS

Early attempts to investigate the structure and function of networks originated in the gestalt approach to human psychology (Köhler, 1925; Koffka, 1935; Scott, 1991). It was argued that in order to understand individual behaviour, it was necessary to study the 'whole' context, notably 'ego's' interactions with others in the social landscape. Moreno (1934) developed the technique of sociograms to map out the dynamics of small groups, whilst Lewin (1936) introduced the idea of the 'field' in which 'forces' shaped social environments and influenced individual behaviour, perceptions and attitudes. These initially crude mapping exercises drew on contemporary mathematical theory of graphs, sets and topology to build increasingly complicated diagrams and matrices which purported to represent enduring patterns of relationships which it turn revealed significant features of social life.

These methods were applied to 'real life' situations and produced results that had the appearance of scientific rigour, reinforced by an intuitive familiarity. The early studies of workplace (Mayo, 1960) and community relations in 'Yankee City' (Warner and Lunt, 1941) used both observation and interviews. The researchers noted patterns of interaction and also asked people about their personal affiliations. Social network analysis (as it became known) was concerned with describing informal relationships in

order to understand the configuration as a whole, rather than individual actions. Deconstruction of the overall structure used the *ties* linking people and organisations as the key unit of analysis, mapping patterns of communication which could be used to identify, and even possibly predict, decision-making and alliances.

Network analysis generated a number of useful theoretical developments in the social sciences, especially sociology, anthropology and organisation theory. They include ideas around leadership, trust, decision-making, coalitions and creativity, all of which are relevant to processes of community development and social integration. Early network approaches to social behaviour have explored the emergence of social clusters, such as acquaintance (Newcomb, 1961), friendship cliques (Boissevain, 1974; Dunbar and Spoors, 1995), dissemination of rumours (Allport and Postman, 1947), the operation of prejudice (Allport, 1958), shifts in attitude and affinity (Homans, 1950), the management of conflict (Gluckmann, 1952) and the operation of power-blocs within democratic societies (Hunter, 1953; Miller, 1958). The social psychologist Milgram (1967) first used the idea of local connections to explain the global reach of personal networks (six degrees of separation) in what has become known as the 'small-world effect' (de Sola Pool and Kochen, 1978).

Using a variety of analytical and presentation tools (tables, Venn diagrams, combinatorial statistics and matrix transformations), network analysis provided a quantitative means of describing the structure of social configurations and positionality of individuals (Mitchell, 1969; Knoke and Kulinsky, 1982). These were further elaborated (using algebraic formulae) to invent quasi-mathematical measurements of structural and interactional characteristics (Milardo, 1986). The former included a network's *density* and *stability*, internal *redundancy*, its tendency towards *centrality* and clustering, and the *reachability* and *rôles* of individual actors (e.g. Burt, 1995; Borgatti, 1997). Other network researchers focused on the nature of the linkages; looking at the *mode of exchange*, *frequency and duration* of interaction, levels of *intimacy*, degree of *reciprocity* within the transaction and *multiplexity* of ties between individuals (e.g. White, 1963; Kapferer, 1969). These ideas emphasised the texture of the network, arguing that social phenomena could be explained by examining the patterns and processes of network ties (Webber, 1963). They were particularly influential within the urban ethnography as promoted and developed by the Chicago and Manchester Schools of social anthropology referred to in Chapter Two (e.g. Mitchell 1969). Of particular relevance to this inquiry is Granovetter's seminal paper and subsequent contributions on the strength of 'weak' ties. Granovetter (1973, 1974, 1978, 1985)

investigated how people used personal connections to obtain information and share ideas. He identified the importance of acquaintances and casual interactions in 'bridging' the gaps between different social clusters and maintaining social cohesion in modern urban life. This was a useful counterbalance to earlier studies which had focused on networks based on the 'thick ties' of kinship and friendship operating within localised communities (Derlega and Winstead, 1986; Milardo, 1988).

Networks are inherently difficult to investigate and, unsurprisingly, network analysts tended to gather evidence in situations which were relatively stable, bounded and integrated. They largely failed to capture the intricacies and dynamics of personal relationships, especially where these involved tensions and negative attitudes. Balance theorists, such as Heider (1958) and Bales (1950) were interested in how affinity and consensus were maintained, but their studies were confined to local interactions amongst small groups. In recent years network analysis has developed more sophisticated techniques of mathematical modelling (e.g. Wasserman and Faust, 1994) which use computer programmes, such as Krackplot, UCINET or Netform to calculate statistical algorithms and display them in diagrammatic or matrix form (Krackhardt, 1994; Borgatti et al, 1997; and Stephenson, 1998 respectively). It has found practical applications, for example, within organisation development and some welfare professions (Pilisuk and Parks, 1986; Seed, 1990; Baker, 1994). The network approach suggests that health and social care workers should broaden the focus of their intervention to include network therapy (Seed, 1993) and improve inter-agency co-ordination (Beresford and Trevillion, 1995).

Network analysis inevitably suffers from expensive, unsatisfactory and incomplete methods of data collection (Easton, 1996) due to the 'endless ramifications' of the networks themselves (Knoke and Kulinski, 1982:24). A more cogent criticism argues that network analysis provides method, rather than theory (Scott, 1991). It is able to analyse social patterns, but not necessarily explain them (Wasserman and Galaskiewicz, 1994), and in any case is confined to static snapshots of what are clearly dynamic configurations. Although my original research interest was in informal networks and their impact on collective organising, I began to realise the limitations of this approach as a means of examining the *practice* of community workers. This required a focus on the *processes* of network development at the individual and collective levels which could only be investigated by looking at the actions and attributes of network 'participants' - their rôles, experience and identities. Actor network theory draws on post-modernism to conceptualise agency as an outcome of networking

(Latour, 1987; Law, 1994). Its emphasis on mutual influence and interaction offered a possible framework for this inquiry but was rejected as having too much emphasis on the material exchanges between individuals, rather than maintenance of the overall web of relationships.

ORGANISATIONAL STUDIES

Following the pioneering Hawthorne studies which looked at informal connections within the workplace (Mayo, 1960), organisation theory began to acknowledge the organic, personal and dynamic aspects of organisations (Burns and Stalker, 1961), which had hitherto been overshadowed by an emphasis on the functions of bureaucracy (Weber, 1947; Blau, 1963) and technology (Woodward, 1965). Research into the structure and dynamics of organisations has produced useful insights and models which are helpful in understanding the significance of networks in the co-ordination of social life (Thompson et al, 1991). Networks have been variously described as a new, intermediary, or hybrid form of organisation, and there is still no obvious agreement about what networks actually do (Li, 1998). Early organisation theorists believed that economic regulation takes place either through market or through bureaucratic mechanisms (Williamson, 1973; 1975). Ouchi (1980, 1981) was the first to propose a third form of organising which he termed the 'clan' or Z-model. Powell (1990) elaborated on this, describing a network mode of organising based on relationships and reputation.

> "In network modes of resource allocation, transactions occur neither through discrete exchanges nor by administrative fiat, but through networks of individuals engaged in reciprocal, preferential, mutually supportive actions. Networks can be complex: they involve neither the explicit criteria of the market, nor the familiar paternalism of the hierarchy...Networks are particularly apt for circumstances in which there is a need for efficient, reliable information...[They] are especially useful for the exchange of commodities whose value is not easily measured...Reciprocity is central to discussion of network forms of organisations." (Powell, 1990: 271-2)

This was seen as complementary to markets and hierarchies, with the majority of organisation theorists adopting a pluralist approach acknowledging that the three forms probably combine within actual existing organisations (e.g. Bradach and Eccles, 1989; Frances et al, 1991). Some considered networks to be an entirely novel form of

organisation, suited to post-modern conditions (Cooper and Burrell, 1988), whilst others saw networks as encompassing all organisations (Baker, 1992:399), weaving a complex web of informal relationships in and around formal structures and commercial transactions (Amin and Hauser, 1997).

Despite these differences regarding the distinctiveness, origin and status of networks, there exists a broad consensus regarding the core features of the concept (Nohria and Eccles, 1992a). Powell describes them as "an intricate lattice-work of collaborative ventures" (1990:269). They contain no central co-ordinating mechanism or authority. Decision-making is devolved and different functions are disaggregated across specialist clusters, resembling the distributed co-ordinating capacity of the brain (Morgan, 1986). It is interesting to note in this context that models of organisational or machine intelligence indicate that information processing efficiency is increased by relinquishing central control mechanisms (Varela et al, 1991), and allowing self-organisation to occur (Orillard, 1997). As Jantsch recognised "in life, the issue is not control but dynamic inter-connectedness" (1980:196). Power operates predominantly through informal influences based on trust, loyalty, reciprocity and social similarity, sometimes termed 'community' processes (Colebatch and Lamour, 1993). There is a tendency amongst network advocates (including myself) to emphasise their 'flatness' and flexibility, assuming network members enjoy a nominal equality and ignoring issues around elitism and exclusivity. The fact that does not always reflect reality is an important issue for community development which will be addressed in the final section. As in the study of 'community', the less comfortable facets of networks have been occasionally noted but received less systematic research (but see Flam, 1993). Networks also include relationships based on fear, jealousy, animosity and suspicion, all of which exert some influence on patterns of interactions and power (Fineman, 1993).

THE NETWORK ORGANISATION?

In contrast to Baker (1992) I have taken a stance that a network is not in itself an organisation or a natural grouping. I tend to share Bauer's (1997) view that the term 'network organisation' is an oxymoron, rather than simply suffering from "semantic ambiguity." Networking offers a mode of organising which attempts to bring about change by facilitating multi-actor co-operation between autonomous and disparate bodies without the aid of formal structures and rôles. I agree, however with Baker's assertion that networks are "characterised by integration across formal boundaries of

multiple types of socially important relations" (1992:400). They enable resources and information to be shared and exchanged without the necessity (or authority) of explicit contracts. Organisations exercise agency and collective control over jointly owned resources through formal decision-making structures (White, 1992). They function through rôles and regulations which exist independently of who might be occupying or implementing them. In contrast, networks operate through recurrent interactions between specific individuals and are largely "self-designing" (Eccles and Crane, 1988). Organisations need rules to co-ordinate activity. Networks use relationships (Milofsky, 1988a). They are more flexible, less hierarchical and therefore more responsive to unexpected change in their environments. Networks may become organisations, through formalising constitutions, or they might spawn new organisations, creating structure for specific purposes whilst leaving the network function intact (Granovetter, 1992). Networks exist *within* and around organisations linking stakeholders in different departments and external bodies. Networks may well improve an organisation's performance, providing a hidden resilience at times of crisis (Bassinet-Bourget, 1991), but they can also sabotage an organisation's formal structure and purpose, undermining authority and circumventing official procedures.

Networks have become the organisational alternative to hierarchy and competition, encapsulating (it was thought) egalitarian and democratic values often associated with the feminist and anarchist left (e.g. Ward, 1973; Ferguson, 1984). Somewhat paradoxically, and despite acknowledged examples of elitism and secrecy, many working in the voluntary sector or within the radical wing of the community development field embraced the network model wholeheartedly. During the 1980s a plethora of 'network'-like organisations appeared, serviced by 'co-ordinators' rather than managed a director who was, nominally at least, in charge. They championed principles of collective decision-making and mutual accountability rather than bureaucratic control. However, they were not the organisational panacea that many envisaged. Networks have limited ability to reach and carry out consensual decisions, and their lack of structure seems to make it difficult to deal with internal disputes or conflicts of interest, resulting in hidden power elites which are difficult to challenge (Freeman, 1973; Landry et al, 1985). The primary function of networks would appear to be in facilitating boundary-spanning co-operation, co-ordination and communication. They operate most effectively in complex situations, characterised by uncertainty, inter-dependence and opportunities for informal interaction across organisational borders. In this respect networks resemble Mintzberg's 'adhocracy' form of organisation whereby co-ordination

is achieved through mutual interaction and adjustment amongst participating nodes linked through personal relationships rather than formal regulations (1979).

The arrival of computers heralded another application of the network concept as a sophisticated integrating device, capable of carrying out multiple operations in parallel to produce constantly revised responses to changing patterns of input. In particular, it was recognised that networks as effective communication systems need 'requisite variety', meaning that they are capable of receiving and processing the diversity of signals in their operating environment (Connor, 1990; Mulgan, 1991). Cybernetics and discoveries about the neural architecture and transmission mechanisms in the brain added a further dimension to this approach used by psychologists and programmers developing artificial intelligence models of human perception and cognition (Simons, 1967; Boden, 1977).

The advantage of lateral connections within and between organisations managing rapid change has been noted for some time. Emery and Trist (1965; Trist, 1983) suggested that de-centralised structures, founded on norms and values (rather than administrative edicts) were most suited to what they termed 'turbulent environments'. Benson (1975) took this one step further by introducing the idea of the 'inter-organisational network' co-ordinating a political economy of resources, legitimacy and power. A 'new' form of organisation was needed to cope with changing times - one which was more responsive, more connected and more creative. Hedberg et al (1976) proposed the notion of the organisational 'tent or teepee', with a minimal, but highly flexible framework, which could withstand unpredictable buffetings. As a means of successfully managing change, Kanter (1983) recommended 'flatter' management styles, which encouraged wider participation and consultation using 'matrix' structures. Perrow (1979) identified informal patterns of inter-dependency amongst organisations as an important source of stability and coherence within complex fields.

This interplay between environment and organisational structure provided the basis for two parallel schools of thinking about organisations, each of which drew on much earlier work on human ecology (Hawley, 1950) and social conditions (Stinchcombe, 1965) to explore the emergence of new organisational forms (Curto and Wensley, 1997). Contingency theory argued that an organisation adapts in shape and culture to fit the environment in which it operates (Dawson, 1980). Population ecology models, on the other hand, emphasise evolution through natural selection. Only those

organisations which find their 'niche' in the environment survive (Hannan and Freeman, 1977; Aldrich, 1979).

The recognition that the environment of an organisation primarily consisted of other organisations operating as an open system offered a way of synthesising these two approaches (Scott, 1992). Organisations are generally inter-dependent, loosely coupled through a variety of connecting mechanisms, including informal relationships by which is meant "any on-going association between two or more people" (Reis, 1995:470). Increasing the linkages between organisations is a means of imposing a modicum of control on the shared environment, as was recognised in Galaskiewicz et al's study of inter-locking directorates (1979; 1985). The voluntary sector can be similarly characterised as a turbulent environment, populated by interacting organisations which often compete for resources (members, funding, status) and yet co-operate around matters of principle and shared values (Perrow, 1970; McPherson, 1988). Milofsky's (1987) investigation of the Boards of Trustees of non-profit organisations in the USA confirms anecdotal evidence of the overlapping membership of many well-established management committees and staff teams, and is characteristic of broad sections of the British voluntary sector (Taylor and Hoggett, 1994) Inter-personal connections form a network of like-minded and dedicated individuals, which serves as an informal integrating mechanism, underpinning the co-ordination of community-based activities and the co-evolution of supporting organisations. The sector thus achieves both coherence and creativity (cf. Ibarra, 1992) without sacrificing the autonomy of separate organisations or its ability to act in consort where necessary. However, the particularist nature of these ties can result in an over-attentiveness to non-relevant factors such as care, loyalty or more negative emotions (Heimer, 1992). Effective organisations benefit from investment in strong ties based on 'philos' (love, affinity), as well as the 'weak ties' which form the bridges between their own members and external bodies (Krackhardt, 1992).

The idea of the network organisation has been introduced to describe a deliberate strategy adopted by firms in 'frontier' sections of industry where innovation is at a premium, such as fashion and bio-technology (Grabher, 1993; Hastings, 1993). Dynamic, personalised networks which informally link separate firms or institutions create "unpaved paths in the undergrowth" between organisations engaged in similar fields of research and development (Kreiner and Schutz, 1990). These seem particularly important for supporting a rich intellectual environment which promotes interactive learning and debate, appearing to benefit all concerned (Lipnack and Stamps, 1994:47; Simmie,

1997). It results in 'crystallised collaboration' at the 'cutting edge' of research and development where design turns science into technology (Allen, 1977; Kreiner and Schutz, 1990; Conway and Steward, 1997; Nadvi, 1999), and is supported by a clustering approach such as advocated in several of the new Regional Economic Strategies (e.g. SEEDA, 1999). It is assumed that such arrangements reduce transaction-costs (Williamson, 1973; Johanson and Mattson, 1991; Park, 1996), primarily through bonds of trust which are said to minimise risk and enhance mutual commitment (Lorenz, 1991; Perrow, 1992). In contrast, I believe that there *are* costs associated with networks, but that they are usually absorbed within informal (usually pleasant), social and quasi-professional activities. These costs accumulate outside the organisation's normal accounting procedures, through the trading of 'swops', opinion and favours. One of the concerns of my research was to investigate the extent to which community workers, as individuals, bear the hidden costs of networking through personal, 'out of hours', investment of time and emotion in relationships which benefit their paid work. This has become more significant in recent years with the increased demands on communities (often supported by community workers) to engage in inter-agency arrangements where boundary-spanning links are particularly helpful.

In the public sector, a new style of management has emerged based on 'freedom within boundaries' whilst local government services have gradually been de-centralised and cajoled into complex partnership arrangements (Hoggett, 1991; Hambleton et al, 1994; Miller and Grisoni, 2001). Network-type structures may well be following the route of institutional isomorphism (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983), but this is as likely to be a general response to changes in the organisational environment, as the mimetic demands of 'fashion'. Networks allow a diversity of perspectives to coalesce and co-operate without imposing or requiring a consensual version of the 'truth' or a 'solution' to emerge. In this sense they have been identified as the ideal organisational form of the postmodern era (Clegg, 1990: 175) heralding a new dawn of organisational effectiveness (Galbraith, 1973; Galbraith and Lawler, 1993). This is particularly useful in the context of complex, multi-dimensional problems, such as those addressed through public welfare and community participation strategies - poverty, crime, under achievement, to name just few currently on the government's political agenda (SEU, 1998; 2000).

Networks enable information and resources to be shared across group and organisational boundaries, comparing, challenging and contradicting different versions of the world, and in the process discovering or synthesising new ideas. Multiple lateral

strands, which may themselves be tenuous, bestow a collective strength which has been well exploited in cybernetics and the development of computer assisted communication, such as the Internet. None of the links is crucial to the overall functioning of the network, and yet their combined effect is to ensure a variety of transmission routes. This internal redundancy endows networks with their resilience and adaptability in the face of changes in their environment and ruptures in their internal configuration (Burt, 1995).

COMMUNICATION SYSTEMS

The popularisation of computer technology has produced both metaphors and mechanisms for networks as efficient information-processing systems. When Katz and Kahn (1966) compared three types of structure to investigate the optimal form for problem-solving, they concluded that the 'wheel' model (all messages passing through spokes from hub to rim) was more suited to simple problems, than either a circle or a cross-connected web. However, as problems become more complex, then network models come into their own, especially in situations of uncertainty (low or contradictory information) and constant change (Wilensky, 1967; Dawson, 1996).

The field of cybernetics, initiated by Wiener (1948) and developed by systems theorists such as Beer (1959; 1985), supplies two useful approaches to understanding the functioning of networks. Originally cybernetics investigated the mechanics of control or governance within self-regulating machines. Interestingly Wiener, himself a mathematician, defined his field as the "study of messages as a means of controlling machinery *and society*" (cited in Mulgan, 1991). A second important contribution has been the development of systems which can learn from experience, and more significantly from their own cogitations, demonstrating what Argyris and Schön have termed 'double loop learning' (1986). The systems approach uses concepts such as feedback and feedforward loops, the mechanisms of iterative reflexivity by which the system is able to compare its actual state with the desired state, and make the necessary corrections. In this way homeostasis is maintained despite unpredictable changes in the environment. In telecommunications the effectiveness of network systems is evaluated by analysing their transmission properties (Connors, 1990), whilst in the field of artificial intelligence, the effectiveness of networks as information-processors is judged by their ability to analyse and adapt to complex and changing circumstances (Simons, 1967).

In cognitive psychology, the connectionist model of the brain identifies the complexity of neural networks as the basis for human intelligence (Hebb, 1946). Such de-centralised parallel-distributed processing systems are highly effective at managing ambiguous information and learning from experience (Bechtel and Abrahamsen, 1991). They are exactly the kind of organisational 'machine' needed to navigate the complex and turbulent landscape of human society (Scott, 1992; Mulgan, 1997). Early studies of mechanical or computer-based information-processing systems demonstrate that network-like structures, with robust lateral connections and feedback mechanisms, are ideal for pattern recognition, including the detection and correction of errors (Beer, 1959; Simon and Newell, 1960). It is no coincidence that one of the first models of artificial perception shares the name 'pandemonium' with a leading recent text on post-modern organisation (Selfridge and Neisser, 1960; Burrell, 1997). An ability to anticipate and interpret discontinuities or departures from current 'knowledge' about the world makes it possible to either take evasive action or to seize on such contradictions for one's own purposes. Community links act like the axons and dendrites in the brain, integrating and disseminating ideas across identity and organisational boundaries. Networks allow information to be processed in parallel – comparing and assimilating messages from a huge range of sources and storing the synthesised knowledge so that it can be accessed (and interpreted) from any number of standpoints (cf. Pribram's holographic model of memory, 1976). Some of the earliest network studies investigated the use of informal networks to obtain and check information. Frankenberg's review of the early community studies recognised the significance of channel redundancy as a feature of effective communication networks (1966:280ff). Lee (1969) found that women's 'search for an abortionist' relied on a series of informed guesses and referrals, tracing a hidden pathway through informal linkages until the required information was reached. Granovetter's study of job-seeking strategies highlighted the importance of 'weak' ties and 'accidental' conversations in identifying new opening for employment (1974). Grieco (1987) examined the impact of social and kinship networks in recruitment and migration patterns, demonstrating a parallel effect for 'strong' ties.

In human terms, and specifically within the remit of this inquiry, each of these functions is important for community development. Inter-personal networks have been likened to a communal super-computer (Dunbar, 1996), encoding and decoding information, transmitting across linguistic or cultural boundaries, detecting and correcting errors through constant checking and comparison, whilst constantly revising a shared but dispersed version of the collective world. Informal and paralinguistic forms of communication, such as gossip, casual chatting, humour and non-verbal expressions,

are often used to convey information which is illicit, ambivalent or confidential (Broussine et al, 1998).

As G. Smith (1999) recognises

> "Experienced community practitioners ...develop the art of 'jizz' over time and find it invaluable. Intimate knowledge based on networking covers such areas as who gets on with whom, who used to work for which organisation, and why the director of one local organisation has the ears of the chair of social services. Gossip is among the most precious information in community work. Such material is both too sensitive and too complex to store on computer...what a competent community worker carries in her head is a highly sophisticated relational database."

Informal networks create conduits for unofficial opinion or unsubstantiated fact, which nevertheless contribute to a collective view of the world, which in turn underpins or subverts moral codes and promotes solidarity. Tebbutt argues that gossip "had a powerful cohesive effect in the maintenance of neighbourhood networks and so-called community life" (1995:173), and as such was an important, as well as entertaining, aspect of everyday life. For women in domestic situations, it provided a constantly updated resource of collective wisdom or 'common sense'. She suggests that gossip is simultaneously a source of compassion and 'ambivalent power' (1995:183). Yerkovitch (1977) and Coates (1986) emphasise the regulatory functions of gossip in consolidating social relationships and managing deviant behaviour. It is equally plausible to view these informal, unrecorded conversations as co-ordinating resistance to the authority of religious and patriarchal institutions

Scientists and development workers alike are beginning to acknowledge that the codes and ideas embedded in folklore represent the accumulated expertise of indigenous people (Sillitoe, 1998). Oral tradition (cultural myths and local legends) trawls through many sources, refining and re-constructing social guidance through constant narration and slow rumination (Orr, 1996; Hinchman and Hinchman, 1997) which allows cautious but considered adjustment to changing social conditions (Williams, 1989). Routine collective interactions can be said to hold the everyday 'tacit' knowledge and 'theories-in-use' which underpin professional competence (Polyani, 1967; Hodkinson and Issit,

1994) and guide the routine functions of organisations and societies (Argyris and Schön, 1996; Baumard, 1999).

REFLECTION AND DIALOGUE

Critical dialogue (Freire, 1972), co-learning in teams (Stanton, 1992) and collective reflection (Cooke and Shaw, 1996) are all modes of discussion which aim to expose the contradictions in social and economic systems, with a view to generating action which challenges and resolves such tensions in favour of the 'oppressed'. This is seen as the basis for conscientisation and radical community work practice (Popple, 1995), for knowledge dispersed through networks does not become 'thinner' but more empowering. Reflection on current experience offers an equally important learning process. Freirean methods of 'conscientisation' use 'guided' reflection or critical dialogue to examine received wisdom and build up alternative explanations for people's experience which (theoretically) enable them to change their situation (Hope and Timmell, 1984; Kirkwood and Kirkwood, 1989). Dialogue and free association are perhaps the essential ingredients in all forms of democracy (cf. de Toqueville, 1945). This means recognising a diversity of interests and creating a "positive spiral of communication" to encourage interaction and "active trust" (Giddens, 1995). Drawing on Fanon's (1968) search for authenticity within liberation movements, Freirean approaches to emancipatory education similarly link trust and dialogue:

> "Dialogue becomes a horizontal relationship of mutual trust. Trust is established by dialogue; it cannot exist unless the words of both parties coincide with their actions" (Freire, 1972).

This approach has been adopted in Britain by the Hope in the Communities initiative which promotes 'honest conversation' between communities and statutory agencies as the only sustainable basis for cross-cultural networks and 'grassroots empowerment' (M.Smith, 2001). The processes of collective inquiry and reflection generate a people's praxis (Rahman, 1993). This approach to adult education, using enablers and mentors, can be a vehicle for social change, democratic renewal and empowerment (Kieffer, 1984; Crowther et al, 1998). Informal networking and debate are essential to the formation of public discourse. This generates a working consensus which may need to be sufficiently broad to accommodate parallel strategies, such as characterise recent social movements activities, for example around the poll tax (Burns, 1992) or the recent campaigns against 'third world' debt. As Handy (1988:137) recognised: "consensus is the toughest form of participation",

but it is considered a necessary foundation for collective action (Klandermans, 1997:20). Consensus is usually interpreted as meaning 'agreement', but its etymological origin suggests *feeling*, rather than *thinking* together. It reminds us that such compacts have an emotional as well as a cognitive dimension. A notion of the "common good" emerges through constructive and open dialogue (Barnett, 1994:183), based on a deeper wisdom derived from listening to, interpreting, comparing, reviewing and evaluating views from divergent sources. Dialogue is an enabling process, which stretches the "horizons of meaning" (Grob, 1984) and allows people to challenge current assumptions. Moving between controversy and compromise, dialogue seeks enlightenment, rather than argument (Tannen, 1998). Within community networks, these exchanges are dispersed and fragmented through gossip and seemingly casual conversations (M.Smith, 1994). But as the situationists and feminists remind us, the 'personal is political', and such interactions, allowing the expression of critical or muted opinions (E.Ardener, 1975) have a wider impact on other, more formal public discussions.

The collective understandings developed through dialogue and "hermeneutic circles of mutual interpretation" (Barnett, 1994:146) form the basis for a shared 'wisdom' and 'collective intelligence' (Böhm, 1994). What Habermas (1978) calls emancipatory and communicative knowledge is developed through circles of mutual interpretation and critical reflection, resulting eventually in wisdom and 'citizen capability' (Barnett, 1994). If knowledge is indeed power, then informal and collective learning represents a potentially important route to empowerment, because as Schön (1983) and others have observed, learning often involves 'unlearning' the old, perhaps more dominant ways of thinking. 'Common sense' is a surreptitious, and sometimes oppressive, facet of our culture (Geertz, 1983b), perpetuating dominant ideologies. Gramsci argued for 'organic intellectuals' to lead the struggle and debate to develop a 'counter-hegemony' which challenges prevailing assumptions about what is 'right' or 'normal' (1971). Postmodernist philosophers, such as Lyotard (1979) and Foucault (1972; 1980), have likewise drawn attention to the covert power of dominant discourses throughout social history (Sarup, 1988), though many authors criticise their approach, arguing that it insufficiently acknowledges, and indeed mystifies, structural inequalities (Cockburn, 1994).

As early social psychological experiments demonstrated, the pressure exerted in groups from peers and authority figures ranges from gentle social influence to tyranny (Festinger, 1950; Sherif, 1962; Asch, 1958; Milgram, 1974). There is some evidence that children are more influenced in their development (and performance) by peers

than by either their genes or their parents (J.Harris, 1999). Within formal youth work and adult education settings, informal learning through group interaction (in and beyond the classroom) is increasingly recognised and encouraged (e.g. Fordham et al, 1979: Heathcote, 1991; Jones, 1991; McGivney, 1999; Gilchrist, 2001). In his study of voluntary and community organisations in Bassetlaw, Elsdon (1995) highlights the learning that takes place across inter-organisational networks, often through chance conversations, involving personal interaction. He stresses the importance of warm, caring, mutually supportive relationships which enable people to overcome barriers to learning and build their self-confidence (pp.133-7). Bateson (1972) in 'Steps to an Ecology of the Mind' emphasised learning through mutual interaction whilst social education is widely viewed as a core process of community integration and empowerment (e.g. Mayo and Thompson, 1995). The idea of learning communities sharing and searching their collective experience for enlightenment (and thus empowerment) echoes the philosophies of Dewey (1938) and Buber (1937). It has more recently found disciples within many professional and academic discourses (e.g. Rahman, 1993; Senge, 1990b; Heron, 1996). Informal networks are essential to processes of social change, especially those which open up access to new ideas or encourage incompatible views to be exposed and explored through questioning and acknowledging differences (Humphries and Martin, 2000). Boundary-spanning ties are crucial allowing experience and understanding to flow across sectarian divides (Lovett, 1995), global diaspora (Hall, 1990) and diverse identities or social status. Just as friendship networks enable us to transcend the confines of families (Perske, 1993), informal networks threading through peer groups, communities and organisations are often the purveyors of challenging, even subversive ideas (Laguerre, 1994).

INFORMAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES

As the eminent biologist, Edward Wilson has remarked (1998:300) it sometimes seems as if "we are drowning in information whilst starving for wisdom". Modern life can seem a deluge of facts, opinions, rumours and half-truths arriving simultaneously from a bewildering range of sources. It becomes knowledge, wisdom even, through processes of informal or implicit learning: shared discussion and individual cogitation, much of which takes place through conversation rather than formal classes or workshops sessions (M.Smith, 1994; Claxton, 1994). An important ingredient of networking seems to be simply 'chatting' and 'checking out' what is going on in within the locality, one's community or the professional field. As Alinsky (1972) noted "happenings become

experiences when they are digested, when they are reflected upon, related to general patterns and synthesised."

The fact that much of this occurs in settings where formal accountability and scrutiny are minimal or non-existent allows such conversations to be opportunities for revealing or exploring ambiguity, inconsistencies and dissent. However, information is not the same as knowledge and in any case, our education system, culture and media are saturated with ideas which underpin dominant ideologies. Informal networks provide a framework for scepticism, critiquing these assumptions and developing alternative 'scripts' (cf. Latour, 1987). A significant part of our understanding of the world we live in is derived through sharing, questioning and checking the evidence and opinion percolating through peer networks (Cottrell, 1996). Community workers can develop and facilitate networks to ensure that people have access amongst themselves and through outside agencies to new ideas, and are encouraged to reflect on these. Bateson (1972) calls this 'deutero-learning', meaning that people have moved beyond mere error detection to developing innovative ways of thinking. They have learnt how to learn. This form of collective reflection encourages experimentation and the creation of 'new' paradigms (cf. Kuhn, 1962). 'Generative thinking' has been identified as a core 'discipline' for the learning organisation, and crucially depends on 'learningful relationships' amongst staff across all levels, based on love, freedom and forgiveness (Senge, 1990a:284). Many modern firms have moved away from hierarchical forms with their emphasis on formal rules and rôles, preferring to adopt a more lattice-like structure which encourages exchange and communication between different parts of the organisation and allows information and energy to flow to where it is currently needed (Bushe and Shani, 1991; Wheatley, 1992:117; Hastings, 1993).

Whilst many community workers might not necessarily embrace the totality of Senge's model, they would endorse the importance of positive emotions and informality within social networks as 'learning communities' (Fulmer and Keys, 1998a and 1998b). Certainly, conversation is suffused with feelings, opinions, rumours and prejudices. It generates both knowledge and motivation. Networking is a social process which elicits and defines issues in ways which take into account personal preferences, priorities and problems (Hosking and Morley, 1991). Consciousness-raising is about the interweaving of cognition and culture to create alternative 'schemata and scripts' (Gamson, 1992:65). This in turn provides the focus and rationale for collective action as will be explored in the next chapter. Networking allows for a construction of 'reality' which is subjective, grounded in experience and yet able to generate new perspectives and

solutions. It can be liberating, leading to radical analyses and transformative action (Ledwith, 1997). Networking for community development uses the 'free spaces' of everyday life in which communities stretch their more subversive roots (Evans and Boyte, 1986) to create that 'critical culture' which produces new awareness and a shared identity (Shaw and Crowther, 1995). Supporting dispersed communication channels within and between community organisations contributes to a radical, dynamic atmosphere of mutual learning and a capacity for collective action (Reynolds, 1994; Page, 1994; Elsdon, 1995). "Consciousness changes, just as changing consciousness can itself promote change" (Mayo, 1997a:171). EP Thompson (1963) and Havel (1985) testify to the importance of counter-consciousness in their accounts of political change in England and Czechoslovakia respectively.

Within community work, networks have long been seen as useful means of disseminating information (Henderson and Thomas, 1987). They are particularly useful in situations where material resources are scarce and participants are dispersed or difficult to reach for other reasons, such as language, prejudices or social marginalisation (Gilchrist and Taylor, 1997). Laslett (1956) was amongst the first to identify the importance of face-to-face communication in the creation of social groups capable of making collective decisions and supporting what Morris and McClurg Mueller (1992) call micro-mobilisations. Direct or 'hot' interaction (Easton, 1996) seems to be an important ingredient of effective networks (Nohria and Eccles, 1992b), especially in the initial phase of relationship-building (Cole, 1997).

It has been estimated that non-verbal communication, primarily through facial expression and other kinesic cues, conveys at least two thirds of the message, particularly when this emotionally ambiguous or highly charged (Burgoon, 1981; Dunbar, 1996:177). Studies of human interactions emphasise the importance of non-verbal communication in transforming and regulating relationships (e.g. Duck, 1992:75). This recognition has influenced the design of buildings, office layout and organisational structures (Hastings, 1993), but tends to be overlooked by the current enthusiasm for community 'solutions' which embrace computer-mediated communication, possibly to the long-term detriment of 'real' community connections (K.Harris, 1999).

Throughout the ages, improvements in the efficacy and cost of technologies have led to new modes of communication, which in turn have transformed the extent and remit of social networks (Sproul and Kiesler, 1991). Just as the introduction of the halfpenny

postcard enabled dispersed Victorian families to keep in touch (Vincent, 1973), so the increasing availability of electronic communication, such as e-mail and chat forums on the Internet, has created 'virtual' networks and teams in cyberspace (Lipnack and Stamps, 1997; 2000). Some have suggested that the possibility of on-line relationships has created new forms of community (Stone, 1991; Rheingold, 1993; Graham, 1999) and society (Jones, 1995; K.Harris, 1999). Others, including myself, are more sceptical, regarding cyber-space as a 'pseudo-community' (Segerman-Peck 1987; McBeath and Webb, 1995) on the grounds that although it supports interaction, the scope for withdrawal and dissemblance render it unable to sustain genuine intimacy or authentic mutuality (Williams, 1998; Jordan, 1991).

As Sproul and Kiesler (1991:33) point out "faster and easier communication is not always better" and current technology fails to transmit important situational cues to appropriate interpretations and responses on the part of sender and recipient, such as context, personal demeanor and appearance (Gergen, 1991). Of course, this may have distinct advantages for those who suffer discrimination on account of their appearance or lifestyle preferences, in creating possibilities of romantic attachments (Lea and Spears, 1995) or political solidarity (Schuler, 1996). Although face-to-face interaction should be valued as a pre-eminent source of information about emotional state, social identity, status and intention, non-verbal communication cannot be guaranteed as spontaneous or authentic. It may be as scripted, strategic and mendacious as other forms of social behavior (Patterson, 1996). However, the reality of most people's lives consists of individuals presenting themselves in the world and building links with others on the basis of a fairly consistent autobiography, a personal set of values and physical appearance that changes only gradually over time.

Whilst electronic networks remain a poor substitute when it comes to building relationships, they are proving an effective vehicle for political mobilisation and community action (e.g. Castells, 1996). Debate and postings on a huge variety of issues and campaigns have escalated on the World Wide Web, sharing the latest arguments and calls to action. Internet websites have been used to great effect by (for example) anti-road protesters, animal rights campaigners, the Liverpool dockers, GM-crop saboteurs (Jordan and Lent, 1998) and most recently the zapatistas in Mexico (Ponce de Léon, 2001). As Sub-comandante Marcos wrote of the zapatistas' organising strategy: "this network is not an organising structure, nor does it have a central head or decision maker...We are the network, all of us who speak and listen". The following chapter explores how networks of all kinds have enhanced political

influence, in some cases perpetuating the privilege of social elites but more importantly for this inquiry, contributing to the collective power of populations normally excluded from important decision-making arenas.

SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS

Social connections are the basis for all non-commercial and non-bureaucratic collaborative arrangements. The etymological derivation of the word 'connect' signifies 'tie or bind together' and references within the community studies literature to the 'ties that bind' indicate the importance that sociologists have attributed to inter-personal attachments. These are unique to each individual but locate every one of us within complex, interlocking configurations. The Seebohm Report (1968) referred to community as a "network of reciprocal social relations." Humans seem to have an inherent sociability (Pilisuk and Parks, 1986; Ferguson, 1995) and personal networks are recognised as a community resource (e.g. Glampson, et al, 1975:49) as well as an asset for the individual.

Indeed it has been suggested that the propensity of humans (and other primates) to co-ordinate their activities and to share ideas has bestowed a fundamental evolutionary advantage. Survival is an issue for the individual, their offspring and the species. Socio-biologists contend that humans have evolved a social disposition which has advantaged the homo sapien species (Wilson, 1975). Palaeontologists have argued that it was the enhanced capacity of Cro Magnon humans to communicate beyond their immediate 'tribe' which enabled them to transcend the environmental uncertainties associated with rapid climatic changes and resulted in the eventual extinction of homo habilis in Africa and Neanderthals in Europe (Tudge, 1991). It is suggested that the large brain of Homo sapiens evolved to be creative, to use language and imagination to think laterally and make connections across different domains of knowledge (Aiello and Dunbar, 1993). This contrasted with the 'tunnel vision' of Neanderthals who used their modular mentalities to live in smaller family-like clusters which became increasingly unviable (Gamble, 1999; Mithen, 1996). Interestingly, within primates generally, the average size of social group seems to be strongly correlated with brain size, indicating an association between intelligence and a species' natural capacity to manage a certain number of simultaneous relationships (Jones, 1999).

In modern society informal relationships extend beyond the family to include friends (Fischer, 1982; Pahl, 2000), neighbours (Ball and Ball, 1982, Bulmer, 1986, Crow,

1997), and the people we work, trade and socialise with on a routine basis (Duck, 1992). They are partially ascribed (given by circumstance) and partially achieved (chosen), reflecting both fate and preference (Boissevain and Mitchell, 1973). A varied network of significant relationships enhances our well-being (Argyle, 1996a) and shapes our social identity (Schulter, 1996). Whilst not necessarily a 'natural' phenomenon, our social networks provide us with informal care and support (Bulmer, 1987; Wellman, 1990), though the extent to which this constitutes 'community care' is disputed (Willmott, 1987).

McCall and Simmons (1966) identified several necessary components to social relationships (mutual recognition, interaction, reward, commitment, investment and attachment). In doing so they emphasised the 'economic' rationale of relationships which maintain optimal ratios of costs and benefits. Through duty and attraction, social networks provide a combination of advice, assistance and affection which reduce stress (Baron et al, 1992) and create an emotional and moral buffer against at least some of life's hazards (Narroll, 1983; Thompson and Peebles-Wilkins, 1992). The emotional and cultural ingredients of informal networks form a set of 'social logics' (Parker, 1985), representing complementary aspects of conversations and relationships. They are suffused with personal and social meaning, reflecting both local convention and personal experience (Skevington and Baker, 1989).

Relationships are sustained through opportunity, common interests and social skills (Garrett, 1989). Studies of relationship formation and maintenance have tended to focus on pairs and small groups (Bliezner and Adams, 1992) but it seems reasonable to extrapolate at least some of their findings to wider networks. Theories of relationships have looked at the various *stages* of progression from initial acquaintance through to endings (Levinger, 1980), the *strategies* used to express and consolidate inter-personal attraction (Duck, 1991) and the *skills* involved in social interaction (Wall, 1998). Context and social structure have also provided explanations relating to lifè-rôles (Lofland, 1982), gender (Skevington and Baker, 1989), class (Willmott, 1987; Garrett, 1989) and ethnicity (Gaines, 1995). Inevitably, they reflect norms and social pressures (Bliezner and Adams, 1992) as well as inter-personal factors such as similarity and mutually reinforcing behaviour (Duck, 1992).

Shared interests and values provide a reliable basis for reciprocal and strategic exchanges. Gifts and favours express mutual attraction and/or obligation, and provide the vital and inter-change of enduring voluntary relationships (Fischer, 1982). A

balance between the parties involved is usually maintained informally, and not necessarily through material transactions. Conviviality (pleasure, humour, fun) and empathy are valued in themselves, and form the basis for a generalised social relationship of love whose key components are "trust, reciprocity, altruism, commitment, sacrifice, tolerance, understanding, concern, solidarity and inter-dependence" (Twine, 1994:32). Community and evolutionary psychologists (e.g. Saranson, 1976) suggest that social networks provide safety and comfort, as well as the care and support identified by sociological studies (Bulmer, 1987; Willmott, 1987). For most people they supply help at times of crisis, are resorted to before professional (and often stigmatised) help is requested (Gabarino, 1983) and act as user-friendly referral systems (Hornby, 1993). In this respect, community networks benefits the weak and disadvantaged who cannot resort to the 'market' to meet their needs (Schulter, 1996). Informal networks provide pathways through the wilderness of modern living (Finnegan, 1989) and the framework of moral and mutual obligation which keep us from delinquency (Narroll, 1983) and destitution (Stack, 1974; Ross, 1983).

CHAPTER FIVE

Networks for empowerment and participation

"When you're a Jet, you're a Jet all the way;
From your first cigarette to your last dying day.
When you're a Jet, let them do what they can;
You've got brothers around, you're a family man.

You're never alone, you're never disconnected;
You're home with your own
When company's expected, you're always well protected"

From 'West Side Story' (Sondheim, 1961)

This chapter reviews the research literature on networks and power. It explores how relationships and connections are influential in promoting particular interests within systems of democratic pluralism (Hampton, 1970). Networking is not necessarily an empowering or progressive idea, but can be used as a technique for self-organisation amongst populations who are isolated or oppressed (Beresford, 1993). My early experience of caucusing within and outwith the Communist Party demonstrated the effectiveness of networking to influence and mobilise others to support a particular position or faction. Community development uses similar, but more open, methods of coalition-building (Boissevain, 1974). This chapter considers both aspects of networking, examining the power of elites and the power of social movements in protecting privilege and asserting collective solidarity.

Networks and voluntary organisations are regarded as part and parcel of our democratic culture, whether as essential to associative forms of democracy (Hirst, 1997b), a complementary approach to participatory governance (Berry, 1984) or a vehicle for radical citizenship (Mouffe, 1992). Networks are often counterposed to hierarchical or bureaucratic forms of organisation, which have been criticised from both radical and functionalist perspectives. Networks are not, however, the panacea that they are sometimes presented as and this has significant implications for how they are used within community development. Networks are particularly useful for the transmission of ambivalent information and for organising clandestine activities. Their often secretive nature and concealed deliberations renders them unaccountable and exclusive, and as such engendering the very opposite of socially inclusion (Newman

and Geddes, 2001). Networks can be cliquey and exclusive, enrolling members through bizarre systems of preferment and ritual, such as experienced by apprentice freemasons (Knight, 1985; Short, 1989) or using the family connections and threats in situations dominated by the Mafia. The 'old boy' network, based on public schools and Oxbridge colleges is said to exert a strong and enduring influence on opinion formers within British politics.

Much of the early research on 'community power' was concerned with discovering the 'chains of influence' in civic society which ran alongside representative public decision-making (Hunter, 1953; Dahl, 1961;Wildavsky, 1964; Perrow, 1980). In his examination of the British state, Miliband (1969) demonstrated how the interests of capitalism were buttressed through the social networks of the upper classes. Recent commentaries by Paxman (1990) and Hutton (1995) have confirmed that little has changed in the intervening years despite the supposed advent of equal opportunities policies in public recruitment and selection. Systems of patronage and nepotism serve to protect privileges, such as access to certain opportunities, including the 'top' jobs. As such, they may encourage impropriety in financial dealings as well as favouritism towards friends and family. Such networks maintain a 'monological' view of the public interest (Furbey et al, 1997), biased towards traditional orthodox models of society and preserving the *status quo*. These power blocs suppress or exclude dissenting voices and express unfounded prejudices towards those outside the boundaries. This resistance to new ideas can mean that they are slow to adapt to changing conditions and fail to learn from past mistakes. Nevertheless elite networks represent a hidden force in society, which may act conspiratorially or simply by default (Waste, 1986).

Systematic mapping of these influence networks was developed in the seventies by Laumann and his associates (Laumann, 1973; Laumann and Pappi, 1976; Laumann et al, 1985). Their studies suggested that participation in such networks is affected by three factors: having an interest in the issue, having the capacity to mobilise relevant resources and occupying a central place within the decision-making system. The pattern and quality of your connections across the network are major factors in being able to promote your interests. Knoke's studies of public decision-making (1990a and 1990b; Knoke and Kulinski, 1982) explicitly focused on the power of persuasion, and therefore the flow of information and opinion through personal and structural linkages. The aim of these studies was to trace the impact of communication on specific outcomes in behaviour and decisions. A prominent and reachable position in the network endowed the occupant with disproportionate influence over fellow decision-makers. The power of an

actor relates to their centrality and status within networks, reflecting their reputation and capacity to integrate ideas and interests into a collective goal, which could then attract support from potential participants. Abilities in brokerage and inter-sectoral liaison contribute to this leadership rôle, especially when based on personal trust and political credibility (Boissevain, 1974).

Personal, face-to-face interaction tend to increase 'felt' accountability (Burns, 1997) with a consequent bias towards familiar (and presumably liked) stakeholders. Recently this has been recognised as an aspect of institutional discrimination (e.g. Macpherson, 1998). Attempts to counter such distortions include the setting up of consultative forums, bringing together politicians, bureaucrats and users as formal policy networks (Kenis and Schneider, 1991). Equally, they may operate as hidden and irregular policy communities (Jacobs, 1992:245), searching out informal opportunities to influence or subvert formal decisions (Laguerre, 1994). Research on urban regeneration has highlighted both positive and negative aspects of civic webs and informal connections in shaping the democratic processes of these government programmes (Skelcher et al, 1996; Hastings et al, 1996). As others before them have also warned, informal networking can lack proper accountability and tends to perpetuate local privileges and hegemonies. Networking often relies on informal processes and personal perceptions. These are based on local conventions, which in turn reflect the convenience and comfort of those involved. Networking can therefore perpetuate prejudices and exclusionary practices which operate on the basis of cliques, rumour and coincidence. A proactive and strategic approach is needed for community workers to counter these tendencies, and this will be the main focus of the current research, looking at what Newman and Giddes (2001) call 'positive networking' for social inclusion and partnership working..

The impact of informal networks is acknowledged by regime models of governance which argue that decisions are actually made through complex, but relatively stable coalitions of people who have access to decision-makers through inter-dependent interests coalescing around particular activities or policies (Stone, 1986; Stoker, 1995). Regimes are not the 'elite cabals' which earlier approaches had suggested, but informal arrangements of relatively autonomous interests which are sufficiently co-ordinated and connected into institutional power to promote a coherent and persuasive argument. Reid (1996) distinguishes between entrepreneurial, covert decision-making networks and the visible collaborative bodies which serve only to legitimise the decisions already taken by the former.

RELATIONS OF POWER

Within formal and informal arrangements it is impossible to ignore questions of relative power (Newman, 1998). In the early studies of organisation and decision-making, the issue of power was seen as relevant only in conflict situations where there are competing interests (Dawson, 1996:170). The zero-sum model, as it came to be known, tended to assume that power was the property of an actor (who may be an individual or an organisation), exercising their influence or authority *over* others in order to secure an intended outcome or promote a particular interest (Weber, 1947). Power ensured that certain interests prevailed, even in the face of explicit opposition or resistance. The capacity to organise, to 'mobilise bias' in one's favour, was identified as a crucial aspect of this 'first face' of power (Dahl, 1961; Schattschneider, 1960).

But power also appeared to operate in the absence of overt conflict and without the use of force or sanctions. Bachrach and Baratz (1962) recognised that power could be asserted through subtle political influence and is distributed more widely than the above model of powerful and self-interested leadership indicates. They suggested that this 'second face' of power operates by "limiting the scope of actual decision-making to safe issues by manipulating the dominant community values, myths and political institutions and procedures" (Bachrach and Baratz, 1963:632). Thus dissenting views are suppressed and conflict is apparently averted.

Radical political theorists have identified an additional form of power, which is even more pernicious. Lukes (1974) extended the debate around power by introducing a 'third dimension' of power which infiltrates the hearts and minds of 'ordinary' people to induce attitudes and practices which protect the interests of the elite or governing class. In many respects this is akin to Gramsci's (1971) earlier notion of 'hegemony', whereby 'common sense' and 'internalised oppression' are reproduced through cultural and civic institutions. Both these formulations emphasise the power of indoctrination as opposed to authority exercised through control or coercion. Their approach suggests a model of power which is more diffuse and less attached to particular 'agents' or objective interests. It recognises the possibility of mutual influence and resistance through the development of countervailing ideas and social forces, or as Gramsci proposed, the construction of an alternative understanding or 'counter-hegemony' (1971). Stone argues that community development should embrace a model of 'ecological power' operating through complex systems of interdependent relationships to influence "non-market areas of policy" by discovering and using points of leverage to "empower relatively powerless interests" (1986:109-111). In

doing so it draws on Long's (1958) earlier model of 'community' as 'an ecology of games' involving a combination of compliance, persuasion and negotiation in order to gain resources and influence, echoing Carnegie's (1937) much earlier advice on 'How to win friends and influence people', which has been joined by a modern version on networking as the 'art of making friends' (Stone, 2001).

Post-modernist analyses of contemporary politics and social practices have also emphasised the dynamic and dispersed nature of ethics and power (Bauman, 1991). Foucault (1977, 1980) argues for an understanding of power differentials which are manifest in the relationships and interactions between people, and between people and institutions. He proposes a capillary form of power operating through the practices and narratives which generate and preserve dominant discourses. Foucault refers to the "synaptic regime" (1980:39) and specifically draws attention to power dynamics operating *within* systems. These constrain behaviour and thinking without recourse to actual force or punishment (Cheater, 1999). Foucault's model envisages power as residing in the micro-processes of everyday life, rather than as episodic or institutional. "Power is in the texture of our lives - we live it rather than have it" (Appignanesi and Garrett, 1995:87). According to the post-modernists, power is multifarious, inherently ambiguous and reversible (Hindess, 1996). It is manifest in, and operates through, negotiation, exchange, resistance and dialogue. Power is shaped by circumstance and identity, flowing through relationships in ways which are disconcertingly unstable and transient (Miell and Croghan, 1996). The current interest in governance owes much to post-modern explanations of power relations, suggesting a looser, more distributed model of decision-making.

In recent years, community work appears to have adopted, perhaps unwittingly, a post-modernist approach to organising. Its tactics are less confrontational, preferring strategies to gain influence within decision-making arenas and attempting resolution rather than revolution (e.g. Davey, 1998). In a network model:

> "The reality is that power does not reside in any one place. It is dispersed and the system of power can be activated anywhere. The important thing is to find ways of exerting leverage in the system...Perhaps the really important thing is to realise that you have the power to change yourself, your way of thinking about power, your way of working with power. Once you do that, you are changing the way people will respond to you." (Gaffney, 1996:68)

This approach (which I believe is fairly typical of recent community development thinking) reiterates a long-standing emphasis on process, and subjective interpretations of self and situations in relation to problem-solving (cf. Biddle, 1968). Community workers eschew notions of power as authority but are fundamentally concerned with using their role and status to influence opinion and behaviour of community members. As Shuftan explains "empowerment is not an outcome of a single event; it is a continuous process that enables people to understand, upgrade and use their capacity to better control and gain power over their own lives" (1996:260). Networking is seen as contributing to empowerment by re-configuring power relations and mobilising a 'critical mass' of 'strategic allies'. Information and ideas are important to this model of power in ways which parallel Foucault's (1984) theory of 'discourse' and resistance. It also incorporates links between Machiavelli and Gramsci's concept of the organic intellectual as modern day Jacobins (Cammett, 1967). Foucault's model of power relations may be somewhat under-structuralised, neglecting institutional or macro-factors in his theorising about the mundane routines and surveillance mechanisms which ensure compliance and normalisation (Clegg, 1994). Communities which have experienced long-term systematic discrimination demand both self-organisation and positive action strategies to challenge existing power blocs (e.g. Christian, 1998).

These might be constituted as informal regimes (Stoker, 1995) or formal institutions and this ambiguity reflects a paradox within community development, which is simultaneously about the struggle *for* power, and the struggle to *resist* it (cf. Wrong, 1980). If, as Foucault argues, one sees power as distributed across shifting systems of relationships and stakeholders, rather than political institutions, legal sovereignty or even prevailing ideologies (Clegg, 1994), then strategies for empowerment of disadvantaged groups require more fluid and decentralised forms of organisation (Clutterbuck, 1994:60-61). Networks have been promoted as the 'new' organisational paradigm, providing the "architecture of complexity" and post-modernity (Clegg, 1990; Kenis and Schneider, 1991; Parker, 1992). By emphasising the diversity of constituent elements (R.Scott, 1992:312), networks allow power to reach those points where it can influence decisions or affect the course of events, making things happen and exerting pressure towards (or against) different interests.

Women theorists in particular have asserted the positive aspects of power as a collective, productive and enabling resource (e.g. Elworthy, 1996). They have stressed the importance of building facilitative connections in order to initiate and manage organisational change

(Kanter, 1983; Helgesen, 1990). Wheatley (1992:39) conceptualises power as the "capacity generated by relationships" which she sees as energy flowing through organisations, facilitated rather than controlled by those in positions of leadership (see also Hirschmann, 1984). As Florence, a rural health trainer in South Africa, recognised:

> "I have learned not to under-estimate the strength of each woman, organisation and community...Every woman is born with that power, it is not created by the [Western Cape] Network, but the Network enables women to use their power." (Womankind Worldwide, 2000)

This articulation of power as flowing through a network of relationships has been further developed by Clegg (1989; 1994) in his 'circuits of power' model. Clegg argues for "the centrality of processes of power to organisation, and of organisation to the processes of power" (1989:20). Agency, the capacity to make things happen, is achieved by making connections so that power can flow to where it is most effective. This is similar to Wrong's (1980) intercursive model of power as enabling, rather than commanding.

Clegg's approach shows similarities with network models of power which claimed to demonstrate the significance of positionality in being able to secure desired outcomes (e.g. Mitchell, 1969; Boissevain, 1974; Knoke and Kulinski, 1982). The flow of information and commitment through networks generates synergy (Komminos, 1997:189) and can be seen as empowering, especially for those who have been excluded from or deprived of opportunities to participate in decision-making or collective activity. Rather than simply identifying patterns of prominence and reach, the circuits of power model identifies specific practices and interactions (Pratt, 1997:129). Miller et al (1995:121) remind us that just as power is contingent and relational, so strategies for achieving empowerment often focused around particular issues, rather than a generally enhanced capacity to influence decisions. The circuits of power metaphor helps us to see empowerment as altering the flow of power through connected series of events and decisions and often operating through parallel relationships (cf. Gilchrist and Taylor, 1997). The integration of information through these nodes and linkages produces knowledge and patterns of influence which eventually lead to consensus amongst those involved and concerted action towards an acceptable common goal (Jelfs, 1982:22). Conversely networks which are closed and homogeneous do little to challenge existing power structure or 'received wisdom'. They are constituted primarily of strong ties amongst people who share a common purpose. These perpetuate elites and are useful for co-ordinating illicit or deviant activities, including protecting members from discovery or disapprobation. Examples of such networks might include the Mafia,

pædophile rings, drug dealing cartels, delinquent and criminal fraternities, the Freemasons and prostitute circles (Heald, 1977; Cohen, 1980; Knight, 1985; Sarnecki, 1986).

These negative associations present strategies which advocate networking for community development with a paradox. On the one hand, relationships represent a valuable and adaptable shared asset, or social capital, especially when carefully cultivated for diversity and reach (Burt, 1992). At the same time tending one's networks can detract from the task in hand or achieving the immediate goal. There are potential losses attached to networking which are not always anticipated in weighing up the cost-benefit balance of social interactions, such as broken promises, severed connections and un-returned favours. It should be recognised that "Faith is essentially risk-laden" (epithet on the tombstone of Ernest Tinsley, Bishop of Bristol 1976-85). An additional dilemma relates to the ethics of equal opportunities. Networks which rely on informal and personal links are prone to bias and exclusivity. This poses significant difficulties for a networking approach to community development as will be considered in the concluding chapters.

DEVELOPING COLLECTIVE ACTION

Generally, people enter into collective arrangements because they are already linked with others involved. However tenuous, a connection exists which persuades them that the benefits of participation are likely to outweigh the costs. Social movement studies demonstrate that social networks provide important channels for communication and the construction of collective identity (Melucci, 1989, McClurg Mueller, 1994). They are used to recruit for community-based organisations (Milofsky, 1987; Chanan, 1991 and 1992) and political mobilisations (Tarrow, 1994). Studies of political activists have consistently demonstrated the importance of social networks in radicalisation (della Porta, 1992), recruitment (McAdam, 1986;1988) and sustaining involvement in movement activities (Andrews, 1991). Group affinity and collective identity are crucial motivating forces, shaped and developed through informal networking across the institutions and spaces of everyday life (Lefebvre, 1984; Melucci, 1989; 1996; Friedman and McAdam, 1992). Two major reasons are put forward to explain this. One concerns the psycho-social aspect of relationships. The other emphasises the practical expediency of using connections to reach and recruit potential contributors. The first argues that informal interactions provide a foundation for large-scale contracts by convention (Hardin, 1982:184). Conventions are local agreements and understandings, which facilitate collective organisation on the basis of moral obligation, tacit consent and norms of 'fair play' (Lewis, 1969).

Trust, and therefore the possibility of sanctions for violation of these hidden codes of honour is the major component of such arrangements (Hardin, 1982:186; Gambetta, 1988). Trust is often mentioned as a key ingredient of social contracts, though as Arrow (1974) and Newman (1998) (and Socrates before them) warn, trust is a 'delicate lubricant', an ephemeral and disarming virtue which can be evoked and revoked to suit the continuing power of professionals. In their study of community leadership, Purdue et al (2000) observed that feelings of trust and empowerment are linked, but that the power dynamics of the partnerships in their case studies often *obliged* community representatives to trust the authorities because there were no sanctions and no obvious alternative means of influencing decision. Trust is generated over successive interactions each of which affirms the other person's reliability and strengthens the mutual bond. It is certainly a major component of the community experience. Without community networks, the power of the state and market forces become much more significant in regulating social behaviour. Civil society constitutes, therefore, an important arena for progressive struggle over 'common sense' assumptions of everyday life (Kenny, 1996).

The second explanation for the use of social networks is that they provide cost-effective means of achieving a 'critical mass' of support, which generates wider participation. Marwell and Oliver (1993) used their own experience as organisers to create computer programmes modelling collective action. Their analysis identifies the factors which galvanise people to contribute to a collective initiative to be:

- the motivation of potential participants,
- the availability of resources,
- ease of communication and
- social processes.

They suggest that effective organising requires a balance between the costs of maintaining mobilising structures (time, effort, money, etc.) and the expected overall gains. Each individual makes their own decision about how they can contribute, but this is influenced by the perceived decisions and behaviour of those around them. Marwell and Oliver emphasise the rôle of 'movement entrepreneurs', who may come from outside the community of interest and disproportionately absorb the costs of organising, perhaps for political or moral reasons. These individuals often have useful resources and skills to offer. Entrepreneurs act as "catalysts who bring together problems and solutions that would otherwise bubble chaotically in the convection currents of modern policy streams" (deLeon, 1996:508). They tend also to be well-connected with other resourceful or influential people.

As a consequence, the necessary critical mass can be swiftly and efficiently mobilised to achieve a credibility for the initiative which persuades others to join in (Marwell and Oliver, 1993:160,174). This certainly echoes my own experience in political organising and as a community worker. It highlights the importance of gathering endorsements from influential or high profile sponsors and supporters, and the value of cultivating these links. The achievements of social entrepreneurs can be partly attributed to the 'social capital' found in their networks regardless of whether this is due to investment or inheritance (Burt, 1997). In this respect, it would appear that extensive and diverse networks are more advantageous than over-lapping, close-knit sets of similar people bound by strong ties and shared outlooks. Individuals who are linked, but slightly peripheral to several distinct networks are more likely to provide the 'bridging mechanisms' which allow the cross-fertilisation of ideas and create the conditions for creative thinking. This could well explain why recent social policies seek community-led partnerships for "innovatory solutions to persistent problems" (Taylor, 1997:29; Geddes, 1998).

It may be that **the primary networking function of the professional community worker is to establish and nurture the 'weak ties', the bridges that connect organisations and sets of people who might otherwise find neither reason nor means to interact.** An analysis of issues around differential power and access are crucial to understanding the (radical?) community worker's special concern with boundaries, margins and barriers. This has two aspects. The first is about challenging inequalities and social divisions, and reminds us of the danger to be found at edges. The second is the entrepreneurial rôle which encourages innovation and iconoclasm (deLeon, 1996). As Fischer observes

> "the effective entrepreneur works the fringes...[they] constantly scan the boundaries of the system and figure ways to poke holes in it" (cited deLeon, 1996:497).

Networking has been termed a meta-cultural practice (Trevillion, 1993), requiring an ability to transgress (hooks, 1994) and to operate appropriately in different organisational environments with the balance and adaptive capacities of a chameleon (Trevillion, 1992). Marwell and Oliver (1993:156) suggest that in the initial stages of developing collective activities, organisers use their social ties to *reach* and *select* people who are most likely to participate, ensuring that a threshold for collective action is achieved as soon as possible. Leadership can be seen as "essentially a social process defined through interaction" (Smircich and Morgan, 1982:257) which uses holistic networking to build consensus and recruit useful contributors (Barnum, 1994; Kay, 1996). This involves knowing a lot of people,

but more importantly, knowing a wide range of people who between them give access to the different assets and expertise needed for collective action to be successful. Organisers with many 'weak' ties in their networks are able to target, canvass and recruit potential contributors across many organisations and social groups (Granovetter, 1978). These boundary-spanning social ties are relatively cheap forms of communication, but highly effective in contacting sympathetic allies and mobilising resources. Marwell and Oliver (1993:130) argue that effective organising involves constructing and maintaining a large, heterogeneous network of social contacts, in which each 'node' is tagged with useful information about potential interests, values, skills and resource base. Knowledge about the inter-dependencies and connections amongst the network members is also vital in making good use of the network as a communications system, ensuring that the flow of information is not disrupted by channels that have deteriorated or become dysfunctional because people have fallen out or lost touch with one another.

Effective organising is not just about 'mobilising the masses'. It requires common purpose, the creation of collective identity and the development of a shared 'script' (Callon et al, 1986) or 'frame' (Gamson, 1992). This is used to guide collective action and sustain the solidarity and cohesion of the coalition. In recent years, social movement theories have begun to recognise the crucial rôle of informal networks in developing and sustaining involvement in mass political activity (Tarrow, 1992, 1994; Klandermans, 1997; Castells, 1983; 1997). There is a growing emphasis on the micro-social processes of collective action: the interactions, the dialogue, the emotional ties between participants, rather than seeing the social movement as a single political entity. In particular social psychologists have asserted that the development and expression of collective identity is socially constructed within informal networks (e.g. McClurg Mueller, 1992; Kelly and Breinlinger, 1996). A sense of communal solidarity emerges through a myriad of conversations and encounters, developing a common understanding and sense of shared fate. This provides both incentive and rationale for participation in collective action. It becomes not simply a question of resource mobilisation, but a means of achieving a 'community of resistance'. This has been particularly noticeable around identity politics, with the development of separatist and 'lifestyle' movements such as gay clubs or 'roots' culture (Weeks and Holland, 1996; Whisman, 1996; Sewell, 1997).

NEW SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

In contrast with more traditional social movements (such as the trade unions or early tenants' organisations), the 'new' social movements are reticular, eschew central control

mechanisms and seem content to operate with high levels of autonomy and low formal accountability (Gerlach and Hine, 1970). Neidhardt (1985) describes them as 'networks of networks'. Alliances form and a non-authoritarian leadership emerges which articulates issues and co-ordinates collective action. Examples include the networks supporting the women's peace camp at Greenham Common (Dominelli, 1995), the anti-poll tax campaign (Hoggett and Burns, 1991/2) and the recent mobilisations against petrol prices. Whilst alliances emerge through the discovery of similarities between disparate groupings (Harvey, 1993), they also need to be flexible and robust so that they can accommodate the diversity of experience and values that motivate people to join in common cause (Alperin, 1990; Gilchrist, 1995b). This broadness of spirit, the colourful 'rainbow' image, of such coalitions has been criticised for undermining class solidarity and leading to fragmented (and by implication) ineffective community politics (Bryant and Miller, 1990). I would argue that alliances, underpinned by latent informal networks, provide a model for collective organising which values diversity, promotes solidarity *and* supports challenging interactions (Bunch, 1987; Philips, 1994:241).

Models of the 'new' social movements have consistently stressed their fluid, diverse and organic nature (Lowe, 1986; A.Scott, 1990). They emerge through latent networks which operate across geographical divisions on the basis of shared experience and values to create and reinforce community life (Castells, 1983:260). Melucci (1989) saw communities as the 'incubators' of collective activity. Tarrow (1994) develops this idea of social networks as 'mobilising devices', which make use of everyday relationships and cultural codes of shared reference. Melucci's later writing elaborates on this theme, emphasising that collective identity and solidarity develop through a learning process by which past experiences and present concerns are integrated and re-defined as a coherent and shared framework of grievances and aspirations, residing in sometimes dormant networks (1994:75; 1996; Morris, 1992). These may lie in 'abeyance' until the movement is rekindled (Rupp and Taylor, 1987; Johnston et al, 1994). Social movements go through cycles of protest, moving between peaks of activity and relative quiescence (A.Scott, 1990). Although they might appear dormant, networks amongst former activists and participants are maintained informally and continue to exert some influence on policy formation and the emergence of temporary coalitions or partnership arrangements. This appears to be true for community activity as well as more overtly political campaigns. It was certainly the case for the Festival Against Racism, as we shall see in Chapter Seven.

Coalitions are generally semi-formal, ad hoc arrangements, whereby separate agencies co-ordinate their activities in order to increase resources and better manage an uncertain

environment (R.Scott, 1992:201). As Boissevain (1974) asserted, coalitions tend to emerge from networks of 'friends of friends', including from the tangle of loose associations that characterise neighbourhoods or interest communities. A coalition might be built in response to events in the organisational field (Warren, 1967) as a pragmatic and informal 'action-set' (Aldrich and Whetten, 1981). Its aims will generally be focused on achieving a limited goal, such as winning a policy decision, organising an event, defending or obtaining a shared resource. Once that the coalition has achieved its purpose it may either dissolve or transform itself into a more structured form which could take on the management of a service, a building or other more permanent project. Like 'excellent companies', social movements and pioneering voluntary organisations are held together by a shared culture and vision (Soeters, 1986; Paton, 1996), but unlike such corporations they often lack the organisational mechanisms to acquire and manage resources (R.Scott, 1992:176). The transition to more formal structures is not always universally desired nor even feasible. At a certain phase in their development, such organisations experience conflicting tensions between the ideals of the founding members and the demands for wider accountability or efficiency (cf. Landry et al, 1985).

SOCIAL CAPITAL

As concluded at the end of Chapter Four, networks of informal relations and associations represent a shared asset, or social capital, in which people invest over the course of their lives. Jacobs (1961), the originator of the concept, recognised the individual and collective aspects of this concept, referring to a "web of public respect and trust [which constituted] a resource in times of personal or neighbourhood need" (cited in Walker et al, 2000). Putnam's work on economic activity and social networks elaborates on these ideas (1993; 1995; 2001) regarding social capital as the "norms of reciprocity and networks of engagements" created and maintained through voluntary associations and community activity. Social capital can be regarded as a civic resource and community asset (Murray, 2000), related to the levels of trust and inter-connectivity within society (Burt, 1997; Flora, 1997). Over the last decade the notion of social capital has been extensively elaborated (Coleman, 1988; Fukuyama, 1996; Schuller, 2001), de-constructed (Woolcock, 1998; Woolcock and Narayan, 2000; Woolcock, 2001) and critiqued (Harriss and de Renzio, 1997; Fine, 1999; Baron et al, 2000). An alternative, but closely related concept of 'social energy' is suggested by Hirschmann (1984). This is based on a combination of friendship and idealism, and was developed in the context of grass-roots activity in Latin America. It incorporates the ideas of hope, compassion and affinity into social struggles and is an important component of models

of co-operation and campaigns for social progress. Both concepts are a useful reminder that the affective (emotional) aspects of connection play a significant part in mobilising participants for voluntary collective action (cf. Crossley, 1998).

Although the concept of social capital (like community) lacks a clear definition and has been criticised for being vague and ambivalent (Portes and Landolt, 1996), its current usage clearly emphasises the value of participation and relationships (Bullen and Onyx, 1998). Major international institutions such as the World Bank and European Union are currently investigating the value of social capital and state interventions to promote and strengthen it, for example, through public health, housing, active citizenship or regeneration programmes (Fox, 1995; Routledge and Amsberg, 1996). These look for improvements in 'community capacity' and 'social inclusion' (Woolcock, 1998), but if the latter is defined as participation or 'connected-ness' to mainstream society, this requires some way of measuring people's ability to reciprocate through 'normal' social ties and activities. As yet there seems to be only limited statistical data available on these aspects of family and community life (Root and Moran, 2001). There is an expectation that social capital operates as a shared resource to enable 'the community' to engage as partners or advocates with government schemes and democratic processes. In this respect community workers with responsibility for developing and managing local and interest-based networks might be regarded as 'stewards' of local social capital (Gittell and Vidal, 1998). In the same way that environmentalists refer to stewardship of the earth's delicate bio-systems, community development should have a similar concern for the socio-diversity and balance of human networks.

The importance of trust relations in civil society has implications for political systems (Luhmann, 1979), local governance (Benington, 1998) and citizenship (Ranson and Stewart, 1998). Although some attempts are now being made to operationalise the concept of social capital in ways which emphasise the 'added value' of participation and social relationships (Bullen and Onyx, 1998; Burns et al, 2000), it is a concept, which like 'community' is beguiling but elusive. Lappe and DuBois (1997) argue that building social capital has three pre-requisites:

- a sense of hope,
- sufficient opportunities for engagement and interaction, and
- possibilities to nurture community service skills and motivation.

They observe that high levels of participation and networking can co-exist with feelings of powerless-ness and suggest that social capital is also dependent on the enabling role of local officials and the general policy environment. Foley and Edwards (1999) contend that there is more to social capital than informal goodwill, trust and voluntary associations. Nevertheless, the concept captures important aspects of informal networks, such as the expectant, but speculative nature of many interactions and the need for active investment of effort and skills in order to enhance communal wealth and the operation of bounded solidarity (Dhesi, 2000). This has implications for the community development process (Chaney, 2000), and raises interesting, (probably gendered) questions concerning production and benefit (Seron and Ferris, 1995).

DEMOCRACY AND COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE

The relationship between networking and democracy is crucial but not straightforward. Networks are not particularly concerned with achieving or mobilising consensus, but they are useful for building mutual respect, generating debate and mobilising collective protest actions (Melucci, 1990; Tarrow, 1994). Ever since the Athenians first developed the concept of democracy, active participation and equality of power have been considered as core principles. But the Greeks not only restricted democratic privileges to 'free men', their version of democracy was predicated on small city states, where citizens would know each other and have regular face-to-face contact (Roelofs, 1996). Many political philosophers have returned to this model of the 'assembly' to argue for a form of 'participatory democracy', based on values of 'community', social responsibility and love (e.g. Bookchin, 1971:79). Berry's early communitarian model of the 'democratic community' combines liberalism with an emphasis on communal solidarity, which can "embrace diversity, whilst yet assuming a substantive harmony" (1984:95). Berry combines the civic virtues of respect, liberty and autonomy, with a 'moral identity' as a member of the community, in which social obligations and duties are accepted and upheld.

The principles of subsidiarity argues that decisions should be taken at the lowest possible 'level' of society, preferably by those directly implicated. Anarchists have proposed models based on 'consociation' (Bookchin, 1991), 'decisions without hierarchy' (Ianello, 1992) and many others have criticised the adversarial and elitist nature of modern democratic systems (Mansbridge, 1983). More recently, arguments have emerged for 'associative democracy' (Hirst, 1997; Cohen and Rogers, 1992), decentralisation (Burns et al, 1994), radical pluralism (Mouffe, 1993) and 'communicative democracy' (Young, 1993). Castells (1997) suggests that the collapse of Soviet-style 'statism' can be attributed to its resistance to

network forms of organisation, with attempts to 'open up' to the information society through perestroika and glasnost coming too little and too late. A common theme, which harks back to the community politics of the 1970s (Hampton, 1970; Hain, 1976; Rowe, 1980), is the potential rôle for voluntary organisations and a re-formulation of what constitutes the 'public domain'. Earlier models emphasised the geographic community, most notably the neighbourhood (Hatch and Humble, 1980; Twelvetrees, 1985), but the politics of identity have created alternative formulations of 'community' which recognise the self-organisation of people according to other facets of their lives, often a shared experience of oppression or social exclusion (Meekosha, 1993; Bunsee, 1993).

Latest models of 'modern' deliberative democracy attempt to honour the diversity of society, whilst achieving a workable consensus. They emphasise the integrative functions of voluntary associations and community life, validating difference whilst supporting interaction across the 'divisions' (e.g. Young, 1990). Network forms of democracy are suffused with opportunities for participation, dialogue and the expression of inter-dependence. They recognise the complexity and complementarity of social life and attempt to capture "the elusive, but essential synthesis between solidarity and subsidiarity" (Marquand, 1998). Government delivered through institutions of representation, formal power and statutory duties is contrasted to more fluid and reticular forms of decision-making using complex and recursive systems (Rhodes, 1997; Jessop, 1997). The concept of governance acknowledges the efficacy of informal networks in mediating and negotiating novel or compromise solutions to complex problems (Kooiman, 1993). Stewart suggests that:

> "Governance is the process of multi-stakeholder involvement, of multiple interest resolution, of compromise rather than confrontation, of negotiation rather than administrative fiat" (2000b:178).

What might be called 'communitocracy' (Waite, 2000) is more flexible than representative democracy permitting multi-vocality and ambivalence. Decision-making mechanisms are more widely accessible and encourage creative thinking. For community governance to be effective and equitable, it needs a foundation of social networks which are inclusive and strongly inter-connected (Mulgan, 1997). Beer (1995) has developed a more formal approach for discussion of complex issues known as 'syntegration'. It involves a structured, but dynamic process of reverberating ideas until consensus is reached around a set of priorities and proposals (Leonard, 1996). It is designed to manage both complexity and diversity of thinking within large groups and provides a possible model for community decision-making (White, unpublished; Bloomfield, 1998).

These less hierarchical models of democracy (Worpole, 1997) pose an emancipatory challenge to representative government and various alternative systems (such as citizens' juries, scrutiny procedures, community planning and civic panels) are currently being piloted as potential methods for improving both participation and the quality of decision-making (Burns, 2000). By supporting local formal and informal infrastructure, community development interventions are likely to improve both the levels and quality of participation by local people (Henderson and Salmon, 1998). In her examination of the Plymouth Hoe citizens' jury, Woodward concludes

> "Strategic interventions through community development processes is needed in order to unleash the potential power people have within themselves but which is often unrecognisable within the context of barriers caused by the day to day realities of their lives." (2000:240)

This raises issues in relation to political leadership and accountability which are partially addressed by network models of decision-making in that they advocate (and make possible) more distributed forms of power, knowledge and responsibility. Milofsky and Hunter's (1994) image of 'community' as a kind of Greek chorus surveying and commenting on the actions of the main protagonists suggests a form of general accountability operating though informal networks. Without strong community networks holding leaders to account and providing them with support, there is a high risk of power corroding individual responsibilities and motives. As Taylor recognises, such arrangements place a "premium on transparency and communication" in order to manage the multiplicity and diversity of stakeholder expectations (1996:62). The government's current preference for 'social entrepreneurs' as leaders of social regeneration strategies (cf. Thake, 1995) appears to ignore this issue in favour of 'can-do' exuberance devoid of proper feedback and decision-making mechanisms (Waite, 2000).

Accountability issues arise whenever people are engaged in joint endeavours and permitted to act with initiative within a broad framework of agreed aims (Leat, 1988). Formal accountability usually operates through contracts, audits, reporting and complaints procedures in ways that are transparent and quantifiable (Kumar, 1997). Voluntary organisations tend to operate within a public service ethos, considering themselves to be accountable to a range of constituencies (Drucker, 1990), notably funders and users. Community groups and networks have a much vaguer sense of their accountabilities, and this can lead to tensions when they are invited into more

public arenas, such as regeneration partnerships and consultative exercises referred to above. For unpaid community 'representatives' involvement with such bodies can be intimidating, hard work and isolating (M.Stewart, 1998a; Purdue et al, 2000), and because it is associated with a delegation of responsibility and discretion but little actual power, accountability requires both discipline and trust (Clegg, 1994).

Many of the arrangements which support co-operation within the community and voluntary sectors are 'notoriously opaque...whimsical and self-justifying' (Batsleer and Randall, 1992:199). This lack of surveillance creates hidden spaces for impropriety, discrimination and failure. It can undermine the perceived legitimacy of 'community involvement', allowing the voices of users, residents or other potential partners/beneficiaries to be distorted or suppressed altogether, as appears to have happened with the Scottish social inclusion partnerships (Collins and Foster, 1999). In order to restore the credibility of community involvement it is necessary to build formal infrastructures (M.Stewart, 1998a), as well as strengthening informal accountability webs. Face-to-face interactions and trust are important to both of these, and networking within and across the sectors provides an effective means of building new forms of 'felt accountability' (Burns, 1997), whilst preserving the autonomy of the separate groups. 'Well-connected' communities (with established voluntary associations and robust informal networking arrangements) are well-placed and well-equipped to make a major contribution to multi-agency developments around many issues and at all levels.

LEADERSHIP OR LEADERS?

Traditional ideas of leadership have focused on the qualities and behaviour of individuals, examining their personal traits and styles in order to identify the characteristics of effective leadership (Dawson, 1996). Charisma has been a popular explanation (Weber, 1930; 1947), but its exact components have remained elusive (Kets de Vries, 1988). It has also been suggested that effective leadership is contingent on circumstances (Fiedler, 1967; 1987), such as the motivations and commitment of 'followers' so that the leader leads by matching their 'vision' to potential, but realistic actions by the 'followership' (Hollander, 1995). 'New leadership' models (e.g. Bryman, 1986; 1992) also emphasise this interactional facet of leadership. Transformational leaders (Burns, 1978) are said to both instil shared values and generate trust amongst their followers (Bennis and Nanus, 1985). They tend to be situated at key intersections in the flow of information and are assiduous in cultivating

dynamic relationships amongst a variety of people (Boissevain, 1974; Kouzes and Posner, 1987; Knoke, 1990a; 1990b; Yukl, 1998).

It has been suggested that such leaders emerge during periods of uncertainty and turbulence (Bass and Avolio, 1990). As we have seen, these are the conditions which favour network forms of organisation and an alternative explanation is that it is primarily the networks that are effective in managing these, rather than the individuals. The apparent leader is merely the 'focal person in a network of relationships' (Smith and Peterson, 1988:69). However, networks are neither static nor given. They are developed through skills and activities that can be strategically applied to create networks which are effective in gathering and interpreting information from different perspectives, thus enabling accurate and sensitive appraisals of a changing environment (Hosking and Morley, 1988). An ability to operate at the edges of social expectations may be an important attribute of this rôle allowing such 'leaders' to cross cultural and organisational borders (Steyrer, 1998; Regine and Lewin, 2000) and get to know a lot of people (Laguerre, 1994:89). This sets up an array of 'weak ties' with themselves as a key node (Prince, 1998), enabling them to act as mediators around a variety of issues and initiatives. They are able to operate as liaison officer, advocate, gate-keeper, co-ordinater and itinerant broker (Gould and Fernandez, 1989). It is this rôle that we now recognise as that of a good 'networker' or 'connector' (Gladwell, 2000). Networking is an important aspect of leadership primarily because it enables influence (persuasive power) to permeate beyond the immediate and present vicinity (Kay, 1996). Recent evidence indicates that 'community leaders', those who become representatives on partnership boards, tend to be the individuals who are active in a number of organisations and can act as bridging mechanisms (Geddes, 1998:114; Purdue et al, 2000). They are likely to be involved in local networks linking a range of issues and groups. This is important because it allows them to contribute to cross-cutting themes (for example around social exclusion, Murray et al, 2000) and to be pro-active in influencing agendas, as well as specific decisions.

Most studies of leadership examined its operation within particular individuals, specific organisations or historical situations. In contrast, community workers operate in complex arenas comprising overlapping communities and local voluntary organisations. Rôles and relationships are more fluid; 'leaders' and 'activists' come and go, depending on personal circumstances and the nature of the concern. As the eco-anarchist, Bookchin (1991:164) noted "the great individuals of history are rooted psychologically in viable and vibrant communities". It is perhaps more appropriate to explore a

'networking model of leadership', which is enabling and co-operative rather than charismatic or vanguardist (Fulmer and Keys, 1998b). Community leadership resides within a web of relationships (Ball and Ball, 1982:81) and across many interacting organisations (Elsdon et al, 1995). Initiative and responsibility are dispersed so that individuals (or particular agencies) are able to move into positions of leadership to co-ordinate activities where they have particular expertise, experience or energy. It allows a 'people's praxis' to emerge, which is empowering and animating for all participants (Tilakaratna, 1985; Rahman, 1993:80). This is the approach preferred by social development workers from and in the South (Craig and Mayo, 1995; Singh and Titi, 1995; Norris, 2000).

STRATEGIES FOR EMPOWERMENT

Since the 1970s the distribution of power has been at the heart of debates about the purpose of community development. Radical community workers have long been aware of the dispersed nature of power and have seen their central task as shifting the balance of power within society by helping people to make connections with others who share their oppression or predicament (e.g. Alinsky, 1972; Baldock, 1977; Jelfs, 1982). Alinsky sees power as "organised energy", a view which finds a resonance in Maffesoli's reference to the "puissance" of the neo-tribal throng (1996:72). Collective organising as a strategy for achieving power is concerned primarily with processes of connection, negotiation and persuasion (Dawson, 1996). Morgan (1986) suggests that one source of power in organisations is 'control' over boundaries and informal networks. In this sense, empowerment is about re-configuring relationships and patterns of influence, rather than 'seizing power'. Within community development, organisation has been seen as a vehicle for empowerment and community workers have often found themselves assisting in the creation, management and occasionally dissolution of formal structures. Their work programmes are usually dominated by tasks relating to finance, constitutions, administration, legal responsibilities and public relations.

At one level, it could be said that it is factors in the social environment which empower (and oppress). Ferguson (1996) argues for a 'modified empowerment paradigm' which uses 'affinity networks' to develop what she calls re-constituted 'bridge-identities' to acknowledge and integrate differing experiences. This is seen as the basis for pro-justice alliances and participatory democracy. Yon (1999) suggests that 'communities of identity' represent capillaries which draw down and channel power to improve the life chances of those most disadvantaged by institutional discrimination. Strategies for empowerment might therefore

include increasing, improving and incorporating useful and positive connections into the routine interactions and habits of people's lives, as was originally advocated by Lukacs (1911) and Lefebvre (1947; 1991) in their conceptualisation of the revolution of everyday life. Rees (1991) recognises the importance of networking practices within empowerment strategies, especially where these enhance credibility and influence within decision-making arenas and encourage creative lateral-thinking (cf. De Bono, 1994). Just as the French students on the streets of Paris in 1968 cried, "Power to the imagination", so networking releases the initiative and ingenuity of individuals, whilst maintaining a framework for co-ordinated action.

Empowerment involves values, structure and process (Clegg, 1989). It promotes (somewhat paradoxically) both autonomy and solidarity. Empowerment within community development is about achieving agency through conscientisation, collective organisation and self-reliance, rather than through individual advocacy or consumer-like choices (Rahman, 1993). It is about "self-help, participation, networking and equity" (Onyx and Benton, 1995:46), and involves a re-examination and negotiation of the whole matrix of social and political relationships. Empowerment is a cyclical process, taking place at psychological as well as organisational and political levels. It needs to be linked to collective action in order to be sustainable (Forrest, 1999). Empowerment builds individual and collective capacity to influence decisions through continual learning and interaction (Stewart and Taylor, 1995). It therefore involves developing relationships amongst the key participants through caucusing (Page, 1997) and mutually beneficial exchanges (Morgan, 1986). For the individual networking is self-empowering (Cheater, 1999) because it reduces isolation (Bell, 1992), provides supportive mentoring (Scott-Welsh, 1980; Segerman-Peck, 1991) and offers career advancement, verging on the disreputable, but apparently not quite illegal practice of croneyism (Baker, 2000; Alexander, 1997; Hayes, 1996).

At a collective level, networking helps people to find allies and build organisations to strengthen their voice within and outside the decision-making arena. Sharing experience and expertise in order to develop collective activity harnesses synergy through the creation of ties of solidarity and common purpose. This can be used to develop internal problem-solving strategies (Larsson and Christensen, 1993) or to assert a particular viewpoint. The strength of united action may exert sufficient pressure on decision-makers for a community's interests to be successfully articulated. It is often useful to cultivate links beyond the immediate community building alliances with individuals and organisations that have greater access to power and resources. Furthermore, empowerment involves shifts in

power relations *within* the system. It attempts to address issues around structural inequalities (gender, age, disability, etc.) based on 'equal opportunities' policies and anti-discriminatory legislation which endeavour to improve both influence and access for those who find it difficult to participate in the networks that make decisions (Skelcher et al, 1996).

A networking approach to empowerment adopts a model of power which is positive, contextual and relational (Dawson, 1996). It recognises that there is a political economy of relationships, framed within a dominant hegemony of class, but cross-cut with other dimensions of oppression. Power relations run the economy, but are also internalised in personal identities (Digeser, 1992), perpetuated through the micro-practices of everyday and organisational life (Benschop and Dooreward, 1998). If community development is about empowering the people who are disadvantaged by the current system (and as Barr (1995; 1997) and Forrest, 1999) remind us this may not be universally accepted), then networking offers one means of subverting, confronting and circumventing powerful discourses to gain influence and resources that would otherwise remain in the hands of dominant interests.

Servian's (1996) vector model and Clegg's (1989) 'circuits of power' provide useful metaphors for the networking model of empowerment. They suggest that power has elastic, effervescent qualities (cf. Maffesoli, 1996). It can be facilitative and generative; a positive force for achieving co-operation and mutual benefit rather than dominance and exploitation. Social networks harness and focus power for collective ends by maintaining solidarity (Waddington et al, 1991), hope (Byrne, 1989) and consciousness of a shared oppression (Oliver, 1997). Informal interactions develop actor networks (Callon et al, 1986) which are able to negotiate or demand change in the existing 'frameworks of power' (Clegg, 1989). These latent networks are important hidden resources within organisations (Hearn and Parkin, 1989), around urban social movements (Gerlach and Hine, 1970; A.Scott, 1990; Castells and Henderson, 1987) and for community action (Lowe, 1986, plus others). As Stewart remarks, "power shared can be power enlarged" (1998a:65).

Morgan (1986) sees organisations as political agents engaged in struggles to control information, resources and meaning, thereby increasing one's ability to define the stage of action (p.198) and influence decisions (p.167). Organisations are important but they are not the only means of collective empowerment. Empowerment also involves cultivating the links and mutually beneficial exchanges between relevant stakeholders in order to create informal networks and alliances (Rees, 1991;Taylor, 1995a). Fluid coalitions can then

emerge around specific issues to promote or oppose particular decisions. Assembling these consortia involves transcending or penetrating the barriers and conventions which impede the flow of power and information across social and organisational boundaries (hooks, 1989; Swain et al, 1993; Tarrow, 1994). To some extent this involves building a counter-hegemony, an alternative worldview which challenges or subverts prevalent ideas. It may also benefit from links with powerful bodies or influential people as one way of accessing or exerting influence (Duck, 1992). This may run the risk of co-option and political isolation from potential supporters and allies, which can be avoided by maintaining lateral connections within a lattice-like structure so as to ensure good communication and trust amongst potential collaborators (Clutterbuck, 1994).

Since at least the early suffragette movement, self-empowerment has been recognised as crucial to the achievement of collective goals (Pankhurst, 1913). This was also recognised by the anti-slavery campaigner Frederick Douglass, (cited in Bobo et al, 1991) who declared a century earlier that "If there is no struggle, there is no progress." The struggle for a re-distribution of power can only succeed if those who are relatively powerless are directly involved in articulating and asserting their interests, rather than reliant on self-appointed champions or professional organisers such as social entrepreneurs.

Freire was possibly the first person to use the term networking in relation to social transformation. It enables people to make better use of skills and resources already present within their social situation (Marwell and Oliver, 1993:174) and is fundamental to sustainable development and self-determination (Rahman, 1993). **Empowerment is essentially a process of proactive participation through which the relations and micro-practices of interaction are constantly re-negotiated and re-configured**. Individuals acquire skills, confidence, awareness and broader aspirations. They also develop or consolidate connections with people who can help them make the leap from victim to agent, taking greater control over their own lives and confronting dominant discourses of oppression.

Almost by definition, empowerment is anti-oppressive (Mullender and Ward, 1991). It involves challenging the discrimination, prejudices and marginalisation which characterise most forms of oppression (Stuart, 1993). Social psychological models of social change (Schneiderman, 1988), organising (Hosking and Morley, 1991), collective action (Kelly and Breinlinger, 1996) and protest (Klandermans, 1997) each demonstrate that empowerment and participation require cognitive and emotional processes in discovering or defining the shared problem and developing a collective identity in relation to its solution. Freire called

this 'conscientisation' (1972) or it might also be regarded as the emergence of 'organic solidarity' (Durkheim,1893). Either way, the motivation of the individuals involved is a key factor and is affected by their previous experience, their perception of the current situation and expectations for the future. All of these are influenced by relationships and interactions within the social environment created by their personal networks (Milardo, 1986; Latour, 1987). Empowerment is as much a socio-psychological process, as it is political.

NETWORKING AS PROCESS AND PRACTICE

For the purposes of this inquiry I will consider networking as a means of developing relationships which promote collective, rather than individual benefit. The use of 'network' as a verb is a relatively recent, but rapidly popularised term, which quickly produced its own parody in the question "Is it networking, or not working?" There are very few formal definitions available, though Hosking and Morley's statement that "networking is a social process in which actors move around their decision-making environment to build their own understanding and to mobilise influence" captures significant features of the practice (1991:226). This is not to suggest that networking is a new phenomenon, merely that it is increasingly acknowledged as an important and strategic aspect of our working lives. The behaviour it refers to appears in various guises in the community (social) work literature, as relationship work, (Perlman, 1979), contact making (Thomas, 1982), inter-agency liaison (Thomas, 1983), co-ordinating, establishing and maintaining links between organisations (Twelvetrees, 1982), and integrating (Hadley, 1987). From an early stage in the development of community work as a professional activity, writers and trainers have identified the practitioner rôle of helping people and organisations to co-operate and communicate across boundaries as a significant, perhaps unique, aspect of the job. Networks were regarded as something community workers needed to know about and could use, but the idea of intervening to change or develop these configurations came later.

In the 1990s, the word 'networking' first appears to describe these processes. Trevillion (1992) writes about a 'networking approach' to community partnership, whilst Payne (1993) refers to the development of 'linkages' as "effective networking in social care." My first article (Gilchrist, 1993) appeared the same year, setting out the 'importance of networking in community work' and arguing that it "offers a more fluid and flexible method of organising and communicating." I raised issues of strategy, serendipity, solidarity, access and equality which were further developed in the CDF briefing paper,

'Community Development and Networking' (Gilchrist, 1995a) and have become major themes of this current inquiry.

Over the past decade there has been a sea-change in the use of the term. Networking has been increasingly recognised amongst practitioners as a vital aspect of their work (cf. Taylor, et al, 2000; Wilson and Wilde, 2001). The Federation of Community Work Training Groups includes a session on 'networking' as part of their Introduction to Community Work Skills course and it is referred to as an area of competence within the functional analysis developed for NVQ purposes. In recent years, job adverts and person specifications have included 'networking skills' as a requirement, and most recently posts have been created specifically to develop, co-ordinate and manage networks at every level of governance, indicating the value attached to this way of working, at least within the voluntary sector. Networking is now so often mentioned in adverts and person specifications that in their survey of current community work employment, Glenn and Pearce (1998) use the word as one of their key terms for defining relevant jobs. At eight successive SCCD conferences (1992 - 1999) I have run well-attended workshops on networking and continue to be invited to speak at other forums on 'effective and inclusive networking'. Recent articles (Gilchrist, 1998b; 1999) published in the SCCD News magazine have attracted an enthusiastic response from community workers who have used the descriptions and explanations offered to persuade their managers and funders to support their own networking. There is clearly an enthusiasm for networking within the voluntary and social care sector which simply didn't register 5 years ago. Gann (1996) identifies 'networking' as a measure of quality standards in the management of voluntary organisations, referring to regular liaison meetings and participation in local and national networks in order to share information and develop joint services. However, this is one of the few acknowledgements of networking as an indicator of 'good practice' from a management point of view. Practical manuals on networking have recently been published (McCabe, 1997; LGMB, 1998) and I know of at least two groups who are currently working on guides or training packs designed to improve people's networking capabilities (e.g. Lyford, 2001; Saunders et al, unpublished). Guidelines on developing and assessing community involvement in partnership arrangements exhort people working for local authorities 'to develop networks' (e.g. DETR, 1997; Wilson and Charlton, 1997; Chanan, 1997b; COGS, 2000; Burns and Taylor, 2000; Sullivan et al, 2001).

Networking is recognised as a means of personal and political empowerment, through (feminist) collective organising (Dominelli, 1995; Scott-Welsh, 1980), fostering alliances

(Adamson et al, 1988) and the lobbying of influential decision-makers (Lattimer, 1994). There is even a feng shui guide on how to attract (and presumably retain) influential people into one's personal networks in order to scale "new heights of achievement and happiness" (Too, 1997). Rees (1991) refers to organisers' social networks as 'intangible resources' which should be nurtured through establishing trust and credibility, whilst Mondros and Wilson (1994) recommend networking as a means of 'building bridges to participation'. Simply creating more ways of reaching people with information and encouragement might address some of the current issues around low rates of involvement in community consultation and partnership arrangements (e.g. Kyprianou, 1997).

Granovetter (1978) suggested that networks (and specifically the weak ties) were useful in attracting sufficient number of contributors to make a project viable, and Marwell and Oliver's (1993) computer model of collective action includes the idea of a 'critical mass' of support. Speck and Attneave (1973) refer to the need for diversity in assembling family-like coalitions, and the same approach is recommended for project teams (Belbin, 1981; Hoskings and Morley, 1991). Networking is also identified as a means of stabilising 'turbulent' and complex organisational environments (R.Scott, 1992) and dealing with inter-communal tensions or ethnic conflict (Norman, 1993; Hall and Camplisson, 1996; Gilchrist, 1998c).

On a more sardonic note, networking has been dismissed as simply a manipulative and superficial way of getting ahead in life through the use (and abuse) of contacts:

> "Networking...it's a waste of time and money and there's no guarantee it'll get you anywhere...to networkers the person over your shoulder is always more interesting than you are" (Browning, 1997).

There has been a tendency to view networking as concerned primarily with 'schmoozing' for personal gain using contacts to gather information, which I have seen termed intelligent 'environment scanning' (Morgan, 1989). Clearly, there are aspects of networking that are motivated by self-interest and reflect one's own identity, but not necessarily in the way portrayed in the cartoon overleaf.

Figure 5. Cartoon from Guardian Weekend (25th October 1997)

Organisation theorists such as Salaman and Thompson have emphasised the emergent nature of organisations, arising from complex informal interactions and negotiations (1980:57). Milofsky (1988a:6) goes so far as to suggest that "community development requires network-building" in order to create and support viable community problem-solving mechanisms. Handy (1988:55) also urges the development of web-like formations for dealing with complex problems, and many large corporations are actively encouraging their staff to network with counterparts in other organisations (Thatcher, 1996; Hayes, 1996). These two ideas of emergence and complexity will become important themes in the final section of the thesis (cf. Mihata, 1997; Holland, 1998).

Much of the literature on community, organisations and networking highlights the importance of one-to-one personal relationships, developed at the micro-level of inter-personal skills or at the macro-level of structure and purpose. Less has been written about the meso-level of collective activity: establishing and managing effective networks which can be used for a variety of purposes, including collective problem-solving, resource mobilisation, organisation development and social change (McCarthy and Zald, 1977; Zald, 1992). Recently networking capacity has been recognised within

guidelines issued for applications to the European Social Fund (Objective 4) and opportunities for networking are deliberately programmed into conference timetables. Although there are still criticisms of networking as a practice and as a concept, some general themes emerge from the literature reviewed in this section which form the basis for the rest of the thesis.

These are:

- Networks are especially effective modes of organisation in managing chaotic and complex situations.
- Networks are based on relationships, not simply connections. The personal, emotional dimensions are important.
- Networking is a holistic process, involving a strategic interweaving of knowledge, skills and values.
- Networking is a vital aspect of building multi-agency partnerships and alliances which span organisational boundaries.

Discovering how networking operates in practice became the central focus of the fieldwork, starting with a rather introspective consideration of my experience as a political activist. This became a springboard to examine the practice of professional community workers.

Section Two

The Research Inquiry

Chapter Six

Methodology: approaches and issues

Chapter Seven

The Festival Against Racism

Chapter Eight

The Panel Study – overview of the design and findings

CHAPTER SIX

Methodology - approaches and issues

"There are many contradictions in the process of development of a complex thing."
Mao (1937)

This section focuses on the research methodology. It begins with an examination of the rationale and methods used in the inquiry. This is followed by a description of the case study and the four phases of the Panel Study.

My thoughts about networking generated and tested over the past five years have emerged through a constant interplay between experience and ideas, my own and countless others. Theorising has been very much part of "critically reflective practice" (Taket and White, 1997:103) and the resultant model is grounded in the sense that it is rooted in experience, and developed as an "constant and flexible accompaniment" to the gathering of data (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). My life and professional work are full of examples of networking but as Durkheim said, illustrating an idea is not the same as proving it (1893). "All theorising requires research" (Stanley, 1990:15) and the inquiry needed to 'unpack' practice to make explicit "common wisdom" about networks (Everitt, 1992; Lynn, 1996). This involved seeking explanations from an examination of models of human behaviour derived in a variety of contexts and perspectives. In my attempt to combine epistemology and ontology, I have been strongly influenced by 'new paradigm' human inquiry (Reason and Rowan, 1981a) and feminist research practice (Stanley and Wise, 1983; Shakespeare et al, 1993; Maynard and Purvis, 1994).

As someone schooled in positivist scientific method, it has been reassuring and invigorating to discover that there are legitimate alternatives to statistical surveys and controlled experiments for investigating the human experience. The research process at the heart of this inquiry has been the development of 'praxis' through description and analysis of real experience (Schön, 1983; Argyris and Schön, 1978). My approach is partly based in models of experiential learning and combines practice, reflection and inquiry.

> "A reflective approach affirms the importance of experiential and inter-connected ways of knowing the world, and favours more emancipatory and participatory research practices...[It] blurs the traditional boundaries and separations between 'knowing and doing', 'values and facts', 'art and science', 'theory and practice', 'subjectivity and objectivity'...Instead a more holistic and

complex understanding...might be reached by blurring these distinctions and allowing for multiple categories." (Fook, 1996:5)

Sometimes this reflection occurred on my own. More often it was through highly stimulating conversations with others, which invoked both casual and intentional checks on my thinking. These discussions offered me a kind of informal triangulation, "enabling questions to be posed in new ways, leading to fresh insights and understandings" (Kelleher at al, 1990:120), especially through the use of metaphor.

UNFOLDING 'PRAXIS'

Writing up the results and producing papers for wider publication helped to explicate and consolidate the on-going processes of experience, data-gathering, reflection, interpretation and analysis (Hammersely and Atkinson, 1983:222). I have deliberately created opportunities to share my research within the community development field, running workshops, writing articles for Newsletters and presenting papers in academic forums. Each of these has provided useful feedback on the validity and relevance of the emergent theories. My thinking has also been developed through literary encounters (novels, poems, children's stories) or when grappling with complex, tantalising scientific concepts, which have thrown unexpected light on familiar territory. I have used the ideas contained in Rowan's dialectical cycle (Reason and Rowan, 1981a), but have not consciously followed the 6 stages described by Coleman (1991) in her account of organisational research, namely:

- 'being' – identifying and acknowledging the issues to be explored,
- 'thinking' – considering relevant literature and epistemological questions,
- 'project planning and implementation' – carrying out the investigation,
- 'encounter' – describing and analysing the findings,
- 'making sense' – integrating these with literature to develop issues,
- 'communication' – drawing and disseminating conclusions.

As indicated in the table overleaf, the empirical phase of the inquiry comprised a case study, followed by a more substantial Panel Study, involving a number of community development practitioners. These will be described in more detail in later chapters but for now I will give a brief outline of the rationale for each phase.

August 1993 onwards	Preliminary reading; writing CDF pamphlet	Reading
March – October 1994	Organising Bristol Festival Against racism	
	FAR case study	
December 1994 – September 1995	Narrative, writing and preparation	Writing
November 1995 – April 1996	Individual interviews	Reflection
May 1996	Focus group discussion	
June – December 1996	Analysis and writing	Revising
	Panel Study	
February, March 1997	Postal questionnaire	
May – August 1997	Critical incidents recordings	
December 1997	Individual interviews	Discussion
March 1998	Focus group discussion	
August 1998 – May 2001	Analysis of findings, literature review, writing up and editing thesis	Workshops

Table 1. Map of the stages of inquiry

Although, like Coleman, I have actively sought to "bring experiential knowing into the research process" (1991:2), my approach has been less systematic. Rather it has developed through a "routine reflexivity" (Skeggs, 1994) encompassing all those aspects in parallel, such that different processes were important at different stages of the inquiry. My involvement in the inquiry has been a process of 'immersion' (Hardiman, 1990), to the extent that I have described the experience as analogous to the early stages of 'falling in love' (research seminar presentation at UWE, 7th June 1994), imagined glimpses of the beloved, mild (?!) obsession, a desire to share that enthusiasm with others and yet fiercely possessive should anyone else express more than a passing interest. This "passionate scholarship" (DuBois, 1983) has necessarily become tempered with a degree of "critical subjectivity". Reason (1988a:12) describes this as

> "a quality of awareness in which we do not suppress our primary subjective experience; nor do we allow ourselves to be overwhelmed and swept along by it; rather we raise it to consciousness and use it as part of the inquiry process."

This has guided the investigation whilst ensuring that it meets the requirements of both academic rigour and practical relevance so that the findings would be recognised as valid,

transferable and authentic. In order to track and make explicit my personal orientation towards the research topic, I have maintained a reflexive journal, recording my motivations, reasoning and emotions during the process of the whole inquiry (cf. Burgess, 1981; Lincoln and Guba, 1985:327; Mies, 1993:68; Skeggs, 1994:87). Scattered throughout my notebooks, in amongst the 'academic' note-taking, are musings from my life and reflections on the experience of doing research, all of which have contributed to my theorising (Reinharz, 1983:175; Maynard, 1994:16).

THE CASE STUDY

At the outset of the inquiry I thought I had adopted a cross-cutting grounded theory approach in which Glaser and Strauss (1967) advocate using a variety of case studies in order to generate substantive theory and then test its formal propositions. However, I recognise that I embarked on the inquiry with a fairly strong belief in the value of networking and its contribution to community development. The purpose of the inquiry was to 'prove' this model in relation to a wider range of experience and practice than my own. I therefore adopted a 'new strategy' which attempted to simultaneously "discover", develop and test emerging "concepts and theory" (Layder, 1993:198). I used only one case study as a sensitising device, to identify issues and to develop preliminary questions for the main inquiry (Stake, 1995). Yin (1994) suggests that case studies can be used as descriptive, exploratory and/or explanatory research tools. He advocates the use of case studies as a prelude to further investigation, but reminds us that their value is in providing revelatory examples rather than firm proof of specific theoretical propositions. Case studies are useful in situations where there are several variables of interest, which can be examined through multiple sources of evidence and when there has already been some initial theory development. They require a different set of quality criteria to more experimental sampling techniques, deriving their reliability from the internal and external validity of theoretical constructs, and the rigour with which data is collected and analysed (Kidder and Judd, 1986). In this inquiry, rather unusually perhaps, the preliminary stage comprised a retrospective consideration of the organisation of a major community-political initiative (and specifically my rôle within this).

The case study bore a resemblance to the ethnographic approach used by Marsh et al (1978) in their classic study of football hooliganism, in that the researcher (myself) was also an actor in the drama. Through personal recollection, informal discussion with others involved, and examination of relevant documentation I was able to identify

salient features of my own practice and consider how they contributed to the overall 'shape' and 'flavour' of the 1994 Bristol Festival Against Racism (cf. M.Smith, 1994:32). Secondary material in my possession (appointments diary, notes of meetings and the programme itself) bear testimony to processes of contact-making, cajoling, chivvying, clarifying and conflict mediation which were used to move the idea from vision to reality. Telling the story of the Festival became a useful means of 'making sense of the experience' (Reason and Hawkins, 1988:100), but the inferences made from my direct and partial experience also needed checking against other perspectives. I therefore used "collective research cycling" through individual interviews and a group discussion to compare my versions of the process against other people's interpretations and recollections (Heron, 1988). Rigorous analysis of these accounts of the Festival 'process' would avoid an over-reliance on description or explanation (Hakim, 1992:72) and reveal some significant themes and questions which were transferable to the field of community development. All case studies risk an inherent bias, and this may have been exacerbated by my total immersion in the material, but as Yin recommends, I have maintained a "chain of evidence" and data base which can be externally verified or reviewed (1994:79,90). I also consciously tried to remain open to 'rival' interpretations of the data and to consider alternative perspectives. The resultant analysis in Chapter Seven includes several unexpected findings and insights.

I wanted to examine through reflection and interviews how skills, certain strategies and situations contributed to effective networking for collective organisation. The first stage was to tell my own story of the Festival. Moving through cycles of narrative and reflection I became increasingly aware of the significance of trust, informality, reputation, values and propinquity in the sustainability of personal networks and the development of leadership. My first attempt to narrate the story of my involvement in the Festival was essentially descriptive and egocentric, but (prompted by Marilyn Taylor, my research advisor at the time) it generated a number of pertinent issues around my rôle and practice in relation to power, democracy, accountability and risk. Whilst reliance on my own recollections and personal perspective might reduce the problem of hermeneutics, conclusions based on such evidence were insufficiently robust to support more than tentative theoretical speculation. There needed to be some testing of these ideas against the experience and reflections of other participants. I needed to talk to people who had contributed in different ways to the Festival and compare their perspectives on the methods of organisation and my rôle in particular. The table on the next page indicates the rôle and nature of involvement of each of the interviewees.

Interviewee	Position	Rôle in the Festival
JK – white woman	Local authority community worker	Organised several events
RS – Black man	Director, positive action training and employment company, Chair Avon Race Forum	Organised an event and authorised support from Avon Race Forum
BP – Black man	Director, voluntary agency supporting victims of racial incidents	Member of ARA and organiser of one event
LB – white woman	Co-ordinator, community-based nursery	Organiser of one of events
LC – white woman	Local authority youth worker	Organiser of several events
MG – white man	Secretary, regional trade union organisation	Member of Festival finance committee and organiser of an event
SG – white man	Volunteer Festival administrator	Member of ARA, managed office, finances, and administration of programme, organised an event
PC – white man	Director, Race Equality Council	Informal support to organisers and offered formal sponsorship of REC.
MJ – Black woman	Solicitor, specialist in immigration and nationality at Law Centre	Member of ARA, Festival Treasurer and member of informal steering group
RJ – white man	Trade union official, convenor of Black members group	Secretary of ARA, member of finance committee, informal support to organisers, organised events
BS – Black man	Principal Race Equality Officer, County Council	Member of ARA, informal support to organisers, persuaded colleagues and key organisations to support the Festival
RE – Black woman	Worker with multi-racial Church based project	Member of ARA, attended steering group meetings, organised events

Table 2. Informants in the Festival Against Racism case study

My initial plan had been to interview only those individuals in the central organising cluster but at the suggestion of two of the respondents, this group of six was subsequently expanded to include an equal number of individuals who had organised events for the Festival programme. I was anxious to gain insights and views from both the core and the periphery of the organisation, which would corroborate, complement, challenge or even contradict my version of events.

The twelve individual interview transcripts were analysed to draw out the main themes and questions for a focus group discussion, which took place about 6 months after the first interviews. Along with the invitation to the group discussion, I sent out copies of their own interview transcripts to each of the respondents and (perhaps more controversially) a copy

of a conference paper on values in networks which set out my initial thinking (Gilchrist, 1995b). My intention in doing this was to test the trustworthiness of the data through member checking (Lincoln and Guba, 1985:314) and to stimulate a shared approach to the 'construction of meaning'.

The interviews were opportunities for both "correction and amplification" of my initial propositions (Heron, 1988:50). Following these up with a group discussion was intended to allow the development of a common narrative through expression, explanation and the exploration of different interpretations (Reason and Hawkins, 1988:80). In the event, only three people were able to attend the focus group, and the discussion did not add a great deal to the ideas already articulated. Nevertheless, it provided a useful opportunity to debate some emerging hypotheses and explore issues that had been raised in the earlier accounts. It was also a chance for me to thank people (with a meal) for their contributions to my research.

Metaphors were particularly useful in the early stages of an inquiry in revealing new perspectives and similarities, which in turn acted as a guide towards further insights and questions (Pinder and Bourgeois, 1982:647). Alvesson (1993:116) warns that metaphors can also 'shadow', or even mask, important features of the phenomenon under investigation. I found it helpful, therefore, to draw on a wide range of metaphors to guide the inquiry and enter into discussions with others.

Comparisons with more familiar concepts allowed fruitful exploration (and eventual explanation) of key issues and phenomena. Morgan (1983) encourages the use of metaphors at an epistemological level of research and elaborates on this to develop different ways "to understand the complex and paradoxical character of organisational life" (1986:13). Metaphorical methods are concerned with the communication of complicated inquiry to a wider audience, thereby opening up and enriching the participation of those most intimately bound up with the object of study itself. 'Imaginisation' can be used as a vehicle for articulating and exploring the links between experience and theory, in order to educate and empower practitioners through reflective learning and peer-based dialogue (Gould, 1996; Fook, 1996c).

The case study and the metaphors which it generated provided valuable devices for developing, honing and organising my initial ideas. Most importantly they confirmed that I wanted the focus of the inquiry to be on networking rather than networks. Significant issues were unveiled around rôles, strategies, skills and power dynamics

which could be explored in greater depth in a more probing (and objective) investigation of how networking was used within community development practice. I also needed to discover to what extent my contribution to the Festival Against Racism resembled the professional community work rôle and how it was different. Perhaps my organising style as unpaid Co-ordinator was both unusual and circumstantial? I didn't believe this to be the case but in order to draw any meaningful conclusions I needed to compare that experience with a wider range of practice situations.

RESEARCH OPTIONS

There were a number of alternative strategies available for investigating the value of networking. As indicated in Chapter Four, network analysis provides a possible method for describing changes in the pattern of linkages which result from interventions or shifts in personal allegiances and organisational alliances. This approach might have allowed some empirical examination of the network-related outcomes of community development practice, but was rejected for this inquiry as too unwieldy in terms of gathering, presenting and interpreting the necessary data. Network analysis is however being explored as a methodology for measuring the impact of regeneration strategies in deprived neighbourhoods, but this application is in its very early stages.

I did consider adopting a more experimental approach to the inquiry, using comparative methods of theory testing. For example, it would be interesting to set up an action-research project comparing the pace and quality of network development in two similar areas, one of which is subject to an explicit networking model of community development, whilst the other experiences community work practice which is more focused on individual and/or organisation development. This could also be carried out as a longitudinal study on the same area, looking at the 'before' and 'after' levels of community networks resulting from community development interventions. A variant on this method of inquiry might introduce training and management to promote networking practice to see if this made a noticeable difference to the connections within communities and between organisations operating in the area.

A related approach, with a more intense focus on the practice of individual community workers, could have attempted a 'cause and effects' analysis, tracing the antecedents and outcomes of specific interactions, and making an evaluation of their impact on 'community' and the resultant chain of events. None of these alternatives

methodologies were pursued because of resource and time constraints, and the difficulty in controlling for possibly relevant factors in the 'experimental' conditions.

THE PANEL STUDY

The Panel Study involved a group of community workers undergoing a "cycle of collaborative reflection" (Marshall and McLean, 1988) to "engage deeply and sensitively with experience" (Reason, 1994a:10). I was concerned to ensure that this part of the project reflected the processes and values of community development (cf. Doyle, 1996), trying as far as was possible to work *with* the practitioners in ways which were beneficial rather than exploitative (Graham and Jones, 1992; Hawkins, 1996). Due to various constraints (time, money, other people's commitments) I did not attempt to set up a fully participative group of co-researchers in which we jointly determined and conducted the investigation (Reason, 1988b; 1994a; Lynn, 1996). Instead, I have drawn on the principles of 'co-operative inquiry' (Heron, 1996) and Rowan's dialectical cycle to develop a methodology which values transparency, partnership and authentic experience. My approach attempted to "de-mystify practice and research by being explicit about purposes, values, skills and knowledge" (Everitt et al, 1992:66). It was not feasible to establish joint ownership of the project, but I could (and did) try to be as empowering and participative as circumstances allowed. This can be seen in the articles and letters I wrote to recruit members of the panel, and in the responses in the evaluation forms returned at the end of the inquiry. See Appendices H, I, S. Participation in the Panel was voluntary and attracted community workers who were by and large already interested in networking as a method of practice. My sample was by no means random and so the results contain an inherent bias. It might have been prudent to include practitioners who were more sceptical or opposed to the use of networking as a method of community development. This would have necessitated a different set of questions in the final three phases of the Study, but would certainly have raised some interesting issues around equality, accountability and professional rôles. It might also have illuminated the circumstances in which networking is not an appropriate or useful method of working. There is a certain irony in that my 'networking' approach to recruitment resulted in a predominance of 'converts' amongst the Panel members and a likelihood that the more negative aspects of networking practice may have been overlooked.

The Panel Study was designed to encourage reflection in- and on-practice, (Schön, 1983; 1987) and to discover 'theories-in-use' by directly involving practitioners in the inquiry (Argyris and Schön, 1996: Ch.2; Lynn, 1996). There was a clear plan at the outset, but like many forms of qualitative research, this needed to be "elastic", adapting to changes in

thinking and circumstances as the fieldwork proceeded (Janesick, 1994; Laragy, 1996). I took heed of Bryman's (1989) advice about qualitative research methods, which was to be opportunistic about using contacts, to be realistic about the amount of data which can usefully be collected and categorised, and to be aware of hermeneutic problems around interpretation. A project plan was devised, consisting of four complementary research tools intended to lead the panel members through successive and deepening explorations of their own experience and practice. These were

- a self-administered questionnaire,
- critical incidents recordings,
- semi-structured interviews and
- a focus group discussion.

The entire process was designed to reflect community development values by being as transparent and participative as possible. I used 'member checking' or 'informant review' of findings at every phase, partly as an attempt to involve the panel members fully in the research (Brechin, 1993) and partly as an on-going form of validation (Lincoln and Guba, 1985:314). This would ensure transparency and internal reflexivity (Gouldner, 1970; Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983) such that emerging themes could influence the questions and responses at subsequent stages (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). The development of theory would thus be cumulative, convergent, coherent and concordant with experiential knowledge. I wanted it to be "well-founded" in the practice and thinking of experienced practitioners (Heron, 1988:43). The purpose of the 'progressive' research design was to encourage panel members to develop their own reflection and theorising, culminating in a collective, but critical sharing of ideas. I shared Fook's view of theory

> "as a stimulus to thinking and practice; as a discourse framework with which to communicate about practice; as a basis from which to criticise and develop practice; as a way of understanding practice, and sometimes as a structure to guide our practice in uncertain situations" (1996b:138).

The 'recordings-plus-interview' technique has been shown to be particularly effective at revealing the 'muted' and 'taken for granted' aspects of experience and expertise in which I was interested (Zimmerman and Wieder, 1977; Benner, 1984; Brenner et al, 1985; Elliott, 1991). A fuller description, analysis and evaluation of the Panel Study is presented in Chapter Eight.

MYSELF AS RESEARCHER - DIFFICULTIES AND DILEMMAS

My rôle in the inquiry is best captured by Argyris and Schön's (1996) term 'agent-experient'. Although the research project endeavoured to reflect the principles of participatory inquiry (Everitt et al, 1992:60; Heron, 1996), I had no "delusions of equality" (Syddell, 1993) as I was directing not just facilitating the investigation. Nevertheless I felt that the research could (and should) achieve something positive for both the individuals involved and the community development field generally. In this sense, I was undertaking a form of action research in which I was seeking to empower others (Swantz and Vainio-Mattila, 1988; Shakespeare et al, 1993:6). My aims were driven by more than academic curiosity. I was partisan and wanted to explore 'good practice' in community development through related issues, such as equality and empowerment, on which I took a definite and explicit stance (Harding, 1987; Smith, 1987). Whilst recognising the problematic nature of this strategy (Hammersley, 1995:40), I wanted to undertake 'real world research' (Robson, 1993) which would make a difference in practice and promote a particular model of community development.

In the Panel Study, I saw my rôle predominantly as guiding and facilitating the reflection and theory development of a group of practitioners in a specially constituted 'community of inquirers' (Everitt et al, 1992:85), for whom I attempted to provide 'enabling and enlightened leadership' (Reason, 1988a). My rôle contained elements of explorer, educator and activist (Kelley et al, 1994:39). I wanted to develop a dialogue with my peers, using active interview techniques to establish 'conversation between equals' (Holstein and Gubrium, 1995) to construct a radical praxis by synthesising action with theory in order (to paraphrase Marx) not just to study the world, but to change it (Stanley, 1990; Maynard, 1994:25; Blackburn, 2000). This involved 'raising to consciousness' the everyday experience of a neglected area of community work practice.

I made maximum and pragmatic use of my academic position, my professional and political experience and my reputation within the community development field. Whilst this approach was partially ethnographic, in that I was sampling the behaviour of a specific community from the same critical plane of understanding (Smith, 1987), I was neither a 'novice stranger' nor an 'acceptable incompetent' (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983:73). As someone who actively used and advocated networking for community development I had a peculiar position in the research process as both subject and object of the inquiry. Within the Festival Against Racism case study, I was not only a retrospective observer and inquirer, my practice was at the centre of the inquiry. My activities and decision-making

provided the focus for reflection and observation by myself and others. This rôle is not one of those traditionally available along the 'participant-observer' spectrum (Gold, 1958; Junker, 1960). I was involved, committed and aligned within the setting. Adler and Adler's (1987) category of the 'complete member researcher' captures the opportunistic nature of the case study rôle, with the caveat that during the relevant piece of organising I had not been consciously acting as a researcher. Indeed I initially found it embarrassing to exploit this collective experience for my own research purposes and took pains to reassure my collaborators in the Festival that this had not been my original intention. People were surprisingly unconcerned at this and appeared more than willing to contribute to the subsequent inquiry.

Like Finnegan (1989:342) in her study of amateur musicians, this ambivalence on my part also impinged on the Panel Study, in which I was indirectly observing and directly interrogating my 'own community'. In order to maintain some semblance of research validity and emotional distance this form of 'auto-ethnography' (Hayano, 1990) must acknowledge a degree of reflexivity (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983:14) and requires 'bracketing' (Heron, 1988:58). And yet active engagement is "simultaneously enabling and disabling" (Peshkin, 1985:278). It affords the researcher distinct advantages in negotiating access to potential 'informants' (Hoffman, 1980:48) and establishing her own credibility (Peace, 1993:32). It may also however distort her judgement over what is significant or salient in a given situation or description. It was important to exercise my 'sociological imagination' (Wright Mills, 1959) in order to render the familiar as strange. The contextual knowledge and shared values that I brought as an 'insider' could be deemed as enhancing rather than contaminating the inquiry (Oakley, 1974; Holstein and Gubrium, 1995:46). It allowed me to explore the 'backstage region' (Goffman, 1959) and 'muted experiences' (E.Ardener, 1975) of community development practice. This was not, however, entirely unproblematic.

I was conscious of my relative power in relation to participants in the case study and the Panel Study. Not only was I, as an academic researcher, in a position to steer the whole process of data-gathering and interpretation (Hillard and Ramazanoglu, 1994), but I would be the primary beneficiary of this co-production of knowledge (Glucksmann, 1994). Moreover, my connections with the respondents in both studies did not begin and end with the research project. I knew or was known to all of the Festival Against Racism 'witnesses' and the majority of the Panel members. My rôles within these relationships included (in no particular order): colleague, friend, fellow activist, comrade, tutor, placement organiser, ex-lover, former employer, manager and 'chair' of a shared committee. My interactions with participants during the course of the inquiry were often tainted with extraneous issues and

emotions. Whilst it was useful to be able to use my current and past networks to recruit a 'focused sample' of potential participants (Hakim, 1992:141) and to make efficient use of limited resources, this had the distinct drawback in possibly distorting both the sample and the findings. Complex patterns of accountability, influence and personal loyalty may have introduced a dangerously high level of 'reactivity' (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983:190), by which the reports and responses of the informants were affected by my identity and already published ideas.

My involvement with these people was neither emotionally nor politically neutral. Conversations, particularly those relating to my rôle in co-ordinating the Festival Against Racism, generated a range of feelings including pride, anger, protectiveness, solidarity, distress, anxiety and resentment. Somehow these needed acknowledging and discharging to avoid becoming defensive (Heron, 1988:55) or overtly 'leading'. I worked hard at creating or affirming positive relationships with the participants in an explicit rôle of researcher. Like many feminist and ethnographic researchers, I felt a need to establish rapport (Peshkin, 1985:257) and trust (Peace, 1994:32) with my 'informants'. This entailed communicating empathy and respect for them, whilst using my own experience to gain credibility and acceptance (cf. Whyte, 1955; Atkinson, 1993). Remaining aloof from the subject matter seemed neither desirable nor feasible, and in any case might well have impoverished the data (Jorgensen, 1989:56).

An interesting additional feature of the research was the diversity and inevitable connections within the two sets of informants. In order to maximise the possibilities of internal triangulation (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983:198-200), I wanted to minimise the possibilities of participants talking with each other about the research topic. Initially I was also concerned that they should remain anonymous to protect confidentiality. I therefore decided against distributing a list of participants or introducing them to each other on occasions when more than one was present. I wanted to control and contain their reflective practice within the confines of the Panel Study. In retrospect, this appears both unnecessary and contrary to the values of participatory research. Participants inevitably knew one another or guessed (correctly) at the identity of others. Whether this generated any discussion or cross-fertilisation of ideas 'outside' of 'my' research study, I cannot say. I certainly am aware (from the results of a simple evaluation at the end of the Panel Study) that many of the participants expressed a sense of collaborative ownership of the project and a continuing commitment to working together to develop theory in this area.

The next two chapters describe the Case Study and Panel Study in greater detail, indicating how the findings from the Festival Against Racism contributed to the design of the latter.

CHAPTER SEVEN

The Festival Against Racism case study

"How do you hold a hundred tons of water in the air with no visible means of support? You build a cloud." Cole (1984:38)

SETTING THE SCENE

As indicated in Chapter One, the starting point for this research was my own experience as a community work practitioner and as a political activist. In the summer of 1994, just as I was preparing to register for my Ph.D, I volunteered as the unpaid co-ordinator for Bristol's first Festival Against Racism. I played a major rôle in visioning, promoting and organising this initiative, using skills, contacts and political 'nous' gained over previous involvement in progressive politics and community development across the city, and in one neighbourhood in particular. I was by no means the only player, indeed it was fundamental to the Festival's concept that participation in the activities and events was on the basis of partnership and persuasion. I was also aware that I was making active use of my personal, professional and political networks to target potential sympathisers, recruit participants and mobilise resources (Tarrow, 1994; Klandermans, 1997).

The Festival Against Racism was an innovative, rather hybrid, initiative steeped in the traditions of social movement organising and the politics of alliance. The Festival consisted of a month long programme of activities organised by over 100 organisations in venues and localities across Bristol. All events reflected the four themes of 'Equality, Justice, Diversity and Solidarity' which had been chosen to convey the project's underlying political and ethical framework. The broad purpose of the Festival was to strengthen the local anti-racist movement and to improve levels of co-operation amongst the multitude of agencies who were committed in one way or another to tackling racism. Our approach incorporated community development principles to develop locality-based participation and inclusive methods of decision-making. Our determination to involve people from different communities in Bristol meant that the Festival had to be presented as an attractive and accessible opportunity to organisations with very different understandings of racism. The breadth and vagueness of the Festival's themes allowed contributors to respond on their own terms, interpreting and applying the core values in whatever ways suited their particular style, situation or priorities. A myriad of events could be devised which were both feasible and appropriate to organisations with very different cultures and resource levels. See Appendix C for a list of actual events and participants.

- explore Bristol's Black history and celebrate the diversity of cultures and experience within the local population which has made the multi-racial city of today,
- demonstrate the strength of anti-racist feeling across the city and establish networks for future campaigning, support and solidarity,
- encourage debate and discussion on how an anti-racist movement can be developed in the city.

Figure 6. The three key Festival organisers handing out leaflets from the ARA stall at St. Pauls Community festival

Consensus was reached around the title of 'Bristol Festival Against Racism', but we also wanted to promote a positive approach which we felt was best encapsulated by the four motifs mentioned earlier – 'Equality, Justice, Diversity and Solidarity'. September was identified as the 'month of action' and an ambitious project unfurled, attracting support and active contributions from an extraordinarily wide range of individuals and organisations.

I played a major rôle in establishing and maintaining contact with potential participants to explain the concept of the Festival and persuade them to take part in whatever way they chose. Informal networking was also a means to identify and debate issues raised, particularly by radical and Black activists, who were understandably suspicious of an initiative emanating from the local Anti-Racist Alliance, a predominantly white organisation.

My intention in each of these conversations was to acknowledge and attempt to allay such qualms, secure the endorsement of key organisations and then use this to foster involvement of individuals and groups right across the city. As the idea of the Festival gathered momentum, it became easier to win support. The concept incorporated different strands of anti-racist thinking, attempting to integrate multi-culturalist approaches with the sharper strands of anti-discrimination (cf. Rattansi, 1992; Arshad, 1996). The initiative developed a resonance across Bristol's civil society, welcoming contributions from all shades of the political and community spectrum, whilst at the same time recognising the many different facets of racism in Britain. However, for the Festival to crystallise into a reality this broad support had to be turned into a 'critical mass' or 'sub-culture' of active commitment (cf. Fischer, 1984).

My contribution was twofold. Firstly, I was able to use *local knowledge* and *personal contacts* to access formal networks, thus ensuring that Festival publicity material reached different communities in all areas of the city. My own networks comprised:

- contacts across the field of community development (including good points of entry into a number of Black and ethnic minority communities);
- labour movement connections, especially amongst former Communist Party members (including the more progressive trade unionists);
- friends, family and close acquaintances; and
- 'familiar strangers', people who I knew casually and might encounter in the course of routine activities at work or around my neighbourhood.

The second, and probably more important, aspect of my rôle was to use these connections to 'talk up' the Festival and gain their contributions. We needed to make maximum use of the limited resources we had available, which were mainly intangibles: contacts, reputations, enthusiasm and a 'vision' based on some shared values.

The idea of the Festival captured the imagination of 'ordinary people' who believed that racism was 'wrong' but were unclear how they might position themselves against it. It provided a framework which people could use to 'do their own thing' but in concert with others. It acted as a trellis against which a "community of resistance" (hooks, 1991) or of the 'moment' (Jowers, 1995) could grow around race equality. This is still evident several years later, supporting new campaigns and initiatives, including five successive 'Respect' events in Bristol's parks even though none of the original protagonists are involved.

The Festival operated with limited formal structure. A finance committee was established to fundraise and oversee expenditure. There was also a nominal steering group, with named officers, but in practice this rarely met and decisions were taken either at open meetings or informally after discussion amongst a cluster of individuals. Although this was only a local initiative, the organisation of the Festival bore many characteristics of the 'new' social movements (Johnston et al, 1994). It relied on networks to mobilise its supporters for collective action and devolved decision-making as far as was possible to the participants. The democratic 'structure' was minimal and mostly informal, resembling Mintzberg's (1983) model of an 'adhocracy'. It was able to respond swiftly to changing situations and be adventurous in its interactions with the political and organisational environment. We had no material rewards or sanctions and the project could only proceed on the basis of voluntary commitment and participation. In many respects it resembled those 'new managerialist' frameworks which encourage 'freedom within boundaries' (Hoggett, 1991; Hambleton et al, 1996) and corporate or civic loyalty (Peters and Waterman, 1982; Senge, 1990a). It also had many of the hallmarks of small innovatory community groups, operating on the fringes of the voluntary sector (see Batsleer et al, 1992).

NETWORKING AS AN EMERGENT STRATEGY

The strategy we adopted was determined to some extent by circumstances (timescale and minimal resources). The Festival enjoyed a kind of 'fuzzy management' (Grint, 1997) which combined elements of entrepreneurial flair, with a "central leadership...trying to direct, guide, cajole or nudge others with ideas of their own" (Mintzberg and Waters, 1985:263). It was strongly influenced by an ideology which felt that "the responsibility for raising awareness of racism and tackling racial discrimination in all its forms should be clearly seen as falling on *all* Bristol's citizens, not just Black people or those living and working in the inner-city". The main idea was to promote anti-racism as "integral to many different everyday activities" (from Evaluation Report, Gilchrist 1994b). This required pro-active networking to ensure that the Festival concept attracted support within those communities and organisations which might have been cynical or simply more hesitant to engage with issues of race equality. In this respect our networking was strategic and deliberately inclusive. We targeted known sympathisers to enlist their support and use *their* networks (and mailings) to promote the idea, making sure that the proposals also reached communities not renowned for their anti-racist activities. A significant feature of the environment in which the Festival evolved was its complexity and heterogeneity. We were operating in a 'multi-organisational field' (Curtis and Zurcher, 1973) which included both alliance and conflict systems (Klandermans, 1997:143).

During the initial phase of the project our use of overlapping formal and informal networks often meant that organisations and individuals were receiving the same information from a variety of sources. Like a hall of mirrors, this magnified the impact of the Festival and created the impression that the project had greater resources, status and commitment than really existed at that stage. This was important in developing a perceived 'critical mass' of participation which encouraged others to join in. Marwell and Oliver (1993) argue that a threshold of motivation must be exceeded before people will commit to a joint endeavour (see also Granovetter, 1978). They suggest that achieving this involves three strategic sub-goals:

- the provision of 'selective incentives',
- the reduction in barriers to participation and
- persuasion that the common goal is achievable and worthwhile.

Tarrow (1992) emphasises the need for suitable mentalities and 'mobilising structures' to suit the political opportunities in the current environment. The Festival accomplished this almost entirely through informal networking and exploiting links with other organisations' formal membership. Networking emerged as a desirable and a necessary strategy for ensuring 'maximum penetration' and participation (Mintzberg, 1983). It also provided excellent feedback mechanisms, which enabled the organising group to manage the risk and uncertainty inherent in the project's experimental status (Dawson, 1996:Ch.10). This raises interesting questions around transformational leadership, accountability and innovation which are certainly relevant to community development. Clearly, the political nature of the project and prevailing circumstances influenced how the Festival could (and should) be organised. But there were also factors associated with the key actors and the networks which made this particular Festival possible and shaped its eventual appearance. For the purpose of the case study, I will consider my own rôle and set this against the experiences of others.

ACTIVATING THE NETWORKS

Several overlapping networks underpinned a coalition of forces which characterised local anti-racist work and were derived largely from the personal histories of those involved. Snow et al, (1986) identified a two-dimensional matrix setting out the means of 'persuasive communication' used by organisers to recruit participants to collective activities. These involved two dimensions of contact: face-to-face vs. mediated, or public vs. private. On this

basis they suggest that there are four categories for activating networks (i) face-to-face, private, (ii) face-to-face, public, (iii) mediated, private and (iv) mediated, public. The Festival organisers used all these approaches as indicated in Table 3 below. We realised we could make best use of our resources (time and connections) by using informal interactions, which were mostly *face-to-face* and involved previously established connections. These certainly proved most effective in persuading people to participate. The reasons for this are explored in the interviews later, but can briefly be attributed to reputation and reachability.

	Face-to-face	**Mediated**
Private	Conversations on street, at social gatherings, after meetings, in shops and pubs.	Telephone calls, personal letters.
Public	Addressing meetings, stalls and leafleting at community festivals	Publicity items in media, Newsletters, widely circulated Festival Bulletin

Table 3. Methods used by the organisers to encourage involvement in the Festival

The networks used to mobilise for the Festival had been constructed and maintained over more than a decade of involvement in local political campaigns and community work. The nature and direction of the actual networking was determined in part by **political** expediency (the need to build a broad coalition quickly). It was also **pragmatic** in that it depended on interactions arising or being created without a huge investment of either time or effort. Some of this was strategic: attending social and political gatherings and public meetings where I was likely to meet with significant allies and potential supporters, and making sure that I was carrying a quantity of Festival leaflets. Much of the networking was, however, opportunistic, involving unplanned, but fortuitous encounters. Because I was a volunteer, there was a strong **personal** element to the pattern of activities and conversations. The resultant Festival programme inevitably reflected my own preferences and circumstances over the months of preparation. I made strategic judgements about how best to use my limited time and therefore tended to prioritise connections where I anticipated a positive response, or which were simply more convenient. Networking was an efficient way for the Festival organisers to make contact with a huge number of people mainly because it made 'surreptitious' (though permitted) use of other people's resources. Costs and risks were dispersed across a wide range of organisations such that an ambitious and innovative project appeared as if conjured out of 'nothing'. The invisible and serendipitous aspects of networking are important themes which were echoed in the Panel Study and are explored in Section Four.

Of course, the Festival did not really emerge from thin air. It was a response to the specific conditions in Bristol at the time and a product of years of local interactions and relationship-testing amongst the key players and across the wider community. Networks were used as formal and informal communication channels. Friendly links with other organisations provided the Festival with access to facilities which we could not have formally negotiated or purchased (bulk photocopying, mailings, design and printing services). Informal networking proved particularly important for addressing the more contentious issues. Much of the discussion around the ideology and format of the Festival took place outside of the formal meetings, ensuring that criticisms and difficulties were dealt with 'privately', rather than becoming sources of public (and demoralising) conflict. Informal connections also gave us an 'inside track' to decision-making or, at the very least, advice on how best to present our case to the decision-makers. My politics and proven record as a community worker allowed 'short cuts' through explanation and persuasion, because people generally trusted my commitment to anti-racism and ability to deliver organisationally. Where we had no direct access, known contacts were used to find out who might provide useful access or leverage. It was usually possible to use this 'leapfrogging' to reach groups of people with whom we had no personal connection or to circumvent bureaucratic barriers.

The looseness of the Festival structure allowed a high degree of autonomy for the organisations taking part. The only policies that were centrally determined were around the theme of anti-racism, the four motifs and an approximate time frame of the month of September. The Festival itself operated as a kind of post-modern organisation (Hearn and Parkin, 1989), reflecting and valuing the diversity of local agencies, but at the same time creating a common commitment around anti-racism. One of the aims of the Festival had been to "establish networks for future campaigning, support and solidarity", reflecting a concern expressed by many over the lack of co-ordination that appeared to exist around anti-racist work in Bristol. Race politics within the city, which had tended to privilege 'cultural or national identity', had generated considerable inter-ethnic tension and a level of fragmentation which left many feeling isolated and disempowered. The Festival was conceived as a vehicle for cultivating mutual respect, understanding and co-operation, and in some ways pre-figured the 're-imagining' of nationhood proposed in the Parekh Report on the 'Future of Multi-ethnic Britain' (2000). Organisations and groups were put in touch with one another and the Festival programme itself was designed as a directory for future reference. Networking was both a method for present circumstances and a desired outcome for the future.

Members of the steering group were in regular informal contact with each other. In addition, fortnightly meetings were held which were widely advertised and open to anyone interested in organising an event or helping with administrative work. In many respects the Festival was never really constituted as an organisation. We remained a loose amalgam of individuals who were in constant communication, mostly informally and able to offer one another support, advice and sometimes practical help with particular tasks. The core group saw our rôle as facilitators and assumed that power mostly lay at the periphery with the people who were actually organising events. The riskiness of this approach was that it left the core group with substantial responsibility for the overall project, but little control over the detail of what actually happened.

In the same way that we were asking others to trust our integrity and organisational abilities, we had to have faith that no-one was planning an activity that would seriously contravene the Festival's principles. A number of things made this strategy viable and necessary, most notably in relation to the operation of reputation within the organising environment. This related to the identity and rôles of those in the core cluster who between them had sufficient credibility amongst a set of potential participants. Their position in and use of relevant networks was crucial to the way the Festival was organised and a major determinant of its success.

INFORMAL CONTACTS AND CONNECTIONS

There was general agreement amongst the interviewees that the success of the Festival Against Racism was attributable to the manner in which it was organised. Namely that it used a clear value-based framework, with devolved and informal decision-making, co-ordinated by a reliable and accessible core administration, supplemented by constant networking. From the beginning, the Festival's greatest asset was the core group of people involved, the relationships between them and their contacts across the city. Trust, reputation and ease of communication were important factors in allowing informality to operate at every stage and level of the organisation. As one of the core group put it:

> *"I suppose that had something to do with the trust that's built up between various organisations working together. And the individuals and the trust in the individuals. Steve and yourself were well known. People have worked with you before and once you've done something once and been trusted to do it, people trust you to do it again."* RJ

The Festival relied to a great extent on pre-existing ties (cf. Melucci, 1996). Previous experience of working together meant that people were aware of each other's strengths, their reliability, their commitment and integrity within anti-racist politics. The Festival was able to approach potential donors in the belief that somewhat 'cheeky' requests would be agreed. These were often formalised through the standard mechanisms of application forms, committee decisions, resolutions at Council meetings or whatever, but the groundwork was usually based on prior informal conversations and good reputation.

> *"People knowing people was a big part of not too many questions being asked and people being happy with things just rolling along."* SG

The way in which informal processes intertwined with formal protocol was a major theme, with many examples of behind-the-scenes preparation subsequently materialising as formal support and public activity. Formal procedures somehow legitimised the informal networking. The benefits to the Festival were two-fold. Firstly, the organisers were able to make use of resources belonging to other organisations. Since the Festival started life with no material resources of its own, this 'support-in-kind' was essential in enabling it to establish an organising base and communicate with hundreds of potential participants. The fact that much of the work of organising the Festival was carried out on an unpaid and altruistic basis probably made these donations more forthcoming. There was a willingness to match voluntary commitment with money and practical help, without needing too much formal persuasion or accountability. Individuals could also be pulled in to help with specific tasks. As one of the core organisers put it:

> *"I had contacts [and] knew people who would be willing to do things cheaply or for free."* SG

People contributed because they supported the idea of the Festival and also because they felt some affinity or admiration for the other people involved:

> *"I felt quite supported because there were a lot people around me who were able to give me advice and help ... and we all got on really well."* LB

SPONSORSHIP AND ENDORSEMENT

The legitimacy of the Festival was secured through formalised support from the leadership of key organisations in the city, namely the Trades Council, Race Equality Council, Avon

Race Forum, South West TUC and Avon's Race Equality Unit. The Director of Bristol REC commented:

> *"I don't think we did much apart from behind the scenes. Obviously when people asked me about it I was supportive and I think in a funny kind of way that can be helpful. Bits of money and things you got; I'm not saying because of us but obviously people did check with us and we were always supportive. That might have been helpful."* PC

Networks were used to check-out the provenance and legitimacy of the Festival, and as channels of on-going consultation. These kinds of intervention were vital in the process of consensus formation in the early stages (cf. Gamson, 1992). We endeavoured to develop a 'collective action framework' (Gamson, 1992) which embraced the trade unions, Black and ethnic minority communities and large sections of 'non-political' civil society. Considerable effort, therefore, was put into winning the support of prominent 'opinion-formers' and the official endorsement of leading intermediary bodies. Many commentators have tracked similar examples of the influence of 'civic leaders' and 'captains of industry' through their informal networks (e.g. Laumann and Pappi, 1976; Knoke and Wood, 1981; Knoke, 1990b; Laguerre, 1994). That we were able to secure sponsorship for the Festival from the Race Equality Council, the Race Forum, the Trades Council and the equalities committees of the local authorities at an early stage proved decisive in allaying initial scepticism and hesitation amongst certain communities. This was certainly echoed by one of the organisers of several events:

> *"I think the link with BREC was really important. For me if there'd been any hint that the Black community were not behind it, that would have been unsettling but I thought that the fact the BREC Newsletter were helping to dish out the information and that the Race Equality officer, like Balraj, was involved. That was important for me."* JK

Similarly the Race Forum played an important rôle.

> *"We as a management committee, felt we should use whatever influence we might have to try ... and unlock doors or whatever. And I think we certainly tried to get political support...taking it to Avon County Council, and to the Joint Advisory Race Equality Committee, between Bristol and Avon Councils and the surrounding bodies ... giving it as much credibility or emphasis as possible."* RS

The fact that the Race Forum had a membership (and mailing database) of most of the Black and ethnic minority groups in the area, as well as formal consultative status with local government, lent considerable credibility to our cause. The involvement of Avon's Principal Race Equality Officer was also crucial in persuading others to overcome their reservations:

> *"I think because of the strong messages given by the fact that we as the Avon Equal Opportunities and Race Equality Unit were supporting it, a number of groups then genuinely wanted to lend their voice, saying 'yes, we want to participate and feel this is a good thing'."* BS

Specific contacts within the trade unions, notably UNISON, the Trades Council and the regional TUC, were instrumental in attracting substantial financial support from the labour movement and enabling the Festival to distribute publicity material through their networks at marginal cost.

> *"Bristol TUC was very significant in the sense that it upped £500 right from the outset which helped the fund-raising and South West TUC helped in terms of getting the trade union movement as a whole on board. And that brought a whole load of respectability and stability." RJ*

Personal knowledge, contacts and reputation were used to encourage organisations to put on Festival events. It was said of my rôle:

> *"You were the best example of someone with networking links that pulled the Festival together ... Basically I don't think the Festival could have happened as well without you actually being you and having your networks, connections, links and your whole interest in it."* SG

Obvious gaps in the informal networks were addressed through wider mailings, but it is clear from the interviews that direct approaches increased the likelihood that invitations to take part in the Festival would receive a positive response. The trust, loyalty and respect engendered by personal relationships were crucial to the success of the networking strategy, and could not have been achieved without prior experience of effective collaboration. The approach raises, however, issues around equality, reciprocity and inclusion which will be explored later.

ORGANISATIONAL VALUES

The organising culture and values of the Festival were designed to promote anti-racism as a stance which people could adapt to suit their own circumstances and predilections. Our aim was for people to do whatever they could or whatever they wanted to do within the 'umbrella' of the Festival's philosophy. The strategy of the Festival organisers was to create a framework which was transparent, inclusive, catalytic (rather than coercive), participatory and grounded in 'everyday' life. We acknowledged that anti-racist work often felt 'risky' and our approach was intended to be both reassuring and empowering. Informal networking, complemented by a very loose organisational structure emerged as the best strategy for securing a flexible, yet supportive political and cultural 'space' into which people could step forward in the spirit of solidarity across difference (cf. Mayo, 2000). This web of allies acted both as safety net and trampoline, boosting people's confidence and magnifying their effort, whilst protecting them from outright opposition or failure.

> *"Racism...is so horrifying... that if you can do something positive about it, it feels good and brings a kind of unity to a group or a community which is very valuable ... your morale is lifted up because you know that you are not the only one and there are people who share the same vision or values and it gives you a strength. And that is something that people could see in the Festival."* MJ

The idea that they were contributing in a small way to a city-wide, high-profile project enthused people.

> *"A lot of organisations only had to do a relatively small amount of work to make up something that was actually very huge; the whole being greater than the sum of the parts."* SG

It was as if the 'risk' of being seen as anti-racist or 'political' was dissipated across all participants, encouraging people to do at least something, even if it was only putting up a poster or turning up for the street party.

> *"I don't actually like being involved in the organisation of mega events. They scare me ... so I suppose [the Festival] just appealed to my way of working. It was not intimidating. I could weave it into what I was doing anyway."* JK

The success of the Festival was not dependent on any one event, nor the activities of any single person or organisation. The network approach allowed responsibility (and credit) to be shared across organisational borders, blurring formal rôles and lines of accountability so that we were able to respond rapidly to eventualities rather than having a rigid plan of action (cf. Davis and Meyer, 1998).

Figure 7. Street party in Easton organised as part of Festival Against Racism

INFORMAL DEVOLUTION

The networking approach was extremely effective in many respects. It achieved many of its aims through a judicious balance of formal and informal processes.

> *"Informal was the backbone of the formal...The formal did not dominate the informal...that was the strength of it."* MJ (focus group)

Continuous informal consultation and dialogue created an over-arching framework of values and policy. Formal structures were used for public sponsorship, for protection, for external accountability and to deal with requests for support. But it was the informal networks which both prepared the ground for these and brought them to life. Because of their political commitment and enthusiasm for the project, people seemed to be aware of and willing to use their professional positions, whilst permitting themselves to operate beyond normal rôle boundaries. These organic ways of working were experienced as encouraging and inclusive. The Festival was amateur in the most positive sense of the word, and

"that made it fairly easy-going. It made the whole thing fairly approachable; easy to be involved in. I think if it was very rigid, people find it hard to say what they think and give that involvement. So I think that laid-back approach really works for most people." LB

De-centralised decision-making, with uncomplicated access to the core group allowed a great deal of peripheral control and seemed to provide a sufficient framework for people to be involved on their own terms.

"If there had been a more structured, centralised organisation it might not have engendered that kind of taking on of responsibilities at local level. Probably it was right not to have any serious structure to the organisation." RJ

It allowed the diversity of anti-racist thinking to be reflected in the range of activities in the programme.

"Because the organisation of the Festival was so fluid, it could embrace different people with different backgrounds and different analyses and social background .... but maybe [they] don't want to be too political because they are scared. Maybe they don't believe in political activity. So if they organised something that they can control the outcome of, this is very important." MJ

However, informality also had its limitations and formal structures were needed to manage certain aspects of the organisation, especially in dealing with the statutory authorities and when faced with disagreements amongst the key players. There *was* a quasi-formal structure, a notional steering committee referred to in publicity material and funding applications. This group consisted of named individuals and anyone else who happened to turn up to the fortnightly open meetings. There was no attempt or desire to turn it into a coherent group. It was primarily used in our dealings with external bodies to present the façade of an official body.

"Because to satisfy your funders you have to have some kind of accountability and some sort of way of sorting out money issues and asking for planning permissions ... And also for some credibility with the press, politicians and people like that." PC

Generally, decisions were made by the people who did the work, using discretion and ongoing consultation with immediate associates. This was acceptable, because we were known, in touch with local feeling and alert to potential criticisms.

> *"Generally it was you making the decisions, listening to comments made by people rather than a collective.... Most of the decisions were made by you after you had sounded everybody out."* RJ

Political conviction and a shared enthusiasm provided the foundation and major driving force for those involved in the Festival. We tried to make it a fun, positive, invigorating experience which people would find empowering and enjoyable. Many people commented in the interviews, informally in conversation and on the evaluation sheets that this had been achieved.

> *"It was an idea that had come of age, waiting to happen as it were. A lot of organisations, community groups whatever had been looking for something to give them a focus for actually running something around racism awareness ... It was an opportunity for them to do something that they'd been meaning to do for a long time and hadn't got round to before or hadn't found a way of approaching it."* SG

As Hardin (1982) observed, participation in collective action requires finding the right incentive to make the effort and risk worthwhile. As well as promoting the overall vision of the Festival as a 'common cause', we approached potential participants on the basis of self-interest, suggesting how a Festival activity might complement or comply with their existing plans, raise their profile, be a fund-raiser and attract new members. We also stressed that each event would have to self-financing, except for contributions towards positive action measures.

> *"It's not so much just what the Festival is about or what any event is about. It's what's in it for them. And that's what we have to sell and also the satisfaction that they would get out of it from seeing the Festival materialise."* RS

Several of the interviewees commented on how much they and their organisations had benefited from taking part in the Festival and this was also evident in the evaluation forms.

SHARED COMMITMENT AND CO-OPERATION

The Festival had no organisational authority, only aspirations and a framework of core values. This feature was mentioned by quite a few of the events organisers in their evaluation forms. A typical comment was "it was a very successful way of involving all sorts of groups, especially ethnic minorities. This Festival gave them a sense of identity and purpose" (ZR). We hoped that by taking part people would feel more confident and more connected to others who shared their beliefs.

> *"It creates that concept that political activity can be good fun, and non-threatening and not dangerous, not confrontational...It's normal, it's day-to-day and if people make that step...then maybe people will be more committed ... That was the great thing about the Festival, it was lots of ordinary people doing ordinary things and feeling that they were doing something important."* RJ (focus group)

This reflects the broad principles of community development based on strategies of social transformation led from below, in which voluntary collective action results in psychological as well as political shifts.

Gifted time, money, effort and other forms of practical assistance were vital in making the Festival feasible. The Festival structure allowed people to make manageable contributions, to feel part of something significant and generally to make optimal use of scarce and widely dispersed resources, notably their own time.

> *"I think it's quite a useful method of organisation because it actually allows people to input what they can rather than forcing people to feel that they have to attend loads of meetings or whatever when they can't, and therefore that could be a barrier to them taking part."* LC

Despite the lack of a centralised command structure, the Festival was able to engender a unity of purpose. There were many examples of actual collaboration around Festival events and these experiences were regarded as instrumental in improving and strengthening existing networks. The Festival

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Festival which enabled people to 'come out' almost....There was a lot of trust built up which I suspect has not disappeared." RJ

It encouraged people to co-operate in different ways, making new connections across traditional sectoral, ethnic and geographical boundaries. Several community and faith groups stepped into the 'anti-racist arena' for the first time.

> *"It was clear to me that there were a lot of groups there who I hadn't actually heard of before, or who I hadn't come across before or hadn't networked with before. There were new groups who came out of the woodwork."* BS

The Festival provided non-threatening space in which people could identify potential collaborators and develop links for the future. For example, workers from different organisations involved in under-fives work organised a conference together to promote anti-racist play.

Figure 8. Plenary session of the anti-racist play conference

They have since used that experience to continue their alliance and organise further events.

> *"I think it had a link basically because of the networking and building relationships through the conference and finding that we had a lot in common ...We all worked with similar families but have different rôles. And we felt there should be a network running continually so that we can share what's going on in the area and make sure that we are not duplicating ... Just being able to*

work together means we are all much more aware of what each other are doing and able to ... work at development together." LB

There was a general feeling, however, that the Festival was more successful in consolidating existing relationships than in developing new connections. This probably reflects the short-term, expedient and voluntary nature of the organising process. Had my involvement been as a professional community worker, it is likely that I would have put more effort into developing the boundary-spanning links which would have yielded more long-term benefit. Nevertheless, at an individual level, it reinforced people's resolve around anti-racism and their confidence in being part of a wider network.

"A lot of the informal and formal networks which existed were actually strengthened by the fact that people gave their trust to this event, this project... and they weren't let down." RJ (focus group)

It also provided opportunities for people who were already in contact in their official capacities to work together in ways that weren't constrained by formal rôles.

"I think it strengthened some connections particularly some of the trade union people who stayed involved. Obviously we have working relationships, but it is quite useful also to have other relationships. So I think in that sense it was positive... I think it does show how one can have professional relationships and disentangle that from wider community interests - hopefully." PC

The Festival offered individuals and organisations the opportunity publicly to display their anti-racist credentials and to connect with parts of civil society where they might not otherwise have had much presence. It elevated anti-racist commitment within the city and simultaneously extended the profiles and reputations of key organisations beyond their traditional constituencies.

"People and organisations would hopefully have a better view of the TUC. I think the very fact that we reached out to groups that we wouldn't normally have reached out to was beneficial. Certainly it strengthened relationships rather than building new ones...It was different. That's why I personally wanted to be involved; to be involved with people and communities that I wouldn't have been involved with otherwise, apart from saying 'hello' to in the shop." MG

THE PARADOX OF POWER

Like many organisations operating on the basis of voluntary effort and limited resources, there was considerable tension between accountability and autonomy (Taylor, 1997). Formal lines of accountability were tenuous, almost non-existent but there was strong mutual and tactical accountability which was 'operationalised' in three ways. In order to counter possible allegations of misappropriation or nepotism, the administrative core of the organisation was fairly transparent. Anyone could drop into the office at any time and regular 'Festival Bulletins' were distributed through various newsletters and mailing systems, letting people know what was happening and giving notice of the fortnightly open meetings. All the interviewees felt that they had plenty of information about Festival activities and means of contacting the organisers.

Alongside the public communications, accountability was maintained through more ad hoc methods, involving many one-to-one discussions in all kinds of informal settings (over breakfast, games of bridge, in the pub, etc.) In the early stages, the idea of the Festival was 'floated' in many forums to gauge the likely response. It gathered momentum and shape as more and more people became interested. Accountability to the sponsoring organisations combined formal and informal procedures. There were regular reports back to the trade unions and the Race Forum committees, via the relevant 'representatives'. In addition, there was an understanding that issues could be raised informally with the organisers or brought to steering group meetings. All this raised some interesting questions about the nature and distribution of power within the Festival networks.

It is difficult to identify and analyse power dynamics within the matrix of formal and informal decision-making and participation. Power was not an issue that the organisers considered at the time, except in so far as the Festival structure explicitly embraced both empowerment and subsidiarity. In retrospect it is clear that power was exercised in several different ways - at the centre, between the centre and the periphery, and by outside forces, such as funders and political opponents. Power very definitely lay within the existing web of relationships, especially in terms of the influence that individuals had on each other and within their relevant organisations. But because of the voluntary nature of people's involvement, there were very few points at which formal power, in the sense of authority and control, could be exerted. Power tended to be permissive and enabling. It had an important emotional component, operating through persuasion, loyalty and respect, driving people's rational choices (Becker, 1991) and voluntary effort (cf. Perlmutter, 1994; Beres and Wilson, 1997; Hoggett, 2000). People did what they did around the Festival out of love, loyalty, anger,

guilt and compassion, as well as because of their political analysis or religious and professional principles. As Putnam and Mumby observe:

> "On the one hand, emotions are subjective, chaotic and weak. But, on the other, they ignite creative energy and involvement" (1993:40).

Personal networks driven by shared conviction and faith enabled power, synergy and information to flow across the organisational landscape. These were harnessed at different junctures in order to influence decisions around resources or activities and to make things happen. In its core-periphery model of organising, the Festival Against Racism unwittingly operated as a political equivalent to the Benetton production and marketing process with its small central hub, and outsourcing of most manufacturing and delivery activities (Jarillo, 1993). There was a presumption and an aspiration of equality amongst the participants, in terms of expertise, commitment and motivation and, as in many informal collective or voluntary organisations, this led to problems around leadership and delegation with few mechanisms for managing these tensions. White (2001) refers to this issue of governance as the "inconsistent triad" of three mutually incompatible functions: strategic thinking, management and accountability. The evidence suggests that the Festival was weakest on management, which raises questions about its long-term viability. There were different views about who, if anyone, had control of the Festival and its component activities. Some saw this question as irrelevant to what actually occurred.

> *"There was never a need to control anything as such because of the way the whole thing was set up. Power never ever became an issue because nobody ever had to override anybody and take a decision that other people disagreed with ... So I don't think there was any real power exercised at all. Except the power of getting things off the ground, a sort of positive power ... Power in the negative sense wasn't there, but power in the sense of moving people together to make the Festival happen."* RJ

The central organisers played influential rôles because of their position vis-a-vis tasks that needed doing. There was no line-management structure and therefore no direct supervision or instruction. The organisers made their own decisions about priorities and those around them seemed happy to let them.

> *"I was in a powerful position. I could potentially have stopped something happening as part of the Festival, just by playing it down."* SG

As another member of the informal advisory cluster put it:

> *"you don't necessarily have to try to control something to control it. You can just control it by doing it. So in a sense I don't necessarily see it in a way as conscious control. I think there's an awful lot of sub-conscious control in these situations."* PC

There was a strong sense that the members of Bristol ARA had most influence over the original format and ethos of the Festival. The core cluster continued to advise but operational decisions regarding administration, resource allocation and communication strategies were left to the organisers, using local knowledge and political acumen.

Once the overall shape of the Festival had been agreed, power bubbled up at the periphery with those organising events and activities for their own communities or membership.

> *"A lot of control was in the hands of the organisations themselves. At that level, that was the bit as you know I've always liked about it and I think it was interesting. So I actually think that there was some control but there were quite major attempts to diffuse it...I think in the first stages a lot of the power about what the Festival was going to be about lay with those [ARA] people. I have to say that I think a lot of it was you personally and Steve just getting on with it...I think [you] were clear that the power should stay with those organisations to decide what they wanted to do; but inevitably it's never as simple as that and people will see you as having the power, being the organiser ... It's quite difficult to get rid of that because some people want you to play that rôle as well."* PC

Not everyone felt entirely comfortable with this, especially those who were less confident in their own capacity to participate or had doubts about the Festival's provenance and philosophy. There were tensions around the pace of organising, between the needs and responsibilities of the centre (to get the information together for the programme) and the independence of events organisers. This resulted in some frantic 'chivvying' which contrasted with our earlier laissez-faire style.

> *"I felt there was a little bit of pressure to get more done than we actually could....I think the informal structure worked. While you wanted people to do*

things by a certain deadline, there didn't seem to be any sort of pressure to get people to do things in a particular way." RE

We had total responsibility to ensure that the programme was as accurate and comprehensive as possible but almost no control over the timescale. We had few sanctions or incentives by which we could ensure people met our conditions for inclusion in the Festival programme. We felt very stressed but somehow had to maintain an appearance of coping with the situation. We had created something which was empowering of others, but where was our power when we needed it? Relationships were under strain, but the informal network showed resilience where a more brittle formal structure might have shattered. The organisational tent (Hedberg et al, 1976) weathered the storm, but sustained some damage in the process. There were lessons to be learnt. Those of us at the core felt we had little power and lots of responsibility. It was an invidious position, but familiar to me from my rôle as a community worker.

THE VIEW FROM THE EDGE

A contrasting view emerged from those interviewees who had been more distantly involved with the Festival. They perceived the 'steering committee' as being more powerful than this group felt itself to be. Those at the centre acknowledged their influence, but didn't experience it as power. Those at the periphery were more inclined to overestimate the degree of control that the centre exerted.

"I felt that yourself and Steve were the ones with most power because you were the ones who were co-ordinating so obviously things that you were giving priority to had more emphasis than maybe other things." LB

This power seemed to be linked to corporate responsibility for the overall profile of the Festival, ensuring that the project remained true to its original aims and achieved the widespread publicity that was essential to its success.

"As far as I knew that committee had the power...I would have thought at the end of the day that they [the steering group] would have had the right to have some sort of veto. That wasn't explicit but as they were co-ordinating it and they were going to publicise it, at the end of the day, if something had gone wrong, it would have been egg on their faces, not mine." JK

Another 'peripheral actor' who had been involved in ongoing debates around the function of the Festival within local 'race' politics recognised the ambiguous position occupied by the central organisers and the attempts that were made to operate on the basis of a democratic consensus.

> *"I would hazard a guess that the steering group tried as much as possible to respond to the views and expressions of as many organisations as possible. Power is a very peculiar word, isn't it? ...Maybe the question is, whether or not I believe there were unilateral decisions being taken by one driving force or whatever. And I don't believe so. Just casting my mind back to the reports we used to get. I seem to think that a lot of debate went on.... And I seem to recall that we were always receiving notes...asking for comments or suggestions. So I think that somewhere along the line, whilst the steering group had to take decisions, and therefore had power if you like, I think that those decisions were very carefully taken on the basis, as much as possible, of information that was coming in. So in that respect, you could probably say that power lay with the people, but the final decisions, of course, had to be with the steering group because they had to get the show on the road... I recognise that organisations were asked to send in lists of events that they wanted to put on but of course, the steering group could have had power to eliminate some of those if they wished, either by default or intention or whatever. So I think there was power in both ways."* RS

INFLUENCE AND INFORMATION

Paradoxically neither of these positions seemed to reflect my experience, but it is an important reminder of how power can be exercised unwittingly or inadvertently. To some extent, the power at the centre was derived from our credibility and connections within the broader organisational environment. The networks acted as antennae, intelligence gathering mechanisms, such that we were sensitive to shifting attitudes and alert to problems and possibilities. Informal discussions between the core cluster of activists were a way of integrating information from the field of potential supporters and opponents so that the strategy could be honed to fit the prevailing circumstances. We were neither neutral nor naïve about the vested interests and political agendas which tend to operate around race equality work. The Festival was primarily intended to reinforce and 'surface' anti-racist thinking, creating a 'counter-hegemony' across local civil society such that racist attitudes would be regarded as abnormal and abhorrent.

The Festival grew within a specific and complex environment in which political bias, personal networks and 'fate' played a hand. The exact content of the programme could not have been predicted, although we did have a vision of its approximate shape. We worked hard to ensure that it reflected the range of political, cultural and community organisations in the city, including activities which would appeal (and be accessible) to a wide spectrum of participants. Our strategy was based on principles of inclusion and diversity, but was complemented by a high degree of serendipity. Just as in the most creative jazz performances, there was a prepared score and a selected array of instruments, but plenty of scope for spontaneous improvisation (c.f. Hatch, 1998; Zach, 2000; Burns, unpublished). CLR James (1980) recognised the importance of this degree of freedom, writing "you know nothing about organisation unless at every step you relate it to its opposite – spontaneity". The Festival emanated from a complex pattern of interactions. These were not random, but neither were they determined by any kind of central control mechanism. It would not have been possible, or desirable to set targets or performance criteria for the Festival as we had no idea at the outset which ideas would come to fruition and which would 'fall by the wayside'. It would be interesting, though retrospectively difficult, to examine the correlation between the amount of informal attention that a proposal received from the central co-ordinators and the probability of it materialising as an event on the programme.

EMERGENT THEMES AND THEORIES

The experience of organising the Festival provided an invaluable and challenging route into the wider terrain of relevant theory in relation to networks and networking. Just as the Festival drew together different strands of my own life, my understanding of the processes by which this was achieved have been illuminated by thinking from a wide range of academic disciplines. This will be explored in greater detail in Section Three, but for now I will highlight the main themes and questions which have emerged from the case study.

Even though I was involved as a volunteer activist rather than a paid professional, the 1994 Festival was strongly influenced by community development principles. Several processes can be identified which relate directly to the rôle of community development practitioners and their use of networking. These issues can be broadly clustered in terms of **power, relationships, values**, and **capability**. How does power operate within networks? How can changes in the web of connections affect how people influence each other? How are relationships established and used to promote particular sets of values or achieve collective goals? What was the relationship (if any) between agency and structure? There were a

number of cross-cutting themes concerning the 'personal identity' of the organisers, the 'environment' in which they operate, their accountability webs, and the informal and personal nature of many of these connections. The issue of power in networks proved particularly thought-provoking. Traditional 'zero-sum' models of power do not seem relevant to this mode of organising. Nor do theories which emphasise the political economy of relationships without also acknowledging the nature of the decisions and the context in which these are made. Perhaps the Festival was unusual in that it met with very little resistance and no explicit opposition. The circuits of power metaphor (Clegg, 1990; Gilchrist and Taylor, 1997) is most promising in that it captures the notion of connections being made which link up different appliances (applications) to a driving source of either stored power (such as a battery or capacitor, which can be re-charged) or a generator which is actively producing power for use around the system.

Community development stresses empowerment as a core value, often arguing for a radical 're-distribution of power' as if there was a finite amount which was simply in the 'wrong hands'. The experience of organising the Festival suggests a different formulation of power which is generative and creates a collective capacity to make things happen. Empowerment is often regarded as enhancing individuals' ability to influence and make decisions which are in their interests. It also has a collective dimension which can be used to challenge oppression and achieve shared goals across much broader contexts.

A major aspect of the work of community development practitioners is to support the voluntary involvement of 'ordinary', often disadvantaged people, in collective endeavours. One of the tasks is to encourage initiative and open conversation by "listening acutely" to a range of views and help people to weave together a shared vision or solution which will attract broad commitment and participation (Lovett, 1996). As Ramcharan et al (1997) assert

> "the most fundamental tenet of the community development approach is that the worker takes time to develop a real understanding of how things look from the standpoint of those with whom she is working, that is to understand the culture, the assumptions and the priorities of those she is seeking to help."

Where there are no formal structures and few incentives to participate, getting the 'vision' right is often a crucial first step in mobilising collective action. Networking allows information to be gathered from a diversity of sources by sampling a range of opinion, surveying the organisational environment and experimenting with new juxtapositions. It is therefore useful

in managing uncertainty and promoting innovation, both of which are significant aspects of community development practice and characteristic of the 1994 Festival Against Racism.

THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING WELL-CONNECTED

Issues of leadership emerged from the Festival case study in quite unexpected ways and made me appreciate directly the importance of networks in supporting and shaping the position of informal leaders and civic entrepreneurs (cf. Leadbeater and Goss, 1998). Many studies have demonstrated how informal leaders "hold their influence by virtue of knowing a lot of people" (e.g. Laguerre, 1994:89; Knoke, 1990a). They occupy key positions within significant and often separate networks which enable them to "mobilise dispersed resources so that collective (or parallel) action can be orchestrated towards the solution of a common...problem" (Kenis and Schneider, 1991:33). They may themselves hold only limited control or ownership of these resources, and therefore wield little authority over others in the network. Their status, and therefore power, derives from their capacity to influence decisions and policy development across a range of arenas. This often seems to be achieved by overcoming or ignoring the bureaucratic niceties of formal structures.

This need not be as manipulative or unaccountable as it sounds. Rather it is earned through valuing, trusting and respecting the information, ideas and opinions contributed by the other network members. This requires a form of leadership 'from the middle' which is akin to Greenleaf's notion of 'servant leadership' (cited in Jaworski, 1996). What qualities characterise this kind of rôle and how might they be demonstrated within community development? How do people achieve the 'reachability' necessary for informal leadership (Baker, 1992)? What are network leaders like and what do they do to maintain their legitimacy without formal rôles and structures (Melucci, 1996:344)?

The Festival experience enhanced my understanding of networks and my awareness of myself as a networker. I recognised that networking had been a fundamental, but overlooked, aspect of my professional community development work. Was there such a thing as 'good practice' in networking? Could it be both ethical and effective? If so, what made a 'good networker'? Were there gender differences? Was it possible to undertake community development without networking? What about issues around equality, access and evaluation? Was networking a learnt strategy? Or a 'natural' capability? These became the central questions for the next stage of the research.

PARALLELS WITH COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Most models of community development, particularly the more radical versions (e.g. Cooke, 1996; Ledwith, 1997) are founded on a belief that social transformation consists of social education **and** collective action. The Festival endeavoured to change attitudes and counter the prevailing sense of powerlessness or cynicism. It was designed as a vehicle for mutual learning as well as collective mobilisation. A further similarity arises from the context in which it was organised. Community workers frequently find themselves operating in situations where resources are not immediately available or are located across a number of agencies and sectors. They therefore need to be able to span organisational (and cultural) boundaries in order to draw together resources, ideas and energy through the power of persuasion, rather than from any intrinsic authority. Chambers has observed that low status professions work in "environments which are diverse, dynamic and uncontrollable", dealing with unpredictable people in unpredictable situations. They are located in "the dirty, chaotic and uncomfortable conditions of the periphery...are poorly paid, looked down on and little recognised or rewarded for their work with people as people" (1998:128-9). These jobs are often occupied by women and, as I have said, a major impetus for this research was to demonstrate the skilled nature and value of this work to other professionals, in addition to the community benefit. Community workers often have only limited formal status within multi-agency partnerships, but play a major, though unrecognised, rôle as brokers. Their legitimacy amongst professionals and 'ordinary people' alike cannot be assumed. It has to be earned on the basis of results and reputation. This can be difficult because much of the work takes place behind the scenes: mediating, interpreting, advising about the best ways to communicate, negotiate and co-operate around shared goals. As the Chinese philosopher Lao Tsu recognised nearly 3000 years ago, "with the best leaders, when the work is done, the task accomplished, the people will say 'We have done this for ourselves' " (cited Heider, 1985).

The Festival was instrumental in building bridges between different forces in civil society. It provided a temporary framework, a non-local public space (Squires, 1994), in which people could join with others in anti-racist activity. The *processes* and *principles* by which this happened were at least as important as the Festival itself, a theme which will be familiar to all involved in community development.

CONCLUSIONS AND EVALUATION

Stake recommends using a case study to gain broad understanding and specific insights (1995:3). Interrogating the experience of organising the 1994 Festival Against Racism was helpful in focusing and shaping the research around the *practice* of networking. These initial ideas were shared through conference papers and practitioner-based workshops looking at the impact of values (Gilchrist, 1995b) and power dynamics (Gilchrist and Taylor, 1997) on collective action within communities. It enabled me to explore issues rather than formulate a hypothesis and was a vital phase of the journey. But as Bassey (1981) warns, the use of a single case study is useful for identifying salient features but provides insufficient basis for wider generalisation.

The case study highlighted an important distinction between the study of networks as organisational structures and networks as personal relationship webs. I realised that for the purpose of my inquiry, I was interested in the practice of networking: how relationships (rather than mere connections) are developed and used to support participation in collective action. As a consequence the next phase of research, the Panel Study, became more clearly focused on the rôle of community workers in initiating and sustaining networks, and in those aspects of their practice which were based on inter-personal relationships and the use of self.

The experience of organising the Festival, and examining other participants' perception of my practice, generated the beginnings of a theoretical framework for understanding techniques of networking and clarified some of the conceptual underpinnings linking networks to community development. The research method adopted could be described as an extreme form of participant observation, in which I was simultaneously the observer and the observed. By adopting a reflexive orientation to my involvement in the Festival I was able to achieve what Reason and Hawkins (1988) refer to as the "dialectic between expression and explanation."

However, I had staked several aspects of my reputation on the success of the Festival and could not therefore be a 'neutral' inquirer in examining its processes and achievements. I was probably inclined to be over-protective of the project (Heron, 1988) and this might have distorted my interpretations of some of the data. My research journal written immediately after the group discussion reveals my anxiety and embarrassment at being both the object and instigator of the inquiry. I felt that there had been "too much guidance from me, not just referring interviewees to issues and topics, but testing out ideas." I suspected that

interviewees may have been positively biased towards an assessment of my rôle and practice, and wondered if the interviews would have been better carried out by someone else. On the other hand, having insider-knowledge enabled me to 'prompt' people about particular incidents or insights (cf. Oakley, 1981). Sometimes people remembered events differently and were able to remind or correct me of things I'd forgotten or misconstrued. This reactivity was a useful counterbalance to the problems of conducting retrospective ethnography (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983).

It should be acknowledged that during the period of investigation, I had a fair amount of contact with several of the interviewees, and informally shared some of the preliminary findings as they emerged. It cannot be ruled out that the respondents were simply pre-disposed to confirm the ideas I had already given them in my early analyses. This is not, however, my perception of how the discussion unfolded and certainly several new issues were highlighted which I had not previously considered. Despite these caveats the case study findings broadly meet Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria for validity in that they are trustworthy, credible, transferable, dependable and confirmable. Informal feedback from participants suggested that they have a "wholesome relation to reality" (Heron, 1996:159) and reflect the "truth as known, experienced or deeply felt by the people being studied" (Leininger, 1994:105).

Although my involvement in the Festival Against Racism provided an opportune, if rather egocentric research focus, it is not unreasonable to assume that salient features of my own practice as an organiser can be used to examine more generalisable aspects of networking. The case study included elements of naturalistic enquiry, such as member-checking, prolonged engagement, peer de-briefing and 'detailed probing' of the experience (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). My involvement as an active participant in the phenomenon itself, does raise issues around triangulation and the objectivity of the 'audit trail' of data (cf. Yin, 1994:32). I tried to maintain a sufficient "aura of scepticism" (Lincoln and Guba, 1985:305) around my inquiry. As an initial exploration of networks in action the findings indicate how informal networking is used to underpin, complement and circumvent more formal structures and procedures. These now needed to be corroborated amongst a wider panel of experience.

The case study proved valuable in identifying issues to be explored in the Panel Study. It also raised a number of broader themes regarding processes of community and political involvement.

In particular, it highlighted the function of informal and formal networks in relation to:

- strategies for participation and empowerment
- resource allocation and mobilisation
- social identity and 'community' solidarity
- democracy and decision-making
- trust and reputation
- preserving autonomy
- managing diversity

I was now ready to embark on the next stage of the research project which was designed to examine these preliminary notions in the context of (professional) community work practice.

CHAPTER EIGHT

The Panel Study: overview of the design and findings

"There is nothing so practical as a good theory" – Kurt Lewin (1936)

This chapter describes the process of carrying out the research, and how each phase of the inquiry drew on findings from the case study and previous stages. It identifies some preliminary themes regarding the benefits and drawbacks of using networking within community development. These are analysed in further details in the following two chapters which comprise section three.

RECRUITMENT OF THE PANELISTS

The Panel Study was designed to explore some of the ideas developed through reflecting on my own experience and to compare these with the practice of other community workers. Recruitment to the panel used formal and informal networks within the community development field. The initial approach relied on potential members expressing a positive interest in the research topic by responding to an article published in the Standing Conference for Community Development Newsletter explaining the purpose of the research and calling for volunteers (see Appendix I). Ten people 'applied', returning a simple questionnaire with information about their current posts and various personal details regarding their age, gender, ethnic origin, sexual orientation, class background and whether they identified as Disabled (Appendix L). I also asked people to briefly describe their reasons for wanting to participate in the study. There was a strong commitment to sharing ideas around 'good practice', to learn from others' experience and thereby to develop a better understanding of how networking contributed to their own work. Several people had already read my CDF pamphlet on networking and wanted to continue the process of investigating how networking is used as a method of community development. The panel therefore contained a definite bias towards network 'enthusiasts' (cf. Skelcher et al, 1996) and this must be borne in mind when considering the findings. A more random sample would probably have included some 'pragmatists' and 'opponents', revealing more jaundiced views of networking.

The original set of applicants consisted predominantly of white men aged between 35 to 50. The two Black practitioners unfortunately both dropped out soon after the study commenced due to severe illness in one case and a change of job for the other (although he did complete the postal questionnaire). I wanted the Panel to be representative of the

range of experienced practitioners within community development in the UK and so on the basis of these returns, I approached a number of individuals who were already known to me to request their participation (see Appendix J). These included Black, lesbian and Disabled community workers and people working in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. I also wanted to include someone who was a retired volunteer and someone who worked freelance. In the event I was able to recruit a further 5 people, none of whom were Black or Disabled. This was disappointing and produces a bias within the findings, but I decided to proceed anyway due to pressure of time. The table below indicates the provenance of each panel member and Appendix L tracks their contribution to the Study.

Initials	**Sector**	**Rôle/ job title**	**Location**	**Volunteer (V) or direct approach (A)**
PH	Voluntary	Project worker	Wakefield	V
KT	Voluntary	Voluntary Action Coordinator	London	V
SM	Voluntary	Freelance trainer and /mentor	Bristol	A
LM	Statutory	Community development worker	Cleveland	V
CK	Statutory	Community development officer	Cardiff	A
CT	Statutory	Community development worker	Salford	V
GrS	Voluntary	Research officer	London	V
MW	Statutory	Community development manager	Burnley.	V
GaS	Voluntary	Community worker/ Operations manager	Stafford	V
TD	Statutory	Community Development Worker	S.Glos	V
JM	Statutory	Retired community worker and activist	Tilbury	A
AP	Voluntary	Community Work Trainer	Belfast	A
FB	Voluntary	Community work manager	Brighton	V
GR	Voluntary	National development officer	Leeds	V

Table 4. Membership of the Panel of community development practitioners

The resultant panel consisted of 13 people involved in community development practice, training or management. There was initially a good geographical spread across the UK and, when compared to recent surveys of community work posts (Glenn and Pearce, 1998; Purcell, 1998), the panel is typical of the range of activities undertaken by community

workers. I was therefore fairly confident that the experience of these people could be used to identify those features which were crucial to networking practice but acknowledge that it may be insufficiently diverse to generate and deal with different perspectives (Everitt et al, 1992:85).

As can be seen from Appendix L, the panel 'lost' members over the course of the Study, mainly due to pressures of work. One person was unable to complete the critical incidents recordings due to major re-organisation of her local authority and so decided not to continue at that stage. I was unable to arrange a formal interview with the second person due to travel difficulties (she works in Northern Ireland) but did have an semi-formal conversation with her over the 'phone. I conducted 11 individual interviews and seven of the Panelists took part in the focus group discussion. I believe that the group remained representative of community development practice in that it included people working in a range of rôles and settings.

PHASE 1: INVOLVEMENT IN NETWORKS

The first thing to find out was the extent to which community workers were involved in networks, to discover what rôles they played and consider how this benefited their work. I also wanted to hear about any limitations and disadvantages associated with the networks used by community workers. The questionnaire was designed to be a simple introductory exercise to get people thinking about their use of networks.

A **postal questionnaire** was piloted in January 1997 and, after some minor adjustments, sent to Panelists in February (see Appendix M). I asked people to identify the formal and informal networks that they used within their professional practice and to evaluate the benefits and limitations of these. Following Converse and Presser's (1986) advice and to assist the participants, the frontispiece of the questionnaires included the following definitions:

> ***"NETWORKING - the creation, maintenance and use of links and relationships between individuals and/or organisations***
>
> ***NETWORK - a set of inter-connected 'agents' and the pattern of relationships between them***
>
> ***FORMAL - based on a collectively agreed structure and procedures***

INFORMAL - operates without explicit rules"

I emphasised that I was interested in both formal and informal networks and assured participants that I was happy to receive their responses in note form. The questionnaires were generally returned within two months. The results were collated, analysed, summarised and then fedback to the participants before the next stage.

Members of the Panel identified a variety of network-based organisations, including voluntary sector forums, professional support groups, issue-based working parties, inter-agency consultative and liaison bodies and ad hoc steering groups. Three people referred to their involvement in identity-based networks, two of which were for women and one for workers in the Black voluntary sector. Informal networks were seen as more personal, coalescing around shared characteristics and values. These consisted most commonly of current colleagues relating to the immediate job, but also associations arising from on-going collaboration. Several people mentioned that contacts from previous employment continued to provide important connections. Other work-related networks consisting of useful individuals in their 'sphere of operation': key professionals such as head-teachers, youth workers, local traders, police and planners. Also mentioned (though less frequently) were residents, volunteers and community activists themselves. Participation in management committees of other projects and consultative groups was seen as a useful source of informal connections.

At a more personal level, one person valued the network of people who shared their experience of oppression (being gay). Participants referred to shared activities and attitudes, such as church attendance, school events, social gatherings, discussions with 'like-minded individuals' and political commitments. Networks of friends and family were also cited. The importance of conversation, (including gossip) and debate was emphasised repeatedly in people's responses, both in terms of developing 'reflective practice' but also in acquiring useful information.

Some common themes emerged from the questionnaire responses. People recognised the advantages and limitations of networks. Some links were easier to sustain than others due to circumstances or their relevance to work. Negative aspects of networks were attributed to both personal and organisational factors.

THE BENEFITS OF INVOLVEMENT IN NETWORKS

At this stage there appeared to be four main areas of benefit:

- support,
- information,
- problem-solving and
- collaboration.

People referred to their networks as helping them to find 'critical friends', to counter feelings of isolation, offering a shoulder to cry on and space to 'let off steam', whilst maintaining a 'sense of belonging' to what is often experienced as a fragmented and beleaguered profession. Similar attitudes, trust, honesty and shared interests allowed people to seek out support and alternative views which encouraged the generation, development and testing of new, sometimes risky initiatives. The relative convenience (ease and frequency) with which contacts could be maintained was mentioned by several people. Examples included simply bumping into people within a geographical community and connections arising 'spontaneously' through regular work patterns and normal leisure activities. Overlapping networks were mentioned as giving rise to complications in terms of 'which hat' one should be wearing in different contexts but useful in other respects.

People found it easier to justify their involvement in networks where there was some benefit to their work or some relevance to their own professional or personal development. Involvement in networks was seen as a worthwhile investment of time and effort, especially where this led to the effective delivery of services or increased community involvement. In some cases participants referred to their own contributions, e.g. giving specialist help to groups, as enhancing links. Networking usually required personal commitment, a shared 'forward vision', similar approaches and views, compatibility of organisational objectives, and common value base. Clearly there was a personal dimension to people's motivation and actual involvement in networks with different aims. They sought out networks of people with whom they had things in common, but seemed also to appreciate challenges and disagreement. This was reinforced by those 'processual' aspects of networks, which were about how people interacted with one another. Membership of networks was easier to sustain when involvement was fun, stimulating, comfortable, enjoyable and relaxing. One person referred to good networks as having the 'right mix' of people. Similar levels of commitment, interest and enthusiasm were mentioned as factors, along with opportunities for informal social activities, such as meeting for a cup of tea or a drink.

The significance of other individuals and their personal qualities, specifically the need for trustworthiness and reliability, were mentioned by more than one Panelist. One person described how a gap in her network with Social Services was created through the departure of a compatible colleague. Another person suggested that the quality of relationships within informal networks made them worth the effort. Networks were easier to maintain if there was clarity (but not rigidity) around their organisational procedures and culture. Good administration and servicing arrangements were identified as an advantage, as were clear structures and strong user participation.

LIMITATIONS AND DISADVANTAGES

The main problems around networks fell into four areas:

- current circumstances in which community workers operated,
- social inequalities,
- organisational factors and
- the impact of 'personalities'.

Those factors which hindered the maintenance of networks referred to organisational arrangements, as well as inter-personal dynamics. One person suggested that hierarchical practices acted as a barrier to informal networking, whilst making it more necessary. Others referred to constraints of time, funding, distance, bureaucracy, officer-control, contracts, size, and unwieldy decision-making procedures.

Where networks were open and participative, links were easier to maintain. However, the informal, almost cosy, organisational culture (cf. Schein, 1985) and attitudes of members were seen by one person as deterring 'outsiders' from becoming involved. Problems arose where network organisations had existed for a while and were losing their sense of focus. They 'ran out of steam', became stale, complacent, dispirited and incestuous. Their purpose becomes distorted, even though this may not be formally recognised. For example, it was suggested that network-like forums which are supposed to have a consultative function become unrepresentative or that the organisation may be dominated by a clique of powerful individuals who are empowered by the network but dishonestly use it to advance their own interests (cf. McCabe et al, 1997). Other examples referred to networks as becoming insular and self-perpetuating, mere 'talking shops' or social clubs, with little energy or action generated. Assumptions around common purpose lead to inertia and a

lack of critical input or challenge, so that an organisation fails to adapt or becomes resistant to change. The value of a 'devil's advocate' rôle was proposed by one person to keep the network receptive to new ideas. It was recognised that a network can be quite vulnerable, especially when dependent on a small group of individuals who not only service, but may control its function.

It was noted that sometimes certain individuals or sections of the membership withdraw their involvement or are discouraged from participation. This was explained through reference to difficulties around access and initial contact due to informal barriers relating to identity (class, gender, 'race' etc.), the organisation's culture, feelings of being inappropriate or intrusive, and lack of confidence. There was a fear of not fitting in, not 'being good enough'. This seemed to be especially so with networks that attempted to involve both professionals and volunteer community members. The latter were seen as needing more support and encouragement to develop their competence and willingness to network effectively. One Panelist recommended proper channels of communication and accountability to ensure equality in access and fair participation. Unless these measures were in place, networks could become exclusive and elitist, or at least perceived as such.

Without formal procedures it is difficult to challenge inequalities and resolve conflicts within networks. Differences of opinion are treated as 'personality clashes' or a genuine divergence of interest might be suppressed through a spurious consensus or the imposition of the majority view. One person mentioned the lack of time and opportunity to acknowledge and debate contentious issues. Indecision was sometimes responsible for organisational weakness and perpetuating inequalities. People were critical of meetings where there was an over-emphasis on communication, the mere exchange of information with insufficient space given to developing contacts and relationships.

This tendency had been exacerbated by a climate of short-term funding and competitive tendering for contracts, undermining inter-agency collaboration and creating tensions between groups (Gutch, 1992). Panelists noticed a temptation to invent 'top-down' projects which met funding criteria and timescales (Knight, 1993; Hedley and Smith, 1994). This over-emphasis on 'task' can short-circuit the processes of 'cultivating networks' through the development of longer term relationships. At the time of the study (1997) Panelists felt that recent changes in management styles and monitoring approaches had made it more difficult to justify the time and effort invested in setting up vaguely defined networks where there is no apparent measurable output. "Networking is seen as a luxury." "There's got to be

some pay-off." They described a tension between personal involvement in networks and the professional rôle, between formal accountability and informal behaviour or aspirations.

The lack of administrative support, which had formerly been supplied by paid workers or intermediary bodies to community networks, can mean that there is little follow-through on decisions or resources available to carry out joint projects. In this phase of the Panel Study what appeared to be missing was a core of designated individuals who were in a position to support the networking of others.

PHASE 2: NETWORKING OPPORTUNITIES AND OUTCOMES

The next stage focused on networking as a process, something that people do consciously and unconsciously. The use of critical incidents recordings was chosen in order to "gather and interpret" (Fine, 1994) the detail of panel members' normal experience of community work, to gain access to the "thick description" of their practice (Geertz, 1973). I had originally intended to use practice journals as a means of recording the routine decision-making and actions, which could be traced over time as well as across professional and organisational space. It was suggested, however, that without specific incentives or time allowances, this might prove too onerous for panel members and would fail to catch the 'subjective' meaning of the connection and contacts for the participants (Deer Richardson, 1992:83-88). The volume of data garnered by this method, whilst extremely rich, might also prove cumbersome and unwieldy when it came to analysis and interpretation (Bell, 1987).

I therefore decided to use a **'critical incidents'** approach (Flanagan, 1954), asking the participants to record a number of networking episodes which they felt were especially meaningful or noteworthy and which had contributed to their practice over a defined period (Oxtoby, 1979; cf. Sadique, 1996). I was asking the Panelists to do what Heron (1996:115) describes as 'paying heed' to particular aspects of their experience and thus to capture the somewhat elusive and enduring qualities of networking in practice (cf. O'Hagan, 1986). Panel members were given a booklet (on disk if preferred) with 20 pages on which to record the details of incidents which occurred over a period of approximately two months. The booklet included the earlier set of definitions and some questions to guide the details of each story (see Appendix O). Participants were free to choose incidents which seemed to them to be significant examples of networking. Following Deer Richardson's (1992) advice, I spoke on the telephone to participants soon after sending out the material and checked on their progress at the halfway point. This was to ensure that they understood what was being required and also to

encourage them to continue with the task, negotiating extensions to the deadline wherever necessary.

I supplied a definition of a 'networking incident' as

> ***"an interaction which may be deliberate or unplanned which contributes to the development of your work or which you think you may be able to use at a later date for a more specific purpose. There is an outcome as a result of the contact which contributes positively or usefully to community development."***

A number of hypothetical examples were provided to indicate the kind of interactions and outcomes I was interested in. I suggested some guiding questions but more or less left it to the practitioners to 'tell the story' in their own words rather than try and impose any kind of prior categories on the recordings.

Three of the participants managed to complete the 20 recordings I had requested, but many struggled to find the time and one person dropped out at this stage. Most of the booklets were returned well after my suggested deadline, with abject apologies and after considerable 'chivvying' on my part. Eventually I received 12 sets of recordings to read, describing a total of 176 incidents (see Appendix L). I carried out a preliminary analysis of these according to outcomes, circumstances and nature of the connection, and made a note of all the issues raised in the recordings. This initial sifting was recorded and a copy sent to each of the Panelists (see Appendix P). The absence of any clearly defined categories left me with a problem of interpretation when it came to codifying the broader function or consequence of each incident. I embarked on this with no clear themes in mind, anticipating that appropriate categories would emerge from the chaos of data (Marshall, 1981; Kellehear, 1993; Laragy, 1996). Adopting an inductive approach, I identified 42 distinct outcomes, such as 'making a referral or introduction', 'reporting on recent developments', 'recruiting an ally or new participant', 'learning from someone else's experience', 'exploring difficult issues' or simply 'staying in touch'. I then clustered these under nine headings as indicated in Table 5.

None of these categories were clear cut, but they did reveal the different purposes to which community development practitioners used these opportunities. Given that the categories themselves are fairly arbitrary, I have not sought to make a statistical analysis of the incidents. Nevertheless it is clear that networking appears particularly fruitful for establishing

and maintaining the foundations for inter-agency co-operation and collective action, for gaining new knowledge and insights, and generally improving the basis for community development practice. Across all the recordings, one interesting theme which emerged was the significance of informal interactions for the sharing of contentious ideas and unsubstantiated information which could not be communicated formally, either publicly or in writing. This included the testing out of unorthodox opinions, checking unverifiable 'facts', introducing more challenging perspectives into a debate and dealing with awkward situations between other people. It became increasingly clear that this aspect of networking required high levels of trust and discretion. It seemed to be enfolded within inter-personal relationships, rather than official connections or formal liaison.

The majority of recorded incidents occurred in work time and many of these were planned meetings or contacts, such as regular liaison meetings or exchange visits. There were also recordings of unplanned encounters at conferences, training events and work-related social gatherings, such as AGMs, leaving-do's, launch ceremonies and open days (cf. Dandridge, 1986). Many of the circumstances were informal, taking place within or on the way to more formal activities, for example, travelling with a colleague to attend a national event or during conference meal breaks. Several of the incidents were scheduled appointments which took place in informal settings, such as a cafe or someone's home.

A substantial number of the episodes were happenstance. They occurred because of a chance encounter which the practitioner was able to use to transact some business (such as arranging a future meeting), exchange useful information or simply 'catch up' on personal news with a colleague or member of the community. Many of these were conversations with former colleagues and contacts from previous work. Others involved talking to current or potential collaborators. Most involved face-to-face interaction, but a few of the recordings referred to the use of the telephone or the Internet. Interestingly none mentioned paper-based communication. A significant proportion of networking incidents occurred outside of any work-related activity and during the practitioners' own time. Often they arose spontaneously out of leisure or domestic activity, for example a school concert, shopping or even on holiday. Sometimes the connection was through shared membership of another organisation, such as the scouts, a church or political grouping. Occasionally, practitioners referred to unexpected, but extremely useful conversations with total strangers, but these were usually whilst the practitioner was operating in their 'official capacity' and at a public, work-related event. They could be seen as planned but not pre-ordained.

Category of networking purpose	Specific outcomes
Creating new connections	Creating space for connections to be made, suggesting contacts, making links; making referrals or introductions; setting up the contact for future communication and collaboration; access to new contacts and resources
Consolidating or implementing opportunities for collaboration	Clarifying possibilities/rôles for collaboration; identifying mutual interests, shared values, common experience or need; exchange/elaboration/affirmation of ideas, cross fertilisation; planning specific pieces of work, allocation of tasks and responsibilities; setting up a further meeting; spreading the workload, access to other people's help; sharing the blame/glory/risk
General liaison and relationship maintenance	Developing inter-agency liaison, improving multi-disciplinary understanding; consolidating, improving/broadening relationships, staying in touch; offering/finding support and encouragement; team-building, feeling comfortable, trust-building; showing hostility/appreciation (i.e. emotional attitudes); learning about others' attitudes, hidden agendas, etc; giving/receiving professional feedback; reporting back or catching up on developments
Managing or improving public relations	Establishing, maintaining credibility/profile; promoting/explaining own work or own organisation; canvassing for work
Enhancing the foundation for one's own practice	Gaining knowledge and another person's organisation or work; reinforcing or updating knowledge (picking someone-else's brains), sharing information; getting the bigger picture, awareness of power and emotional dynamics in wider context; awareness-raising , seeing things from a different perspective, identifying a practice issue, gaining an insight; recruiting allies/collaborators around a particular issue, identifying potential new members/activists; accomplishing (serendipitously) a planned task, conversation or piece of work; using existing contacts to gain access to expertise/resources/information
Shared or mutual learning	Group learning; learning from the experience of others; comparing experiences
Consultation and co-ordination	Opportunity to raise and respond to specific issues; forum for consultation; bringing together different interests to reach consensus
Influencing decisions	Improving confidence/assertiveness of self and/or others; persuasion/influence towards a preferred course of action; improving decision-making; making and suggesting recommendations
Dealing with risky situations	Checking out uncertainties; exploring difficult/contentious issues; passing on awkward requests or unratifiable information; finding out the unexpected

Table 5. Categorisation of critical incidents recordings

The incidents provided ample illustration of the ways in which community workers are both strategic and opportunistic in their approach. The individual interviews which followed were

a chance to explore these observations in more detail by asking the Panelists to reflect on 'networking' as an active intervention and to investigate the qualities and strategies used to achieve useful outcomes.

PHASE 3: METHODS AND COMPETENCE

The third stage of the Panel Study involved individual **semi-structured interviews.** These interviews were an opportunity to examine the fine grain of networking practice. I wanted to find out what skills and personal traits supported 'good' networking, in relation to both effectiveness and professional ethics. In particular, how did practitioners use networking to enhance the development and empowerment of the communities they worked with?

I arranged to meet with each Panelist on their 'home ground', mostly visiting them at their place of work or a convenient alternative venue. Two took place in the interviewees' home, one in mine. As a preparation for the interview, I sent the preliminary findings from the first two stages of the study and a copy of the interview topic guide. See Appendices N, P and Q. This reflected my commitment to transparency within the research process and ensured that Panelists would have time to develop their own thinking prior to our discussion. The interviews were scheduled to last 90 minutes and were tape-recorded for later transcription. I assured participants that their contributions would be confidential (or at least anonymised) and spent a few minutes establishing some kind of rapport, especially where this was our first face-to-face meeting. I found the Panelists eager to talk about their networking experience and to share their ideas about what constituted 'good practice'.

Every interview used the same topic guide, but each Panelist pursued slightly different themes. This partly reflected their current work situations but was partly affected by personal issues that they brought to the subject, for example, around accountability, ethics, the use of technology or the importance of face-to-face contact. My approach was to guide the conversation but to be as flexible as time allowed in 'letting' the interviewee explore their own practice and beliefs. Although most had not previously thought deeply about networking as a form of professional activity, they recognised the benefits of networking within their work and could relate these to the wider aims of community development. They were articulate about how they networked and were able to identify the conscious (and not so conscious) processes through which they established, maintained and used connections to carry out their work.

One of the things that particularly struck me about the interviews were the similarities that emerged across people working in quite different settings, with different rôles and different life experiences. This was particularly apparent when people were talking about their personal values and approaches to networking and how this fitted in with their current work. There were, of course, variations amongst individuals but broadly speaking there were some strong common themes which suggested that the craft of networking involves significant core skills, strategies and attributes. It was clear that members of the Panel saw networking as essential to community development practice. Relationships and contacts were regarded as a major asset. This was particularly evident with regard to inter-agency co-operation, but the networks also supported informal learning and professional development in ways which have not been so readily acknowledged. Immediately after the interviews, a letter of thanks was sent to each participant which also reminded them of the date and venue of the focus group discussion. This was followed a month later by my preliminary analysis and summary of the interview data (Appendix R). Each person received a rough transcript of their own interview.

PHASE 4: ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS

In the final stage of the Panel Study I wanted to consider some of the issues arising from the previous findings and to explore with the Panelists the implications that these might have for professional practice. A group discussion seemed to be the best way of generating debate and allowing some of the diversity within the Panel to emerge. In order to prepare Panelists for the final stage of the inquiry and ensure that we made the most of the limited time available, I circulated a topic guide and 'ground rules' beforehand (Appendix S). Five key areas for discussion were identified:

- network maintenance,
- inter-agency co-operation,
- managing diversity,
- power and inequalities, and
- enhancing networking practice.

I also telephoned those people who were not coming to see if they had any specific contributions to make.

The focus group took place during the last session of the annual conference of the Standing Conference for Community Development held in March 1998. Not everyone was

able or willing to attend because conference places were limited and expensive, but several people did make the effort and two people travelled to Brighton especially in order to participate. Seven of the original panel contributed to the focus group. Five of the Panel were unable to attend due to budget or time constraints. Four of these were men (three in management positions), evenly split between the statutory and voluntary sectors, and the fifth was the woman from Northern Ireland. Consequently the final group consisted predominantly of workers from the voluntary sector, all directly involved in community development. Some of the Panelists already knew each other whilst others were meeting for the first time.

The discussion itself lasted two and a half hours, with one participant arriving late (train delayed) and another having to leave early. The group was seated around a table, each person having a name card displayed in front of them and with access to refreshments throughout the session. Two tape recorders were used with pressure microphones, placed towards either end of the table. A volunteer assistant took notes of the non-verbal interactions and recorded the order of speaking to aid the subsequent transcription. She was introduced to the group and her rôle explained along with assurances of confidentiality.

In order to enhance individual contributions the actual discussion was set up as an interactive group conversation. It was semi-structured to promote active engagement with the questions on the topic guide, but nonetheless informal (Carey, 1994). Nearly everyone had read my report summarising the individual interviews and drawing out the main themes. Some people had prepared notes which they used to underpin their contributions. Following the introductions, I encouraged people to think of the discussion as a debate, emphasising that I was interested in their disagreements as well as areas of consensus.

Although I was personally involved and shared my experience in order to establish trust and credibility (Maynard, 1994:16), I tried to adopt a moderating rôle as "seeker of wisdom", drawing out the insights, understanding and expertise that lay in the group's collective experience (Krueger, 1998). The group discussion was transcribed and a summary sent to all Panelists, including those who had been unable to participate (Appendix T). This completed the fieldwork.

DEVELOPING THEORY FROM PRACTICE

As indicated at the beginning of this chapter, the Panel Study was designed to elicit theory from practice. My intention had been to work with a group of practitioners as participatively as circumstances allowed and I had tried to ensure that they would also gain from the experience. I wanted to know whether I had achieved this. In addition, therefore, to asking for comments at the end of the focus group, I sent an evaluation form to each of the Panelists asking them to rate their understanding and involvement in each stage of the study (Appendix U). Panelists expressed a very positive sense of having been involved in a project that would have practical implications for community development.

> *"I think it's great being involved in something like this... just to get some real core validation that [networking is] a huge element of our work."* SM (focus group).

They felt they had benefited personally from the process, even though it had required a major commitment over the year. The inquiry had helped people to reflect on their practice, identifying patterns in their work and tracing through processes of development from initial contacts to actual project outcomes. The minutiæ of networking had become more visible, as had the broader purpose.

> *"I don't think I realised until participating in this research how much time I did spend actually in informal networking. It never crossed my mind how much I really did ... I could identify the formal networks because you can't do much about that - just attend the meetings or whatever that people organised. It was the informal side that really has fascinated me and how much, looking at it, how effective it is, how much it makes you do your job. And I hadn't realised, either, how just little things that you do - chance meetings, or planned meetings - it doesn't matter, it's all to do with networking, and that was quite a shock I think really."* LM (focus group)

People realised that networking helped them to deal with complex and uncertain situations, and that their rôle in maintaining and servicing networks was crucial in ensuring that voluntary organisations survived in the prevailing climate of social fragmentation and competitive tendering. Several mentioned that they felt validated by the research process and that it had improved their practice by demonstrating the inter-connectedness of their

working relationships and making them more strategic in addressing 'gaps' in their networks.

> *"I found the recording bit was the hardest bit to do ... it made me look at the networking in isolation to other things, perhaps things that I was not conscious of, really. It brought those things out and made me think a lot more about how I use the process."* PH (focus group)

Panelists recognised both the importance and the difficulty of 'proving' the value of networking to managers and funders. They hoped that the research project would provide clear evidence and theory with which to justify their own investment and skills in networking. This seems to have been achieved. Even though the critical incidents recordings had been difficult and time consuming, people acknowledged the value of monitoring and evaluating networking incidents.

> *"It's actually helped me with my work to sort of show other people the value of the networking because this is one of the problems I've always had; how do you justify it and how do you show it's valuable. And I can see how I've moved on in things that I wrote down. There were perhaps initial contacts with people that I was hoping something would develop out of and now things have developed out of them and I can see the links, which is really helpful for me."* TD (focus group)

Mostly the Panelists enjoyed the chance to *talk* in the interview and focus group to fellow practitioners about their networking experience (cf. Finch, 1984). They felt that these latter stages had been the culmination of a well-structured process, based on individual reflection and the collective development of theory. They welcomed the idea of developing theory from accounts of practice (cf. Ingamells, 1996) and hoped that it would go some way towards convincing others of the effectiveness of 'ethical' networking for community development. 12 of the Panelists returned the evaluation form. The average (mean) scores for each statement are given in Table 6. Panelists used a range from 5, meaning strongly agree through to 1, meaning strongly disagree.

These overwhelmingly positive responses indicate that the research design and style achieved the original aims for the inquiry which were to work with practitioners in a participative and transparent manner. It produced results which are relevant and applicable to current practice. I am still in touch with three quarters of the panel members and know

from subsequent conversations that several of them have publicly acknowledged and made use of the thinking developed through their involvement in the inquiry.

I understood the purpose of the research	4.75
I was kept sufficiently informed at each stage	4.67
I felt I could ask questions and make comments about the research process	4.67
I felt I was participating in a collaborative investigation	4.42
I will have contributed to the development of theory	4.25
I feel that the project is applicable and relevant to fieldwork practice	4.67
My own practice and awareness has benefited	4.25
I enjoyed the * postal questionnaire	3.91
* critical incidents recordings	3.92
* personal interview	4.64
* group discussion	4.29
* generally being involved	4.58
The overall design (the different stages) helped me reflect on and understand my use of networking	4.33
I would be willing for my name to appear in the acknowledgements of the thesis and other publications	4.92

Table 6. Satisfaction scores (out of 5) from Panel Study

The next section presents data from the Panel Study in greater detail, making links with the Festival Against Racism experience, but focusing on networking as a method of professional community work. Chapter Nine examines the components and attributes of 'effective networkers', whilst Chapter Ten explores some issues and implications for 'good practice'.

Section Three

Analysis of the findings

Chapter Nine

Networking as a method or function of professional practice

Chapter Ten

Issues and implications

CHAPTER NINE

Networking as a method or function of professional practice

"To understand is, as ever, to put choice in place of chance" – Charles Handy (1988:113)

Community development often feels somewhat nebulous, creating capacity and cohesion from unpromising beginnings. This chapter focuses on the rôles and techniques used in networking as part of professional practice. It looks at what community workers actually do to establish and maintain connections that are useful to themselves and others. What skills are required and what strategies deployed in networking? What makes a good networker, and how might these aptitudes be acquired? Although many members of the panel had not particularly thought about how they used networking, when questioned about what they actually did they revealed their networking to be strategic and skilful. It took planning and proficiency; and could therefore be fairly described as work.

SKILLS AND STRATEGIES

The interviews revealed the amazing vitality and richness of networking. For these workers, networking was fundamental to their community development practice. It was described as "absolutely central", "the start of everything", "the life and breath" of community work, "pretty vital to all of it", "the sap of community development." It was seen as a core process of community development, and also a key purpose

> *"Community development happens through networking...I think the process of community development work is a process of developing relationships with people and encouraging people to build relationships with each other which are for the purpose of getting things done, but which will also have the benefit of educating people about the way in which they can best live together and to how they can best relate to sources of resources and power in the town, in their area. So the way you do community development work is through this kind of multi-directional process of relationship-building which is networking...It's essential. You couldn't do it without networking."* MW

This was not, however, always acknowledged as such by line managers or funders, or even the workers themselves. The community workers in this study deliberately allocated time and effort to developing and maintaining their networks.

> *"I consciously in my own mental work plan, say that I must spend a certain proportion of my time networking and pro-actively setting up networks of different sorts."* GrS

They were often tactical about who they formed links with, careful in their approaches to different people and conscientious in monitoring and maintaining connections. The networking described in the critical incidents recordings and the interviews was not aimless, but neither was it invariably purposeful. It happened within a broad framework of organisational policies and professional principles.

> *"I'm strategic ... in the sense of almost making a list and saying 'Who do I need to pay attention to next? What network do I need to invest some of my time and energy into next?' "* MW

People acted with design. They took risks and were extremely pro-active in making contact with others. But they were also flexible and opportunist in their use of happenstance encounters and conversations. Networking was portrayed as a combination of intuition and pragmatism. It was both serendipitous and strategic in the sense that the workers deliberately created situations where they were likely to make useful connections. Panel members were skilful in their networking, using a range of methods and ploys, and flexible in how these were applied in different situations. Responses to my interview questions often began with the phrase, "it depends..." and what then emerged was a sophisticated appraisal of the context and purpose of interactions, including explanations of why one approach would be more appropriate and effective than another. Nevertheless, there was considerable agreement on certain core skills, loosely clustered around communication and inter-personal relations. Some people also referred to organisational and administrative competence, especially in relation to the storage, retrieval and dissemination of information. After all, as Milsom (1974) observed, "good organisation...is a way in which we care for people. Efficiency is not the opposite of affection, but one of its expressions". In addition, effective networking seemed to be underpinned by cognitive and political abilities that are rarely acknowledged.

CONSOLIDATING CONNECTIONS

If networking is primarily about developing relationships, then inter-personal skills are bound to figure high on the list. In the interviews, people identified themselves as highly proficient in one-to-one interactions (where they referred to counselling-type skills) and group situations. Good networking involved accurate interpretations of individual conduct and group dynamics. It sometimes meant intervening in situations to shape or open up inter-personal interactions that were being distorted or blocked for one reason or another. Relationships develop when each party feels valued in the interaction, and when these are convivial. Some of the relationships maintained might not be consciously selected, but develop anyway through reciprocal attention and care. Panelists made sure that they stayed in touch with certain colleagues at a personal level, even where contact was predominantly work-related. This included 'phone calls, making time in conversations to share personal news and views, marking significant life events (birthdays, weddings, funerals) and generally arranging social time together.

> *"I would offer help and support, would sort of make some space to have a bit of a personal chat as well as a kind of work chat, so like 'How are you? How's life? How's bla bla bla?' and then 'oh well then so what's this about?', or at the end of the conversation after we dealt with the business, you sort of say 'well, how are things going for you then?'."* FB

In the course of routine work arrangements, people went out of their way to make occasional face-to-face contact, even where this was not necessarily the most convenient or 'efficient' mode of communication. One Panelist described how she would occasionally drive home through a particular area in the hope of "catching a wave" with residents there, and possibly even stopping for a chat. I know from my own experience that cycling around a neighbourhood offered a good compromise between getting to where I needed to be, whilst creating opportunities to catch up with local residents. Most people described how they deliberately structured their work so as to be 'out and about':

> *"I'm not office based, I don't sit behind a desk everyday, I make 'phone calls, I'm pro-active, I go out of my way to go and see people regularly, whether it's sitting having a cup of tea in someone's home, whether it's being invited to do that, whether it's making a prior appointment to go and do that, or it's because somebody has made a particular point of contact and I've responded by saying 'Yes, I'll meet you'."* CT

Panelists described how they made themselves 'ubiquitous', 'accessible', 'welcoming' and 'friendly' and were extremely flexible in how they did this. Living locally was an advantage, but other strategies mentioned were 'having lunch in different places', walking between appointments where possible and generally using the same amenities (shops, pubs, transport, etc.) as people you wanted to network with. This approach created possibilities of meeting people in ways which were neither intrusive nor overly formal. It was about being in the right place at approximately the right time, and then making good use of whatever encounters happened to occur. This was clearly strategic in that it involved knowledge about local customs and habits, good planning, but also serendipitously responding to opportunities as they arose.

Panelists acknowledged that whilst not every contact might necessarily prove immediately or obviously useful, nevertheless information about it would be retained. However, when a link can be established and appears fruitful, it needs to be consolidated. Panelists were adamant that this should not be left to chance. Business cards and leaflets would be exchanged and definite arrangements were often made to meet again.

Alternatively, a way would be devised to follow-up the conversation with some form of contact. Again this might appear fortuitous, such as noticing and sending a magazine article which would be of interest to the other party. Others talked about finding ways of demonstrating a genuine commitment to the other person's well-being or work.

> *"My follow up is to ask them questions and to listen to find out what their interests are, what are their needs, to note them internally and sometimes on paper. I then find that I can follow those up. Whatever people tell you, there's some kind of reverse sod's law. If they are interested in matchboxes there'll be an article on matchboxes in your tray, newspaper, in no time at all and so I'm able to follow that up with something concrete."* KT

This has the dual purpose of beginning to set up an exchange relationship, and

> *"reminding people that I'm still there and that if they wish to contact me, they can do."* LM

Equally they might contrive to be somewhere where they were likely to 'bump into' that person.

"And if it's something about grassroots level within the community, then ... I would go out of my way to be in a place where that person was if I wanted to continue those links. I mean it maybe just something simple like a coffee morning I know they always attend, or [that] they always go round to the shops at a certain time. If I needed to see that person and I wanted to build up the links with them to be the secretary of a particular group or something like that, I would go round it that way, sort of plan my actions but it appears casual." LM

Making contact sometimes involved being quite audacious in "button-holing" a comparative stranger from the crowd of potential contacts and then rendering the connection memorable and pleasant, so that the other person also has an incentive to continue with it. One community worker described how she would (rather cheekily) try and make an impact which she could refer to at a later date.

"'Remember me?...I was the one that commented on that lovely tie you were wearing with the blue and yellow daisies on it'. He looked at me a bit strangely, and I said also 'You will remember me'. " TD

PLANNING, PREPARATION AND PRESENTATION

A theme that runs throughout this inquiry is the strategic nature of networking. Like other aspects of community development it involves planning and evaluation to initiate, consolidate and sustain a changing web of relationships. Some research and preparation might be undertaken even before the initial contact. Panelists made conscious decisions about whether to attend particular events on the basis of the participants list. They scanned these lists to target useful contacts and used their knowledge to decide where to sit or which workshops to go to. They would also think about how to present themselves (protocol, dress codes, use of language) and generally how to manage that first impression. Clearly this needs sensitive judgements about other people's expectations or about what circumstances dictate as 'appropriate' behaviour or dress. Interviewees mentioned that they took care with their self-presentation, and attempted to 'level' the relationship as far as was possible. Paralinguistics (non-verbal aspects of communication such as smiles, shrugs, posture and gaze) appeared to be crucial at this stage. The telephone was preferred to letter writing, probably because more can be discerned about someone from their tone of voice. Face-to-face contact was most favoured in that this allowed communication of emotional signals through body language. Non-verbal

communication provides important clues about other people's intentions and emotions (Eibl-Eibesfeldt, 1989). Good networkers will pay close attention to the non-verbal dynamics of meetings and group interactions.

> *"Why is it I can go into some situations and the vibes tell me to be cautious? Nobody's really said anything, nobody's done anything to make me think that, but there's just a look, an action...and you just think be steady in this situation."*
> LM

Panelists mentioned, for example, that their reason for approaching an unknown colleague at a conference was because they 'looked interesting' or behaved in a particular way that caught their attention, such as laughing at something that had been said or making eye contact. Specific individuals were approached either because of a position they hold or simply because they are 'new on the scene'. The ensuing conversation fulfils at least three simultaneous functions: to establish rapport, to gain information about the other and to impart information about oneself. The interaction can be fairly informal and often takes place in a social setting, such as over refreshments or whilst travelling. Networking exploits opportunities which are incidental to, but a necessary adjunct to the 'main event'. The purpose of the interaction is to seek out common connections, and may involve a far-ranging series of (perhaps risky) conversational leads, including disclosure of personal matters.

> *"What I tend to do is try and ask about the person, try and find out a bit about them and ask about their work or find something to talk about which perhaps isn't related to work, find some sort of common point that we could talk about."*
> TD

The Panelists felt that they generally adopted an informal style, without being or appearing casual. They engaged people in conversations around their likely interests, pitching and moderating their language accordingly, and used humour to put people at ease or when expressing a slightly risky or unorthodox position. There was a strong sense that sustainable networking needed to involve enjoyable experiences, since most such interactions would be voluntary.

> *"It's got to be a pleasant encounter; it's got to have been a bit of fun, you know have a laugh, coffee and just feel that the person can like you in some way."* TD

Workers made sure that others were able to make contact with them relatively easily. This was mentioned by over half of the panel members, referring most often to attendance at formal gatherings, such as meetings, conferences and seminars, but also at events not directly related to work, such as church or school functions and other (slightly ancillary) community initiatives.

What seemed to characterise people's aptitude for networking was not so much the tactics in themselves, but the skill with which people were able to use them to develop their connections with a *wide range* of people.

> *"You are going to have to relate to a whole range of individuals, and at the end of the day that is about being able to think and behave in a reasonably ordinary way, so that people can see you as being accessible."* CT

OVERCOMING BARRIERS AND SPANNING BOUNDARIES

As well as identifying the areas of common interest between groups and between individuals, Panelists used networking to ensure that the people that they worked with had access to a diversity of views, skills and knowledge. Frequently this involved some ingenuity and a certain amount of risk in bringing together experiences which could be mutually challenging. Building bridges across perceived community or organisational boundaries was a first step in generating a dialogue, which might eventually break down the barriers of fear, prejudice and internalised oppression. This area of mutual learning was supported and expanded through informal networking. Workers identified occasions and spaces where people could develop their confidence and understanding. This required some judicious assessment of the individuals involved and how they are likely to react to particular suggestions.

> *"It's also about putting people in touch with the right people at the right time, in terms of them enhancing their personal development."* SM

It means recognising when and how to bring people into situations which match their level of comprehension and commitment, and when to withdraw so that people can manage their own progress. Putting people in touch with others is a major feature of community development practice, especially assisting communication and co-operation across

psychological edges and organisational boundaries. This included direct introductions at pre-arranged meetings or visits.

> *"I introduce people, explain what the circumstances are, and let them get on with it."* GaS

Or accompanying people to events and helping them to make contact with those who might be useful to them by

> *"trying to break the ice between people…making connections between people and convince them that talking to a particular person is a good idea… I'll encourage people to come to a meeting perhaps because I know that somebody else is going to be at that meeting that they could make use of so it's generally not just a 'spur of the moment' thing."* PH

Networking involves forethought, sensitivity and a thorough knowledge of the context, including knowing how to engage someone's attention. Community workers are often the point of entry to other networks.

> *"So what I've done is invite them into this structure where they know they can access all these other people."* TD

Or they may use a personal relationship to facilitate referrals and generally make it easier for people to access the specialist help they need.

> *"I think referrals to be effective need more than information in that, because you can do referrals simply by looking at the computer database or the directory and say well yes there is an Afro Caribbean project on sickle cell anæmia or whatever and you can give a customer or client the telephone number but there is no guarantee they'll follow it up. It's much better if you can say, 'well I'll phone my mate Fred and say that you're here and while I'm on the phone you can make an appointment to go and see him', or whatever, and in some cases with particular sort of people it's actually better to go along with them to the centre. So I think good referral practice is important."* GrS

There was a recognition that networks and networking inevitably reflected personal interests and the prevailing dynamics of the local context. Without counter measures

(sometimes referred to as positive action), networks could become or remain exclusive and cliquey. Panelists therefore used their position to support people who were less confident and articulate in some settings.

> *"So it might be ... making sure everybody gets heard and everybody has a say in what's going on, to the other end, telling everybody what they said."* GaS

This is important where people are on unfamiliar ground or there is a power differential amongst participants. One person described how she would accompany people from the community on their first attendance at a formal gathering:

> *"That does happen more in the Asian community ...or young people maybe. They would ask to come along with me ... just to give them a bit of confidence really. I mean I don't when I'm there, hold hands with somebody all day. I mean I would deliberately not do that. I [would find an excuse] to move out the way, and give the people their own space."* LM

Others referred to the need to work with marginalised sections of the community, referring to:

> *"the homeless, the poor, the elderly, black ethnic minorities, women, children, elderly people, people with disabilities and mental health, new people to an area, for instance. So you're trying to take all of those on board. Sometimes it is noting in a network that I'm in that they're **not** there. Sometimes it is so that the network can get them in but sometimes it is just reminding ourselves that we need to also do something else. We need to go out and talk to these people as well, as well as the valuable work we've done in the network because it's not always possible to get them into a network."* KT

Drawing in new perspectives seems to be particularly crucial in this respect. Several interviews contained examples of how community workers had used connections outside the immediate arena of their work to inject fresh, sometimes challenging ideas. One person explained her decision to become involved in other projects beyond the remit of her job:

> *"There is no doubt that [my experience] benefited the community of young people because they then got input that they would never have got if I'd stayed as a peripheral suburban youth worker, not networked into inner city projects and*

current political thinking and stuff like that... If what networking produces is what they call an added-value now which just brings something new then it has to be a good thing, even if it's a different perspective and it could be a new bit of information...that is a product of having bothered to go out of your usual circle." SM

Another Panelist contrasted the outlooks of two old people's clubs, only one of which was prepared to make links beyond their immediate membership. The members

"are prepared to listen to others, to learn from others, to contribute themselves, so it's a two way thing which makes this communication important ... This need to want to listen to others, to improve not just the thing you're involved in but your knowledge of things generally and a have a wider look. Is networking really just a wider look on things?" LM

As a result of their links with other bodies, such groups become more adaptable and improved the probability of their survival in what was then an increasingly harsh and unpredictable funding climate.

Networking is not simply about cross-validation and corroboration. Panelists actively sought out views that would challenge their own interpretations by meeting with people in other organisations or from different backgrounds. If connections with like-minded people are important elements in the network, so also are those which bring difference and dissent (Oberschall, 1993; Klandermans, 1992). And it is precisely these links which require more effort, more diplomacy and more imagination. This is where the *work* of networking takes place: setting up and maintaining the 'weak' ties across different (and sometimes antagonistic) sections of society.

PROMOTING PARTICIPATION

In general community and inter-agency networks were seen by Panelists as empowering. Either through influence or direct participation, these connections gave people greater access to decision-makers. They facilitated the emergence of community leadership and promoted a shared enthusiasm and ownership. Community development aims to empower disadvantaged people through collective self-organisation. Enabling people to work together in coalitions helps to create stronger voices to promote or defend particular views.

Identifying allies and building alliances frequently involves working across a range of different experiences and perspectives to find (or create) a working consensus.

> *"I think finding allies is a really important thing and trying to cut across single issues like gender, or race, or disability, or sexuality, and ... I know that I do that on purpose, you know."* SM

This requires imagination and diplomacy. It is rarely a straightforward matter of aggregating the separate parts.

> *"It's really difficult but again with a lot of work and a lot of input and going at people's paces. Often those people with completely opposite values can actually develop a relationship because there might be some other common issue that they share and eventually the fact that they're a different colour or different sexuality doesn't matter ... They may have an interest in a piece of land that they didn't want to see destroyed and they work together on that so that... they can gradually understand each other's values."* TD

Assisting people to 'self-organise' on the basis of a shared interest or oppression was regarded as a legitimate form of consciousness-raising and empowerment. Networking was used both to identify and to recruit individuals likely to be useful to collective ventures. 'Rising stars' were nurtured, community members cajoled into new activities and potential volunteers or management committee members solicited. This was particularly necessary in the early phases of developing a project or setting up a new organisation.

> *"We set up discussion meetings to which we invited people who we thought would be interested in the idea. Before and after those meetings we chatted people up about the idea and sold the idea to them, sometimes through letters, sometimes meeting people over coffee."* MW

At community level, workers' informal contact with local people supported a constant process of matching interests, needs and enthusiasms. One-to-one work with individuals was often followed up with suggestions that they join a particular group.

> *"If I think it would be really good for them to be involved in that, I'd say to them, 'Oh you should know about this, this is the person to contact to invite you to the next meeting', and then I ring the person who I suggested they contact and say*

'Oh I met so and so the other day and I've suggested they phone you, I think they would be really good to invite along to this next meeting'." FB

Networks supported mobilisation around local issues or a specific campaign. The 'grapevine' offers an efficient and far-reaching means of gathering participants for community activities. It is probably far more effective than posters, leaflets and newsletters in actually galvanising action, though, of course, the others are necessary supplements if the activity is intended to be inclusive and accessible.

Building people's organising skills and their assertiveness creates a vital foundation for collective action.

"It's about people being able to say that whatever their backgrounds, whatever their concerns, if they feel very strongly about the issues then they have to organise themselves. They can't possibly achieve things in isolation but they have to attempt to work towards a common aim which may well involve going to talk to other networks." CT

Networking was seen as a way of lobbying decision-makers around specific concerns and as a means of generally building people's capacity to influence decisions that affect them. Panelists admitted to using personal connections with policy-makers to promote particular points of view, but they also saw their rôle as enabling other people to develop their own links with powerful bodies.

"It's processes which empower people to be more able to voice their own views, to shape their own lives, their own organisations. That's the driving principle. So when you're networking... the particular outcomes that I'm aiming for are things that I think will strengthen the ability of the local community to represent itself and to get resources for itself and to develop a relationship with big power agencies like the local state." MW

There was an emphasis on using networks to develop a collective, but not necessarily unanimous voice through which different views and interests could be channeled. Statutory workers mentioned their work in creating and supporting community forums as part of formal consultation processes and the constant effort of ensuring that these remained open and diverse.

Finding the connecting threads in order to develop joint projects or services requires knowing a lot about a lot of people, and often relies on the kind of knowledge that is only revealed through 'chatting'. One interviewee felt that it would be difficult to initiate effective collaboration

> *"if there isn't the infrastructure of networking, if you don't know who is around and could usefully be involved in partnerships. Again I suppose it's the information and knowledge in the first place, then the personal contact."* GrS

Knowing who is likely to respond favourably to an invitation is important so that sympathetic individuals can be targeted within a larger body in the hope that either they would attend themselves or find a suitable alternative from amongst their own contacts.

> *"I've got to try and get all the people there who I think should be, so then I would be quite strategic, suggesting specific people who would be useful to invite from specific organisations... Because if you just send a blank letter up to the agency, the chance of anybody picking it up is kind of minimal really."* FB

One of the major benefits of knowing how networks operate and having a mental map of the relations and attitudes of individual members, is the ability to place information in order to influence decisions and enhance the likelihood of particular outcomes.

NETWORKING AS INFORMATION-PROCESSING

Networks can be envisaged as cascading information down and through lattices of inter-connected people and/or groups. For Panelists this was particularly important around complex areas of knowledge or contentious issues, where a range of perspectives was needed to develop a solid understanding of the situation.

Panelists were conscientious in using networks to convey information to where it could be useful, thinking about:

> *"how to use what knowledge I've got and pass it back, because I really do believe this thing about information is power and that's part of networking."* SM

They noticed and passed on items of news, not always immediately but saving it for the right opportunity or target. This might simply be about having a good memory.

"Sometimes it's just storing that little bit of information away in my brain, and it might not be apparently of use to me at that time, but I am aware that sometime in the future it might be of use to me or someone else." FB

In order to be an effective node in the communication system, Panelists saw *receiving information* as an important area of competence, notably asking questions and really listening to the answers in the sense of noticing (and storing) potential connections. Their contribution ranged from simply transmitting information, through to convening and servicing network-type organisations. One participant referred to their rôle as an open communication channel, a conduit through which information flowed as well as acting as a point of contact for other groups and the media. Many of the Panelists described themselves as a resource which others could use to obtain information. They had become a kind of human encyclopaedia of local knowledge, "a walk-in file index" as one person described herself, but one which was functioned actively as a key node in a vast communication system. People referred to their notebooks, filing systems, card index boxes, diaries and address books as vital tools in their ability to network effectively.

One mentioned the importance of maintaining their membership of various umbrella organisations and to read the relevant minutes, newsletters and periodicals. For this reason, it was seen as vital to be on a variety of mailing lists so as to stay up-to-date with the latest issues and developments. Talking to colleagues was a useful way of gaining access to information and ideas about what is going on in your own and other organisations.

"I'm actually building up a lot of knowledge which ... also makes my networking more effective because I can actually ... instigate a conversation." TD

Panelists used their networks to examine the validity of their own ideas and to consider alternative perspectives. Links were cultivated for their reliability or 'newness' as sources of information. Informal interactions were used to clarify ambiguous or contrary interpretations of events.

"People stay behind and talk to you and check out 'how do you think that went?', 'What went on?', 'Who said what?', 'How do you think ...?' I'm checking out, reviewing and evaluating what's going on, making sure I've been to the same meeting as everybody else. Checking out what's happening." GaS

TRAITS AND ATTITUDES

The ability to manage information has to be complemented by other people's willingness to give it. This seemed to be affected by aspects of the Panelists' personality including a commitment to perceive and value the whole person with whom they were interacting. They showed interest, empathised where necessary, paid attention to (and remembered) personal details (even apparent trivia) and made genuine efforts to understand different points of view. Making a positive contribution occurred at a psychological as well as a practical level. Being optimistic, helping to maintain morale, sharing the aims and values of the organisation, being part of developments and following through on conversations helped to sustain relationships.

The community workers in the Panel Study were able, when asked, to identify qualities within themselves that they felt enhanced their networking. A cluster of attributes emerged from the interviews which are summarised in the table below.

Affability	Warmth, compassion, empathy, humanity, gregariousness, responsiveness, attentive
Integrity	Self-aware, trustworthy, reliable, realistic, honest, open in dealings with others, respecting confidentiality
Audacity	Relishing change and innovation, prepared to challenge authority, take risks and break rules
Adaptability	Tolerant of differences, enjoying cultural diversity, flexible, non-judgmental, open to criticism
Tenacity	Patience, persistence, comfortable with uncertainty and stress

Table 7. Characteristics used by Panelists in their networking

These suggest a portrait of the networker as someone who is oriented towards other individuals, seeks affiliations but values autonomy, is non-deferential and therefore less tolerant of formal organisational constraints. Community networkers exhibit many of the attributes which predict transformational leadership: self-esteem, consideration for others and intuitive thinking (Bass, 1981; Bennis and Nanus, 1985; Bennis, 1988; Bryman, 1992). They provided ethical leadership (Cassidy and Korrall, 1994) and showed entrepreneurial flair (Young and Smith 1998), but without (apparently) the drive for personal ambition or profit. These traits were very similar to those found in 'allocentrics' (Hui and Villareal, 1989), Machiavellians (Aronoff and Wilson, 1985), high self-monitors (Baron, 1986), collectivists (Triandis, 1995) and mavericks (Watson, unpublished, cited in Hastings, 1993; deLeon, 1996). Lo (1992) highlights the role of challengers and dissenters in mobilising the initial

stages of transformation. Networkers need to be able and willing to defy conventions, break bureaucratic rules, operate effectively in unfamiliar (social) territory and establish personal connections rapidly and smoothly. However the Panelists were reticent in claiming credit for their interventions, and seemed gregarious rather than charismatic in that much of their networking took place 'off-stage' and consisted of manœuvering others into the limelight or positions of influence, rather than occupying these for themselves.

Whilst organising the Festival Against Racism I was aware how often I found myself using courage, cheek and charm to approach people who I didn't know well, but whose help was needed for the Festival. These traits were complemented (to continue the alliteration) by a foundation of curiosity (about other cultures and asking questions about who was who in which organisation), and conviction that the project was worthwhile and would make a difference to anti-racism in Bristol. The Panelists also seemed to demonstrate these qualities in their own networking. The Festival experience also indicated that there was something about the style, reputation and identity of the main protagonists. Their leadership was trusted, and they in turn trusted one another (Bennis and Nanus, 1985). This allowed us to do without a system of rules and regulations, which we would have had neither the power nor the inclination to administer. As Fukuyama explains:

> "Trust is the expectation that arises within a community of regular, honest and co-operative behaviour, based on commonly shared norms, on the part of other members of the community...By contrast people who do not trust one another will end up co-operating only under a system of formal rules and regulations, which have to be negotiated, agreed to, litigated and enforced, sometimes by coercive means." (1995:26-27)

Within the community development rôle, networkers strive for collective achievements; discovering solutions to shared problems and facilitating others to take initiative and responsibility. Their purpose is to empower others, rather than seek power for themselves.

The critical incidents in particular revealed the variety and unpredictability of opportunities that community development practitioners use for networking and the importance they attach to flexibility. As Pasteur is said to have observed: 'chance favours the prepared mind' and good networking involves both groundwork and self-discipline. Several members of the panel emphasised that their networking needed to be reliable and adaptable. By this they meant being punctual for meetings and appointments, giving apologies where necessary and fulfilling (more or less) commitments and promises. This paradoxical desire to be both

flexible and consistent was evident when Panelists were asked about the professional values and personal attitudes which underpinned their networking. A picture emerged of the 'good networker' who was accommodating and versatile, willing and able to adapt to a wide variety of situations, yet holding within themselves a very strong sense of self and set of core beliefs. This was thought to be crucial in maintaining an overall purpose around the networking. One Panelist described her approach as:

> *"not too closed, not too fixed really, I think I do have a fairly ... clear idea about what I believe is good practice in terms of community work and I really think it's important to be clear about that."* FB

It enabled people to shift between rôles whilst maintaining a clear identity and sound ideological base. The Panelists were convinced that their ability to form relationships was about being 'straight-forward', neither having nor suspecting 'hidden agendas'. They felt that they were seen by others as honest, trustworthy, reliable and sincere. These qualities were identified as important in a recent piece of action research looking at the development of 'caring communities' (Barr et al, 2001). A few commented that they found people confided in them readily and seemed to respect their advice. They described themselves as approachable, using words like 'popular', 'charming', 'sociable', 'extrovert' and 'comfortable'. Panel members came across as confident in unstructured social settings, but very aware that not everyone present would feel as included or relaxed as themselves, especially in talking to strangers or officials.

Nearly all the Panelists referred at some point to their interest in other people and curiosity about different lives and cultures. They enjoyed diversity and several had previously lived or worked abroad. They were accepting of difference (even relishing it) and deliberately sought out new experiences which would educate and challenge them. This 'breadth of spirit' was demonstrated through compassion, tolerance and patience. They showed respect, not condescension, often acknowledging their need and desire to learn from others. The Panelists were open about their own shortcomings. They were ready to admit mistakes, to ask for assistance and to apologise. They wanted to be seen as human; even vulnerable and felt that this helped them to build genuine links with others. They were willing to share resources, generous with their time, skills and knowledge. They saw themselves as working for others, but were not self-effacing about their rôle or contribution. They knew their worth and what they could offer to different situations and relationships.

Members of the Panel referred to the skills and attitudes that they had developed from varied careers in marketing, adult education, social work, youth work and from working within other cultures. People had gained a capacity to deal with a broad variety of 'client groups', and also an ability to appreciate different perspectives.

> *"The fact that I've got a multi-disciplinary background helps me in a practical sense of being able to anticipate but I think more important is the theory that not everybody understands the same thing from the same set of words or concepts and having that in mind is really helpful when it comes to mediating. It leaves me open. I don't make a judgement."* KT

Most of the Panelists welcomed the demands and challenges of diversity. They saw it as enriching and dynamic, providing opportunities for comparison and debate.

> *"It might be interesting to make contact with somebody who has a different mission; in other words has experience in a different service or different agency, to compare notes because that agency might be an advantage or help to you in the future."* JM

Although diversity brings complications and potential conflict, it is to be promoted not only because it brings greater levels of satisfaction for those involved (Hirsch, 1980), but also because it has benefits for collective action and problem-solving. A major rôle for the community worker involves convening and servicing groups which bring together individuals across organisational and identity boundaries to develop what Ledwith and Asgill (2000) term 'critical alliance'. In order to work together effectively, such coalitions need to find temporary alignments which allow forward movement towards a common goal. Coalitions represent temporary, tactical arrangements through which disparate actors combine forces in order to achieve a goal that benefits each of them or fends off an external threat. Boissevain (1974) suggests that these are inherently unstable whilst others have described coalitions as a form of ossification, the equivalent of organisational arthritis (Handy, 1988:148). Most campaigners would recognise their potential as creating a dynamic resource for social change (Wilson, 1984). I tend to agree with June Jordan, who recognises that coalition formation is contingent on current issues and political circumstances (cited by M.Smith, 1994).

> "I would say about coalitions what I say about 'unity', which is what is it for? The issue should define the social configuration of politics."

Where conflicts exist or are anticipated, it is vital to create 'safe space' for discussing contentious issues (Norman, 1993) and for members to have opportunity to overcome the 'hidden frontiers' of the mind by getting to know one another personally (Camplisson and Hall, 1996:44). Neutral and mutual non-governmental organisations have an important mediating role. The experience of cross-community working in Northern Ireland and other situations torn by sectarian or ethnic divisions (such as Rwanda, Afghanistan, Moldova) reiterate the value of trust and informal relationships in peace-building and conflict resolution (Harbor et al, 1996; Heenan, 1997; Kuzwe, 1998; Johnson, 1998; Veale, 2000).

Disagreements and tensions are inevitable corollaries of diversity, but generate an important impetus for learning and transformation.

> *"I really genuinely believe that conflict is a really healthy thing ... for two reasons. I abide by that statement that says 'from conflict breeds consciousness' but also because in my experience if you constantly live your life with people of the same values and shared vision then you never tighten up your arguments."* SM

An important aspect of this appeared in Panelists' willingness to challenge existing practices and assumptions. They were prepared to 'grasp the nettle' if necessary, asking awkward questions or giving constructive criticism. They were bold, but not reckless in their dealings with either individuals or institutions. Most mentioned that they became easily frustrated with bureaucratic procedures, the paper work and the formality of corporate culture. There were several references to tensions within their team or with their immediate line-managers that seemed to arise from their tendency to operate rather more autonomously than their employers wished. They were mavericks who survived because their optimism, forward-thinking and determination inspired others and achieved results. There is an aphorism that "an optimist is someone who thinks the future is uncertain", and in this context, is willing to try and bend it towards a more socially just alternative.

The above characteristics reflect professional values as much as 'personality traits' (cf. Cattell, 1965) and could be deemed essential (or at least desirable) qualities for most community work posts. It has been suggested that people are adept at choosing (or even changing) situations to suit their particular strengths (Hosking and Morley, 1991; Bryman, 1992). This finds a parallel in the nature-nurture debate concerning the origin of individual differences in attitudes or behaviour, and will be considered in the next chapter.

WIDENING HORIZONS

Networking clearly involves both 'common' courtesy and good communication skills. It is about maintaining a web of relationships which can support a useful flow of information and influence. But for it to be taken seriously within community development it is necessary to identify more tangible outcomes which make community workers more effective and which benefit community members.

In their questionnaire responses nearly every participant mentioned the importance of being part of a constant exchange of information and opinions. One person referred to one of his informal networks as a source of inspiration and stimulation in relation to shared political values. Others acknowledged that communication within their networks enabled them to form an overview of a situation, to gather useful insights, establish the 'bigger picture' and identify gaps in provision which might be met through adjustments to the agency's or their own work programme. Two participants referred to networks as being a way of monitoring their own reputations and maintaining the profile of their organisation and work. There was also a need to observe and evaluate the links between groups. This is helpful at an individual level, but also contributes to the construction of a communal model of the world which is used to determine collective responses and strategies for change. The debates and on-going discussion that reverberate around informal networks create and constantly revise a shared understanding of what's happening and how it can be influenced. It enables workers to intervene directly in political or social processes, and also allows them to advise others.

> *"You've kind of got a sense of where people fit on the map of networks and you have a sense of where you fit.... you gradually build it up and you hear different and contradictory things from different people and you form your own judgements. So it's a gradual process of becoming part of that landscape of relationships, networks and power dynamics."* MW

Seeing the bigger picture is also important for local people, and seems to be an important function of 'weak ties' (Granovetter, 1978). For community members, networking was thought to extend their horizons and perspectives. It operated as an informal research method, enabling people to gain an overview of the (policy) context and develop a broader understanding of issues. Networking enables people to stay in touch with shifts

in the organisational field, as well as the dynamics of community politics. This was particularly useful for obtaining unofficial views to compare with the public version of events.

Several of the panel mentioned exchange visits they had organised between similar organisations (miners' welfare schemes, pensioners clubs, tenants' associations). The purpose of these was to transfer the experiential learning from one group to another, so that they didn't need to "start from scratch" in setting up a project. This meant that groups were:

> *"not inventing the wheel all the time. Somebody has done something, they can learn from that, they can learn from other people's mistakes so they don't make the same mistakes, they can go one step further."* PH

This same strategy was used to help a group address specific difficulties.

> *"We bring in people ... and I'll always offer to go and visit people who've worked through those same set of circumstances so ... we visited those that have been there and come out the other side."* GaS

Or it might simply be about discovering that local difficulties are part of a broader problem, that neighbouring communities are also facing.

> *"I try and keep in mind that we've got to learn from other people's experience, locally and wider. Keeping ideas coming; and of course that's key and crucial to networking anyway. It's one of the purposes of getting as broad a spectrum of experience together as possible so that you can compare, contrast and learn."* KT

IMPROVED ACCESS AND CO-OPERATION

Networking allows people to cut across organisational boundaries and gain access to facilities, expertise and advice. This enabled them to solve problems quickly and without going through official procedures. Participants saw their contacts as saving them time and effort. They were able to request or negotiate access to resources, especially funding, more easily, and to link individuals into relevant groups. Personal contacts also provided access to external professional guidance for specific pieces of work. This was mentioned as particularly useful in relation to legislation and grant applications. Reciprocal

working relationships were developed through regular participation in relevant events and activities; using contacts to build up inter-dependence by "giving as much as I receive", as one person put it. This included offering knowledge and advice, as well as simply sharing information and skills. There were many forms and levels of co-operation referred to in the interviews. At one end of the spectrum, informal connections supported begging, bartering and borrowing; calling in favours and circumventing formal procedures by

> *"trading in kind rather than having to account for them [which gives] flexibility.... anything that doesn't have to go through the accountants."* GrS

This seems to be especially necessary for workers in the voluntary sector, and represented a surreptitious re-distribution of resources between statutory agencies and smaller community groups.

Panelists emphasised that it was the personal aspects of relationships which eased the processes of multi-agency working. It allowed people to move through and beyond the formal bureaucratic procedures to establish genuine mutuality, rather than paper partnerships.

> *"I think it could lead to multi-agency work and match resourcing as opposed to match funding ... And to be honest I think there's something about there being short cuts to get what you want or what communities need, and the flow of information increases."* SM

People used their networks to solve short-term problems and to develop a collective response to common issues, such as when many organisations were faced with:

> *"the new Charity Commission and Home Office regulations on SORP. That's brought about a whole mass of networking in the sense that people are contacting each other."* JM

Co-operation need not always entail direct collaboration. It may simply be about making sure that activities augment rather than compete with one another. Networking with other organisations is useful for ascertaining the current 'state of play' and adjusting one's activities accordingly, for example to avoid competition for funding.

"We contacted other people doing a similar sort of bid; not to pinch what they were doing, but to find out what their experience was and what their particular need was. We wanted to ensure that we weren't all making the same competitive bid which could penalise all of us." JM

Networking enables organisations to co-ordinate what they do so that their services, funding applications and resources are complementary or can be shared. Helpful connections can be nurtured, avoiding unnecessary (and wasteful) rivalries. Multi-agency partnerships and intermediary bodies were important in providing opportunities for this kind of co-ordination, as was the case with this CVS in Essex.

"Its steering group work found a lot of voluntary groups were working in total isolation, so [my] initial work acted as a fulcrum ... or a hub to bring people in." JM

NETWORKING THE NETWORKS

The questionnaires and interviews indicated the vital rôle that community workers play in organising and managing 'umbrella' bodies which bring together people and projects operating across a variety of settings and issues. Several Panelists had a key function in convening and chairing such meetings. They often seemed to play a 'behind the scenes' rôle, servicing such forums, maintaining membership lists, sending out mailings and providing a point of contact for interested parties. Several people referred to their active involvement in multi-agency working parties, task groups and project development.

Other opportunities for networking were more deliberately engineered through meetings of membership organisations designed to facilitate exchange and discussion across organisational or geographic boundaries. They might also have the aim of articulating a particular perspective around a set of common issues to another co-ordinating body. Forums and federations and, to some extent, local associations which actively represent different sections of a community (e.g. neighbourhood committees) share this potential. They all provide opportunities for people to link up with others who have different interests and identities and yet have some kind of shared values or purpose. Community workers are often instrumental in setting up and maintaining such intermediary or umbrella bodies. Their ability to function effectively is determined by the quality of internal and external linkages. As well as maintaining their own links and relationships, Panelists described an additional rôle of 'networking the networks'.

"I think my networks work ... they are actually very diverse. There is some overlap with them but there isn't a very core tight knit group. I'm sort of very conscious I'm the hub of lots of networks." GrS

Panelists deliberately and strategically maintained their involvement in a range of networks, adjusting the level of their participation to ensure that the range of connections reflects current and potential work priorities.

"Networking the networks has become very much my job, initially by default - it had to be done like that.... linking past, present and future, these things are always very important to me but implicit rather than explicit... I think I'm always bringing a broad overview." KT

Networking is used to support processes of mediating, translating and interpreting between people and agencies who were not in direct or clear communication with one another. The interviews were full of examples where community workers had been invited to act as intermediaries between opposing parties, using their rôle to find common ground.

"Sometimes I play a mediating rôle, there have been times when I've tried to bring groups together to sort things out. More often I guess I end up being in a bridging rôle, so that messages go through me to other groups." GrS

Getting the relationships right meant that disagreements and disputes could be handled more amicably and resolved more effectively. Sometimes knowing the people involved meant that conflict could be anticipated and averted or dealt with informally. This certainly occurred within the cluster of Festival organisers. Difficult issues were addressed through parallel discussions amongst all the key activists, but very rarely aired at the official steering group meetings.

"If you look at the way things were done and the regular discussions that took place over controversial issues, there was a sort of informal committee of people or should I say circle, 'cos it never actually met as a committee. There was a group of us who were the informal decision makers who could have been called together if there was a problem." RJ

Conflicts often erupt in communal facilities where people want to use the same space for different purposes. Tensions inevitably run high and this seems to be particularly the case when young people are involved. One person described how she was able to contain the anti-social behaviour of local young people by relating to them personally. It was a

> *"huge advantage because I know them (the teenagers) by their name.... especially if they're the kids that also can cause quite a lot of trouble ... The fact that they're not anonymous actually makes an enormous amount of difference, and also working with the detached youth workers makes a lot of difference...[The kids] know that their behaviour is what we do not like, it is not them."* FB

Other mediation strategies involved getting the views of people outside the dispute or using one-to-one conversations as a basis for consensus formation, leading to an eventual negotiation of an agreed settlement. Informal discussions were often useful in addressing controversies without them becoming confrontational.

> *"If there is another point of view which they have not taken account of...You have to talk to people about that as well. So in that networking ... it's the place where differences of agendas, differences of opinion, and differences resulting from the different locations that you have, get had out."* MW

In order to co-operate, organisations must sometimes also deal with competing interests or divergent ideologies. These may involve differentials in power or status which the community workers have to be aware of and seek to overcome.

Diversity also creates the possibility of innovative combinations and adaptations.

> *"Collective, collaborative action [is] a means to solve problems, to make changes. It's just being open to finding the new. This is what's exciting about having a mixed community. It sets problems when new people come in and there's a mix but one of the good things is that you might come up with new solutions because of that."* KT

Getting people to work together who have different cultures, interests and social status is fraught with difficulties and tensions. Members of the panel seemed to use their contacts and relationships to manage that pluralism in very positive ways by being informed, tolerant

and flexible. Where fundamentalist positions (whether based on faith or politics) were encountered, Panelists attempts to overcome dogma and intransigence by building personal links and mediating between factions if required.

PROMOTING COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Community development as a profession has often been misrepresented or marginalised. For the Panelists, networking created opportunities to promote their work and explain its underlying purpose. They used networks to seek out support from others who might sympathise with some of their professional dilemmas and provide advice on specific difficulties. As well as a form of mutual education within their own field, the Panelists used informal networking as a form of public relations for community development. This included both promoting community development generally as well as their own work or organisation.

> *"It's also building a reputation of the organisation, as being open, accessible, interested and dynamic and exciting and that information passes round...also gets the community heard about and known about."* FB

More generally people made an effort to enhance understanding of community development principles amongst colleagues in other occupational disciplines or departments.

> *"It's really useful because I was able to input community development types of approach into perhaps what might be more sort of controlling ways of working, and talk with other people about the difference and possibilities for working in both ways sometimes. So not only do I meet people who might be useful to me but I can also get community development into people's minds."* TD

This 'infiltration of other camps', as one person described it, can be seen as a necessary strategy to raise the profile and status of a misunderstood and poorly funded profession.

META-NETWORKING

There is substantial evidence from the fieldwork that networking should be regarded as a skillful and strategic activity. Good networkers display both propensity and ability in their concern to develop and manage a range of relationships. They make judgements about how best to initiate and support useful links between themselves and others, and more importantly perhaps, they help people make and maintain connections between each other. I have termed this latter function *'meta-networking'* (Gilchrist, 1999, Appendix W), arguing that this represents the essential community work intervention which contributes to the development of the 'well-connected community' (Gilchrist, 2000).

Although at the time I imagined this formulation to be original I have subsequently discovered a reference to 'meta-networks' used to describe a strategic, but virtual form of regional geo-governance used to promote and regulate economic competitiveness (Sum, 1997:161). The concept of 'meta-networking' will be explored further in Chapter Eleven, but for now the key components of effective meta-networking can be identified as

- mapping the social and organisational landscape (knowing the key nodes and how they are connected);
- initiating and maintaining inter-personal connections (often using one's own contact to make the referral or introduction);
- managing and monitoring relevant networks (being aware of shifting dynamics and boundaries);
- anticipating and dealing with conflicts within and between networks (acting as diplomat and mediator where necessary);
- encouraging and supporting participation in networks where there are obstacles or resistance (perhaps facilitating access and inclusion through positive action measures) and
- assisting in the development of structures and procedures which will ensure that networks are open and sustainable.

Traditionally community work has emphasised the rôle of the professional in establishing groups and organisations with specific aims and activities. The 'discovery' of meta-networking as a core function suggests a shift away from formal arrangements in favour of more informal processes. It is another way of looking at the well-rehearsed

arguments about the balance between 'goal' and 'process' in community development. These are considered in the next chapter which identifies some of the issues arising from the research, and explores further implications for community development practice and policy.

CHAPTER TEN

Issues and Implications

"You have to go by instinct and you have to be brave" – from 'How to make an American quilt' (Anderson, 1995)

It is evident from the Panel Study that networking can be seen as essential to the community development process and that without it, other things that were more formally recognised as the purpose of community work become difficult or impossible to carry out.

> *"The networking is absolutely central to everything else that you want to do and that's why I think that we do it and justifying it I think there are some implicit reasons for doing it, because if you didn't do that you couldn't do these other things. If you don't have the relationships, the contacts, the information, this flow that's going on, then you couldn't do the other things that are explicit in your job description, and this is a bit of a problem because often networking isn't explicit but to do these other things it's absolutely core."* KT (focus group)

As we have seen, many of the panel held pivotal positions or played a key rôle in setting up network-type organisations, such as area or issue-based multi-agency forums. They seemed to provide both 'servicing' and 'leadership' functions, chairing meetings, organising publicity material and mailings, monitoring and encouraging participation and occasionally advocating on behalf of the community. In short, they established and maintained situations in which networking flourished, and worked hard to ensure that these were inclusive, productive and equitable by paying attention to issues around access, reciprocity, diversity and power. This emphasis on support for networking generally raises a number of issues concerning the rôle of the community worker and had implications for practice and policy. These will be considered in this chapter, alongside a particular focus on the significance of face-to-face interaction.

Informal networking complements formal liaison mechanisms by creating the conditions which support effective co-operation across boundaries. The *relationships themselves* appeared to be a source of strength, of collective and individual empowerment. Sound working relationships were mentioned as a foundation for joint action and co-operation. They created a 'collective power-base', which enabled individuals and groups to influence the decisions of more powerful bodies. A frequent image used by the Panelists was of the community worker as a catalyst, providing the 'magic' ingredient

that releases the synergy of the combined partners. Zeldin (1994) comments on the catalytic rôle played by intermediaries in social transformation. Good networkers need to be able to interpret and transmit information, directing it in appropriate format to where it might be useful. Again, flexibility appeared as an important quality. People recognised that they needed to be able to communicate effectively in a variety of modes and to make decisions about which style would be most effective with which people. They therefore needed a wide repertoire of communication styles, ranging from formal report writing right through to the subtleties of cross-cultural body language.

INFORMALITY ALLOWS RISK

Foy (1980) identifies the relative informality of networks as key to their organisational success. This was reflected in how Panelists used formal structures for informal purposes. Sometimes people would go to a formal event, not primarily because of the items on the agenda, but in the expectation that they will obtain useful contacts for a piece of work they might be starting, gain some advice on a problem they've encountered or simply to maintain their own profile or place on the map. The discussions 'around the edge' of the meetings are often more productive than the main agenda and are a useful reminder of how people stand on different issues. Equally, formally convened meetings are often where initial contacts are made, or provide the occasion for fostering links in the professional network. In these situations, humour is a useful means of revealing paradoxes and ambiguities or expressing resistance (Rodrigues and Collinson, 1995). Humour and play activities provide opportunities to dissipate tension (Berger, 1997) and develop a working consensus within professional contexts (Broussine et al, 1998). The informal nature of some gatherings allowed people to talk directly across organisational and status boundaries through a seemingly more equal connection.

> *"Generally if someone from the community group wanted to meet with somebody fairly in authority, they would have to set up a formal meeting, whereas at Network meetings they can talk together without that formality ... People can offer advice off the record."* PH

The absence of formal structures and procedures allows people to be candid, more risky in their remarks and behaviour. This was identified as a major advantage of one network's meetings.

"People have also said that they have been able to say what they would not [otherwise] be able to say ... because they're not seen as representing their organisation really, so they can say things about their own department that they wouldn't say in a formal situation perhaps." PH

There was a clear sense that it was the development of these more personal relationships, which provided the durability and flexibility of community-based organisations.

"I think it's at the informal level that you build up trust and real relationships and this is absolutely crucial to bringing people together ... It's not just people, ideas and resources... the informal networking is absolutely crucial, not only because you need it in a practical sense but, I think, because it actually reflects community." KT (focus group)

Informality was similarly a hallmark of the Festival Against Racism, and seemed to facilitate people's involvement. In the early weeks many conversations took place serendipitously or were 'hooked onto' other encounters or meetings. Ease of contact was an important consideration, but the lack of formal bureaucratic procedures seemed to increase people's willingness to take risks in committing themselves to organise a Festival event. It was said that the "informality encouraged spontaneity" (MJ) and, paradoxically, created a sense of security. It allowed people to make an assessment of the situation, to check out what might be involved and then make an informed decision. One organiser described it thus

"if the approach is informal, the person being approached can measure their involvement, whereas if it's some kind of formal invitation you either make a commitment or you don't, whereas if it's informal you can bargain around how much commitment there is. It doesn't feel difficult in an informal setting." LC

For more cautious events organisers, knowing the core activists personally gave them access to advice and information and diminished the sense of trepidation. The Festival had a temporary office in the Community Centre where I had worked for several years and where this interviewee now ran the nursery.

"You were there so it made it very easy for us to approach you to get information and feel alright about that. I think if you were a stranger, we would have to have initiated proper contact and felt...basically we could discuss it on

an informal level and then decide what we wanted to do. If you were stranger we would have felt obliged... I don't know. It just felt right, I suppose. I wonder if we would have done so much if there wasn't that initial contact." LB

Another organiser referred to the lack of bureaucracy.

"There were not so many red-tapes. There weren't forms to fill in ... [It] was easy because it did not put pressure on the people ... so it was a contribution from individual people as to what they can give rather than what we are demanding and what you must give. And I think that made a difference to how people felt." BP

This released people's initiative and imagination.

"People were not being regimented into any kind of structure I suppose ...I think that therefore people were able to be a lot more creative...They could feel free and I think people tend to be a lot more responsive that way ... [They] didn't feel pressured. They felt trusted to come up with the right thing." RS

The Festival Against Racism illustrated how informality made it possible for people to become involved on their own terms. This is important for community development which relies on the voluntary engagement of community members. Informal methods of organising require less explicit commitment and provide easy escape routes.

"I think informal [contacts] are much easier because if you make a slip up it doesn't matter, because it's so informal or casual and you could say well I just happened to be here, and you can make an excuse for yourself almost. So if you don't give the impact you wanted, all is not lost." TD

Both the case study and the practitioners' panel revealed the extent to which the formal and the informal are inextricably and symbiotically enmeshed. As Laguerre (1994) demonstrated in his study of decision-making in the Bay Area of California, informal encounters were used to explain, to elaborate, to explore and to critique what might have happened at a formal level. Seemingly casual comments or encounters are often neither observed nor recorded, evading surveillance by the authorities (J.C.Scott, 1990). Consequently, people saw these exchanges as more sincere. They discovered what other individuals really thought, as opposed to the official 'line'. Subversive or downright bizarre

views could be voiced in the hope that they might entice out similarly contentious or creative thinking. Informal conversations are usually where news is exchanged about personnel changes, the results of funding applications, or a chance to 'float' projects that are still only sketches on the mental drawing board. Advance notice of proposed policy changes travel the 'grapevine', and can sometimes be 'reformed' even before they are formulated. And then, of course, there is the 'gossip' through which we stay in touch with each other's personal lives.

WEAVING TRUTH WITH TRUST

The word 'risk' is derived from the Portuguese for venturing into uncharted territory. It involves both hazard and uncertainty (Giddens, 1999), and both can be ameliorated through networking. As Axelrod (1979) demonstrated in his examination of the 'Prisoner's Dilemma', all forms of co-operative action involve risk assessment. Following Deutsch (1958) and Kelly and Thibaut (1978) who first made the link philosophically and empirically, McKechnie and Welsh (1994:69) emphasise the importance of relations of trust in mediating risk in the development and exercise of collective power. In doing so they reject Gidden's (1991) view of trust as a "defensive carapace" derived from childhood experience and adopt instead Beck's (1992) approach which argues that the 'risk society' must be based on institutions and relationships which can be trusted. As Marx once wrote, "Love can only be exchanged for love, trust for trust" (1961). Trust is developed over time and is renewed rather than eroded through use. It is cultivated in civil society through active, reliable and mutually beneficial co-operation (Giddens, 1995; Benington, 1998). Between individuals this creates the basis for friendship and neighbourly co-operation. At community level it translates into collective conventions (Hardin, 1982), which regulate interactions within 'small moral worlds' (Becker, 1991) and develop eventually into the ethical codes enshrined in law and religion. These micro-social contracts are created and maintained through iterative and overlapping face-to-face interactions (Laslett, 1956). They allow us to make decisions about collective action when it is not possible to control the outcome, nor even to predict what it might be. Tonkiss and Massey (1999) argue that it is trust that underlies the efficiency of the voluntary sector.

Evolutionary psychologists have suggested that trust, and indeed emotions generally, evolved as a way of keeping track of 'reciprocal altruism' (Dawkins, 1976) within an increasingly complex social environment (Evans, 2001). Trust represents a cumulative appraisal of another party's ability or willingness to return favours (Pinker, 1997). It has been suggested that the intellectual power of the human brain evolved in order to detect

cheating or 'free-riding' in complex social structures and that our sophisticated, but painful emotions of jealousy, resentment and disappointment are 'nature's way' of advising us to withdraw from non-reciprocal relationships (Barkow et al, 1992). Conversely, authentic mutuality and 'bounded altruism' are sustained by feelings of gratitude, sympathy and love within an overall concept of the 'common good' (Trivers, 1985; Enquist and Leimar, 1993; Jacobs, 1995a). Although the arguments of socio-biology are unpopular in some quarters, they have not been scientifically refuted and are becoming increasingly persuasive. It is contended that the co-operative inter and intra-tribal networking that takes place in what we now refer to as communities has significant advantages for the species as well as individuals. It enables us to cope with danger, adversity and even betrayal, learning from direct and vicarious experience who can be trusted and in what circumstances. Reputation is an important dimension of networking. Trust (and therefore a propensity for risk-taking) is an outcome of a person's continuing interaction with their own environment, including the people and organisations which form the 'web of life' around them (cf. Capra, 1996). Networking strategies create situations in which responsibility and risk are dispersed across a number of actors, whilst new insights are gained by comparing different perspectives. In this way change and uncertainty can be faced with greater insight and fortitude, enabling people to behave as agents, rather than passive victims of the environment. They are able to influence decisions which affect them and engage pro-actively and collectively with the forces shaping their lives. This is what community development understands by empowerment.

It was suggested by Panel members that whilst their meta-networking strategies might be conscious (identifying useful connections, responding to gaps in the web, and so on), the actual processes of building relationships needed to be authentic, otherwise the links are perceived by those involved as ingratiating and worthless.

> *"I think the strategy is conscious and there's a conscious effort to put it into a work plan but the actual networking has to be natural because if that's too conscious it simply won't work, it won't wash, it won't convince anybody."* KT (focus group)

The community worker might indeed be a catalyst in the interaction, in the sense of making things happen whilst remaining relatively unchanged, but they nevertheless had to be genuinely involved and to take responsibility for their own actions. Although they are more time-consuming, face-to-face interactions feature strongly in Panelists' descriptions of networking. These seemed to accelerate and enhance the development of personal

relationships and commitments. Direct encounters often demand one's full attention. A more holistic impression is given and gained, and this usually makes the connection more memorable.

> *"I'm very aware of that and I think that all those things happen at the first meeting. It's almost inevitable that we'll have made a relationship and sometimes that's far more important than the actual business."* KT

Several expressed a preference for this form of communication and even went out of their way in order to visit someone in person, rather than communicate by 'phone or by post.

> *"Last week I decided to consciously hand deliver to somebody a piece of paper that I could easily have put in the internal mail...I could have put it in an envelope, and I thought, no I'll walk across to that particular office with it because I'll be able to say 'hello' to whoever's in that office and just pick up on the gossip and news. That's quite a pleasant thing to do, but it also just nurtures in their minds the existence of the work that I do."* MW

Others made a habit of 'popping into' or 'hanging around' places where there was a high probability of meeting people with whom they needed to maintain a link. Non-verbal communication was regarded as important in consolidating relationships and interpreting someone's response.

> *"You're talking about whether or not people have eye contact through conversations, simple things like that or whether or not you're making judgements on the basis of personal behaviour, whether a person smiles, whether a person looks confused, whether a person looks happy, or whatever, there are a whole range of judgements there, about our personal effectiveness."* CT

Panelists felt that face-to-face encounters allowed them to build a more accurate understanding of what people really felt and thought. Community workers need to be sensitive to these aspects of collective behaviour because they often have to make decisions about their own interventions. They need to have an awareness of how people are relating to each other and identify potential areas of friction or compatibility.

"I've made them feel safe with me as a person. So trust is a standard ... from the person, I think, it's the actual person, who you are." KT

Trust was a theme which emerged strongly from the interviews. It is

"something you build and develop by being honest, reliable and consistent" GaS

Whilst organising the Festival Against Racism it often seemed to be trust that allowed the networks to function smoothly. For the Panelists trust had a number of inter-locking components. It involved fulfilling commitments and being frank about one's own rôle and motives.

"I think the openness is important because the process of networking is carried by people building up trust and relationships between each other. People can suss you out if you say something you don't believe, they know that, and if you say something that you do believe they know that as well. Because they see you in a lot of different circumstances and they see you in different kinds of meetings they bump into you in the street, they see you at informal meetings, they'll see you making a report to a council committee, and the same message the same agenda might be expressed in different tones of voice in the different settings. But it can ring true whether or not you're saying the same thing in those different ways and the different settings to people. It gets back to people...I think you build up trust with people if you're straight with them about what's possible, what you think, what you disagree with, not promising things that you can't deliver." MW

ETHICAL DILEMMAS AND PROFESSIONAL PROBLEMS

Like any other profession, community workers are aware of the need for accountability and standards vis-à-vis colleagues, employers and community members. Panelists were keen to explain their understanding of 'good networking practice' and to explore some of the dilemmas that they encountered. In addition to the importance of authenticity, trust and informality, Panelists raised issues around power relations, rôle boundaries, monitoring and evaluation. They were also concerned about time, funding and a general lack of appreciation for networking activities. When Panelists talked about their own and others' networking, they stressed the importance of 'real relationships', not in the sense of intimate friendships, but to differentiate them from more superficial

connections with little emotional content. Networking was effective for the community workers in the panel because it was *personal* and involved getting to know the whole person.

> *"The personal bit is the important bit, 'cos...that's the bit you remember and you latch on to."* PH

They were adamant that it was *not* about exploiting their contacts in a manipulative or selfish way, but about establishing authentic and reciprocal relationships through which each gained. People were resistant to the word 'use' when referring to their networking, shying away from the Machiavellian connotations.

> *"Right at the very start you said something about using people, and I don't think that's right. It shouldn't be about using people, it's about people wanting to reciprocate."* GaS

Nevertheless, they appreciated the benefits for their own work and job satisfaction.

> *"I think it makes an enormous difference in terms of goodwill and kind of quality of work...I think people just put themselves out more."* FB

But networking runs deeper than the superficial exchange of information or favours. A relationship makes it easier to make requests and suggestions that are more inconvenient, complicated or hazardous.

> *"The personal touches are so important. If the personal stuff and the foundations are right, then I think the work will come out of it, because people will have such faith in you."* TD

This was felt to be particularly important in working with disadvantaged and oppressed people, who may feel more vulnerable and more suspicious of professional interventions. It was vital not to let people down or to deceive them. Being 'oneself' was therefore crucial, whilst also taking care to negotiate and maintain rôle boundaries - a delicate balancing act. Most Panelists felt that their professional networking needed to stop short of friendship and personal intimacy. As one person put it, "I am friendly, but I am not your friend." This applies to colleagues.

"I tend not to initiate personal friendships with people that I recognise that I'm going to work closely with, and I keep a distance between myself and them. A kind of professional mask." MW

It was equally important in dealing with members of the community.

"I try to make sure that I don't take advantage of somebody, because it's easy to mislead people into thinking you're developing what could be a friendship with them, when really what in fact you're doing is developing a working relationship, and I think especially with working with people who are vulnerable... I find this especially so in the mental health field, or people who are unemployed or just vulnerable for whatever reason." TD

Similarly, constantly 'being oneself' means that it is more difficult to change or lower one's standards, without being seen as hypocritical.

"I think it's about yourself as a person and your own personal sort of characteristics. In a way I think with networking you're giving of yourself all the time...so it's quite hard 'cos you've almost got to follow your own act really." TD

The chameleon-like nature of networking also creates strain, in that

"you can't be all things to all people all of the time." PH

Notions of 'good practice' included attention to rôle-boundaries, operating as transparently as possible by recording and explaining the networking that is going on, maintaining accountability and ensuring that relationships are reciprocal.

"Networking needs to take place at all levels which is mutual, it's supportive, it's not exclusive, must involve all sections of the community with different levels of experience. It needs to occur purposefully and explicitly." CT

There was considerable exasperation at the additional (invisible) burden this created for community workers still committed to this way of working. People felt their willingness to provide information was taken for granted and that they were often seen as key people within networks to the extent that it was difficult to withdraw even for a while. Individuals felt they worked hard at creating or fostering the less convenient or comfortable links. They

made efforts to stay in touch, to send apologies, to maintain their information systems and to show a continuing interest towards different projects and communities.

This personal aspect of networking cannot be overlooked, and is the most probable source of burn-out so often encountered in this type of work (Maslach, 1982; Paine, 1982; Ife, 1995). A state of 'burn-out' is characterised as having three dimensions: emotional exhaustion, de-personalisation and reduced personal accomplishment (von Dierendonck et al, 1998). It appears to be the consequence of a mismatch between personal, 'user' and organisational expectations of what can be given and achieved by the worker. It occurs because networking seems so much to involve using one's own identity and beliefs to build and maintain relationships. I remember a particularly hectic period as a community worker when I felt that I had prostituted the positive aspects of my personality (being friendly, helpful, caring) to the organisation I was working for and had little compassion or enthusiasm left for myself or my 'real' relationships. This was compounded by the fact that I had also lived in the same neighbourhood for a number of years and been active in the area as a resident and political activist. I needed to develop tactics (for myself and others) to demarcate my personal and professional lives, but often found it expedient to ignore such boundaries. I did this again during the Festival Against Racism and this tendency appears in many of the examples given in the Panel Study which happened away from the constraints of the normal work rôle or organisational rules.

Usually a deliberate shift to informality can be used to indicate when roles are being blurred, for example in the style of communication, relaxing of dress codes, alternative settings or timing. Within bureaucratic organisations, this switch from formal to informal is obvious because work conventions are recognised and generally adhered to. But community workers have no 'uniform', often work 'unsociable' hours, occupy no fixed 'workplace' and would normally converse in everyday language. It is therefore more difficult to demarcate 'work' from 'life', and some people prefer not to do this anyway, for example those working from faith or political perspectives (Rumman and Salter, 2000; G.Smith and Horn, 2000; Peacock, 2000). However, as several of the Panel members observed, this can be disorienting for members of the community, especially those most in need of genuine friendship (cf. Firth and Rappley, 1990).

PREFERENCE AND AFFINITY

Panelists appreciated that networking was easier and more enjoyable where there was mutual affinity. As Aristotle observed people tend to like people who are like them, and this

was acknowledged as a dimension of networking which militates against inclusion and equality of opportunity. Similarly, since much networking seems to take place in people's 'social' time, they may not make that extra effort to welcome people who do not fit in so readily. It is understandable that people will seek company and stimulation, where they feel valued and comfortable and this also applies to 'off-duty' community workers.

> *"As far as I'm personally concerned I find that the people I network with effectively are those people who I get on with...what's the point in networking with somebody who hates your guts."* GaS

Another Panelist went so far as to talk of passion as a driving force in her networks, especially its positive impact on joint working (cf. Page, 1997).

> *"I think a lot of it is sexual chemistry, whatever your sexual identity or sexuality, I actually think that some of the best joint work I've been involved is because of fancying people on some sort of level."* SM

Conversely, unrequited or betrayed attraction can often be followed by the severance of carefully nurtured ties. The impact of envy, resentment, fear and repulsion on personal and professional networks has yet to be studied, but there is anecdotal evidence of these affecting the transmission of ideas and resources across the community and voluntary sectors. Networking is suffused with personal loyalties, reputations and affinities and this creates a dilemma for people who are committed to principles of equal opportunity and democracy. For a profession which asserts that participation or access should be open and based on merit, networking might seem somewhat heretical. Whilst some Panelists felt that informal networking was a legitimate preparation for more formal decision-making, they were also disparaging of 'deals' struck in this way or 'backdoor' favouritism.

People were critical of the kind of tokenistic behaviour that had become subsumed under the term 'networking', where this was felt to be short-term, superficial, expedient and elitist. For professional networking purposes, connections must have the potential to be useful even if the precise outcomes are not immediately obvious. People distinguished between relationships that they wanted to pursue and those they allowed to lapse.

> *"I don't believe in networking for the sake of it, I need to assess after perhaps one or two encounters either on the phone or meeting people, whether or not they are on my 'Christmas list', and if they're not, I cross them off."* TD

However, some felt that networking had become merely 'fashionable' or was reluctantly carried out due to the requirements of current funding and policy regimes. Good practice, it was argued, incorporated certain values and involved a sense of long-term purpose, even if the outcomes could be only roughly forecast rather than predicted with any degree of specificity.

> *"Networking should be about change and not about supporting the status quo. If it's about supporting the status quo, which it often is, it's not networking ... you've got to have some vision of what the networking is and what it's for, you've got to have values and principles."* KT (focus group)

Clearly there are limits to the amount of time community workers can spend simply tending relationships. Managers and funders expect outcomes and often need these delivered across a range of issues. So Panelists were strategic in cultivating at least one point of contact with a variety of other networks.

> *"I suppose we divide up within the whole [organisation] our networking... and so between us we probably have a network that covers all human life in Nxxxx"* GrS.

Job constraints necessitate a division of labour and people maintain strategic links in order to keep alive useful links into areas of work where direct involvement is limited or precluded. Examples mentioned in the interviews included councillors of the ruling group on the local authority, networks around domestic violence, and the local anti-racist movement. People's identity was referred to as a factor in negotiating access to faith-based communities (e.g. Muslim women) or self-organising groups, such as Disabled lesbians. Often Panelists found alternative means of staying abreast of developments in these groups ensuring that they had access to up-to-date information and expertise around relevant issues.

> *"They can open doors to me, they can point me in directions that I may have lost contact with now...because community development and the work that we do fits into [so many] boxes. I don't think it would be possible for me, in fact it wouldn't be possible, for me to actually keep updated with all of those ... boxes. I don't try to, what I do try and do is use (again this word) those people who have the expertise in those specialist areas to keep in touch with me... I think it's more important in the way that we are becoming more isolated as*

community workers in the sense that I'm not going along to events where I would meet people to keep those links going. And maybe one of the reasons why I'm able to get through the work that I'm getting through is because I have maintained those links, and I don't have to start from scratch." LM

MANAGING ROLES AND ACCOUNTABILITY

One's position in the networks brings definite advantages and is influenced by reputation as much as direct interaction. People do refer to each other, and this indirect feedback is an important source of self-monitoring, provided, of course, that you get to hear it ! Networks amongst other community workers or like-minded people provided significant channels for informal support, supervision, advice and mentoring. One person used their networks as a 'sounding board' at moments of crisis, using "seemingly unrelated information ... to clarify or help progress intractable problems or issues." Feedback from informal mentors and trusted allies was an important source of constructive criticism, enabling people to correct and adjust their behaviour accordingly (cf. Ruffner and Burgoon, 1981). Another Panelist suggested it was important to be aware of feedback on their own rôle and contribution, urging the need to regularly review and evaluate their networking with their line manager. Networks offer important space for monitoring, reviewing and adjusting plans and developments, as well as providing support and inspiration.

Community development practitioners learn to survive through their peer networks (Ingamells, 1996). They use them to seek out informal supervision and formal mentoring, and are able to keep abreast of current developments. Informal networking creates 'safe' and supportive environments where practitioners can talk things through with like-minded colleagues. They are able to explore contentious issues, upgrade their professional skills and knowledge and reflect critically on their own practice. In the absence of formal supervision arrangements and in-service training, this form of peer education and support enables community workers, who are often in isolated or peripheral posts to cope with stress and to manage what are often quite complicated work programmes. Ibarra (1993) observed that the social support provided by their work relationships was crucial to the survival, job satisfaction and success of Black and women managers, helping them cope in environments that can be unfamiliar, precarious or downright hostile. Similar situations are faced by community development workers, especially those employed in the voluntary sector. It is usual for voluntary organisations to deal with people expressing high levels of anger, fear and frustration. Some might argue that this is their 'raison d'etre', a fact which is

insufficiently appreciated by funders and policy-makers who try to impose rigid monitoring and auditing techniques on their work (Davey, 2001).

Panelists reported that networking enhanced the quality of their own work and service delivery generally. The morale and knowledge of individual staff was improved, they became more reflective as practitioners through critical feedback from colleagues, thus developing a sharper focus to their work. Informal comparisons and debate encouraged people to keep their ideas fresh, to stay informed, to review their work, to maintain key values and principles of community development and to challenge poor standards and complacency. This meant that 'best practice' could be developed and consolidated. One person referred to their networks as a source of friendly support, which recognised and reinforced their own commitment to the job.

Networking has been portrayed as an activity in which people engage as 'themselves' and the importance of 'authentic' relationships between consenting individuals has been constantly emphasised. This was particularly evident for the Festival organisers when boundaries were markedly blurred between paid and unpaid time, between activist and professional rôles. Many of the interviewees were ambivalent about the exact status of their own and others' involvement. As well as simply 'being themselves', everyone seemed to be wearing several 'hats' at once. This multiplicity of ties and rôles was useful in terms of gaining access to different networks and building the credibility of the Festival, but it also created confusion around accountability and mutual expectations. One of the central organisers said of two of the trade union officials involved:

> *"[I was] not sure whether this was in the capacity of their jobs or just as individuals."* SG

Another spoke of his own contribution:

> *"I never took time to sort out when they were talking to me about the Festival, whether they were talking to me as an individual or as the [Principal Race Equality Officer]."* BS

The Panelists were more aware of issues around professional accountability and convey a sense of their rôle as members or representatives of organisations. Several referred to predicaments that this created for their work, within their teams or even with other bodies.

All felt that it was important to work within a broad framework, finding common ground, whilst being allowed a degree of autonomy to make suggestions and take stances.

> *"Networking the networks is very much part of my job but networks have aims, have policies and so if I'm in a network I take very much on board what their aims and objectives are, what their policies are and I try and work within those. Sometimes it's difficult to tie in [my employer]'s policy, where I work, with a network's policy, with Sxxxxx Council's policy but I try and overlay these as much as possible and find what the common ground is and that way, where I find that they do coincide is at the strategic level."* KT

Some people saw their involvement in networks as maintaining informal mechanisms of accountability. It was a way of monitoring one's own performance and credibility, and also provided a form of informal reporting. It enabled others (apart from line managers) to examine the full scope of one's work and influence priorities. A lack of formal structure allows swift responses to changing circumstances, but revealed limitations in collective democracy, as was experienced at times during the organisation of the Festival.

> *"Decisions were made because decisions had to be made, and quite often they were made on the hoof...I don't have a great deal of problem with that as long as there is some accountability built into it. People need to report back. But I think we did fail quite a lot in the decision-making process."* MG

Managers can help people to clarify their rôles and review the effectiveness of their networking. Otherwise it could be somewhat bewildering for the workers and those they worked with.

> *"Sometimes I don't know which hat I'm wearing and which network I'm supposed to be in ... I do seem to pop up everywhere with all these different hats ... I think I'm very clear when I'm doing [what]. I manage it for myself, I have different coloured highlighters in my diary so I know who I am at different times."* SM

The interviews were predominantly positive about the value of networking, but people were realistic about the limitations of this approach. They recognised the disadvantages of networks, acknowledging that they could be messy, confusing, elitist and flimsy. More

formal structures and regulations were needed to properly organise events, deliver services and to honour confidentiality. The Panelists also talked about their networking as stressful and precarious creating a responsibility to others which sometimes felt more of a burden than an asset. Being endlessly helpful and friendly raised expectations of one's capacity to deliver on a whole range of problems.

> *"You end up doing more work than you thought you were going to do...I don't think I do react negatively towards people. I think this is something that causes problems for me as a community worker and people coming in through the door, [saying] "Can I speak to that one over there?" They don't know my name but they can point me out."* LM

LIMITATIONS AND DISADVANTAGES

These last two comments reveal some of the problems associated with networking as a method of organising. This is evident in both the Panel Study and reports on the Festival Against Racism, where a lack of clarity over who was ultimately responsible for which tasks caused problems when there was much work to be done. We avoided the rivalry, mistrust and recriminations that can beset some voluntary organisations reliant on trust and common values (Beres and Wilson, 1997), but nevertheless the Festival organisers felt quite vulnerable when really controversial issues emerged, such as poster design and the question of the Festival's public (and therefore political) ownership. These decisions were controversial but crucial to its eventual success.

> *"I think the likes of you and Steve didn't really have the support which you deserved. I think some of us probably failed you somewhat in that."* MG

There were no organisational 'buffers' or formal mechanisms for resolving disagreements amongst the contributors. This was especially problematic when everyone was under pressure and nobody willing to take a lead. My co-worker, who was less experienced in these matters, felt anxious and demoralised by this situation.

> *"My overriding memory is feeling quite isolated alongside you. There were many occasions when I realised that if it wasn't for you and I, the whole thing would fall apart ... I felt very personally liable, responsible rather than just being the face of a group that was going to take responsibility. I felt that I would be*

held accountable for things that went wrong. I felt that if people got angry then they would be angry with me and that wasn't nice at all." SG

The Festival Against Racism demonstrated that informal networking performs well in certain circumstances, but has a number of disadvantages. Autonomy and de-centralisation were achieved at the expense of central planning and control. There were only limited formal mechanisms in place to handle disputes or to summon up effort when it was urgently needed, notably in relation to distributing the all important publicity material.

"When the pressure was really, really on. It was a struggle. Getting that programme out...it was a nightmare....And I felt guilty. I'm an organiser. Why didn't I plan to have those volunteers available to do the donkey work when we knew the donkey work would have to be done...People should be here lining up at the door to do this. But of course, nobody lined them up... we hadn't organised it." RJ (focus group)

"It completely relied on bumping into people, calling in favours, ringing up your mates...It nearly fell down at that stage, not having a structure." AG (focus group)

The devolved structure and networking methods were excellent for reaching people 'on the edge' and encouraging them to organise events. But as a long-term strategy, we failed to recruit more than a handful of volunteers into the central co-ordinating and decision-making structures. In terms of capacity building for long-term community development, this is a problem which needs to be addressed (cf. Hulyer, 1997). Loose structures and informal methods of organising are useful in encouraging the flow of ideas and enabling relatively disparate interactions. They allow expressions of interest to crystallise into something more tangible. But for this to have a wider impact it needs co-ordinating, moulding into a collective demand or aspiration. Faith and favours are fine up to a point but they are not sufficient when organisational demands exceed resources, nor when there are competing external pressures and internal disagreements.

MAKING and GIVING TIME

Time was a significant factor in establishing a worker's credibility and knowledge-base within geographic communities and several people described how their work in an area over many years (seven, ten, eleven, twenty), often through a number of successive or

over-lapping jobs, had endowed them with a presence and function which could not have been acquired over the short-term. They had become a stable feature of the social and professional environment, describing themselves as a 'rock' during times of upheaval, a 'fulcrum', a 'fountain' of useful information, the 'key link' between separate networks. One thing that everybody agreed on was that networking takes time, and that time to network had become an increasingly scarce commodity within community development. As one person described it, networking involves

> *"quite painful long winded processes, structured possibly over 3-6 months, they aren't done over a week...it's about being committed to ... small gains over a considerable time."* CT

People 'invested' time and attention in their networks.

> *"Giving time is a very valuable thing. But you've got to be strong to do it. To hold out against all the pressures not to do that and try and keep an eye on the overall plan, but when it's really appropriate being able to make a critical judgement, [that] this person needs the time."* KT

Several interviews echoed this feeling that there was less 'spare' time available.

> *"I just don't seem to have very much time to do it any more. I don't have a lot of time to phone around people and sort of check they're OK and how they're doing. It feels like a bit of a loss, and I think as a result communications really suffer between organisations.... I feel like I've known less about what's going on generally, I feel I've got less of an understanding at times about all the other people around and what they're doing."* FB

Short term funding, projects with outside workers being 'parachuted' into areas from national agencies and increasing emphasis on performance criteria were all blamed for this decline. It was said to result in less efficient inter-agency working, strained relationships, a culture of blame rather than co-operation, frustration and a growing sense of isolation.

People felt that networking was often undertaken as a matter of personal choice or the result of circumstance rather than funding policy. The group agreed that the importance of informal networking was neither sufficiently understood nor recognised by those who manage community development. There was general frustration expressed at the lack of

investment in long-term generic community work, which would allow workers to build up and maintain their contacts in an area, and act as a resource to other agencies.

> *"Funders are actually destroying [networking] by not funding additional capacity in organisations, that isn't output driven and [...] we have to have some way of arguing this back into funding and I think what comes out of this [research] may actually help us all to do that."* SM (focus group)

People felt that spontaneity and flexibility had been 'squeezed out' of their jobs.

> *"I think things have changed a lot. That isn't just pressure of work; I think that we need to get through things and there is more planning of our work... that's maybe how things should be. [But] I do think though that we are losing some things by not having that little bit of freedom, more time to spend with the community, just to spend with the community, rather than for a particular reason...or I may spend a few minutes or whatever, but it isn't as long as we used to, where we used to go along and just be there, just to see what was thrown at us or whatever."* LM

This clearly had an impact on community workers' ability to respond sensitively and strategically to needs and aspirations arising from community members, either collectively or as individuals. The pace and timing of community-based enterprises was being dictated from outside, rather than emerging organically from local conversations and connections.

MONITORING AND EVALUATION

The outcomes of networking were seen as long-term and continuous. When asked directly how they judged the effectiveness of their networking, Panelists were unanimous that there had to be results in terms of things actually happening - new projects, proposals agreed, funding secured, whatever. But they also wanted the less visible results to be recognised, such as improved co-operation between agencies, better representation on forums or consultative bodies and more subtle changes in relationships and commitments.

> *"The things that I try to get done can't get done unless people invested personal commitments in that, so they're proof of whether networks have come alive, or whether things have been done well...In the course of achieving the*

different practical results you do kind of note whether there are shifts in the tone of relationships between yourself and other people." MW

At an individual level, Panelists knew their networking to be effective because they were in demand. Other people had heard of their work or knew their name, they were invited to contribute to joint initiatives, their suggestions were taken up and implemented and they were "used mercilessly" (GaS) by others, mainly as an information resource and as a point of access into other networks.

"People say directly to you things like 'you've got an amazing network ... or things like that, or more to the point the real test of it, they send other people particularly new people, new workers coming into the borough. I get a constant stream of them coming to me...you do feel a sense of being appreciated. That's the main thing that indicates that I'm there as a resource person." GrS

But the most frequently cited evidence that people referred to was informal feedback, getting to hear that such and such had happened, or so and so had been in contact. Sometimes it was even more nebulous: a 'buzz out there', 'warm fuzzes' and the perception of a group working well together.

As we have seen, networking interactions are often informal and happenstance. They are sometimes not even recognised as such and are barely recorded. Attempts to monitor and review are often clumsy by comparison, especially where they rely on pre-determined performance criteria or quantifiable measures. Some good examples of network management were described. These mainly took the form of asking people to reflect on how their relationships with people in the community were developing and being maintained. It was felt to be important to self-monitor.

"I've got quite a good awareness, so and so hasn't got in touch. I keep a map in front of my desk and sometimes if I've got five minutes when I'm having a coffee I'll look at it and think 'Hey, I haven't been round that corner. I haven't heard from that group, etc.' So I'll ring them. I'll just call them, see what's happening." KT

People worked hard to maintain their profile and integrity within their own networks and were dismissive of the kind of superficial 'networking' which they saw going on around them. They considered this to be poor and unethical practice, if it was not based on

reciprocity and respect. Specific examples given were promising to help out and then letting someone down, self-promotion, manipulation and exploitation of relationships for a one-way gain. The essence of 'good' networking lay in balanced and recurrent interaction, rather than transitory and purely instrumental contact.

> *"There are people that I know in my work situation who ... would talk about networking but I don't actually think really do any because some people dip in and out of things and meet people and they call that networking...But I think some people do actually think maybe they can go and talk at things, talk about community development and meets lots of people but I don't think that's really networking because it's sort of talking* ***at*** *people."* TD

ADDRESSING INEQUALITIES

Generally, people expressed their awareness of issues around power and dependency in relation to their networking activities. There is an inherent danger that networks simply reflect and perpetuate existing inequalities, preserving political elites and social exclusion. During the focus group discussion an example from one city of male 'stitch ups' in particular pubs was readily echoed by workers in other areas. This practice was unanimously condemned and it was asserted that one of the rôles of the community worker was to expose and challenge this semi-covert 'wheeling and dealing'. Good practice was about transparency, integrity and inclusion - working towards the wider benefit of one's designated community or catchment area. However, it was recognised that there were consequences of not 'joining in' with the dominant networks: missed opportunities to enter into dialogue with decision-makers or failure to obtain those 'confidential' items of gossip or inside information. In order to gain access to these, people either used alternative routes to influencing the decision-makers ("weaving a different web" -TD) or took risks which involved placing oneself in situations where one felt intimidated or open to criticism.

The Panelists' commitment to empowerment meant that much of their networking not only spanned organisational boundaries but attempted to counteract power differentials within organisations and amongst people experiencing different forms of discrimination. One person highlighted the gap between volunteers and professionals.

> *"This is one of the things I notice, the difference between a professional and a volunteer. Professionals would contact professionals, and as volunteers,*

technically, have not got anything to offer on their level, which can be a misconception on their part, because volunteers [have] got things to contribute."
JM

Dominance by professionals can present a problem, especially in situations where the pace of change is prescribed by external factors, such as funding criteria or the protection of jobs:

"It isn't always something we should be pushing at, bringing [professional] people in, networking with people... I think sometimes people want space just to be as they are, but to know there are other people should they need them."
LM

Panelists were conscious of operating within political systems and that they themselves were seen as influential either because of their position in the networks or because of their professional status. In order to network effectively, people felt that they had to acknowledge this power and to reduce power inequalities between themselves and others. One Panelist felt that her networking assisted

"people being able to link together ... to get strength, people who are isolated for whatever reason, whether it's to do with their colour, or whether they're single parents, or whether it's a group of lesbians or gay people, whatever. If they're living in [rural] communities often they feel isolated, and there might be lots of people who might be feeling the same as them, but they don't know how to approach them and they're not going to go out and say, 'I'm this and that and need to meet other people the same as me, because I'm unusual or different'. So just trying to network people together who've got similar concerns or similar feelings of being isolated or oppressed. They can get strength...by getting together they can start finding out local resources and information and finding out who is like [them] and who could be an ally to them really, who you can work with them and who is against them." TD

This can lead to new projects and support systems being set up which offer a more formal means of consciousness-raising or challenging institutional discrimination.

"It puts people in touch with each other. I know for instance, my friend who started going to African history lessons ... is now sitting on a steering group with quite a few of her brothers and sisters who went to the same class as her,

and they are now managing the African Young Men's steering group. I know a lot of them attended and began their African centred learning at the same time. So I think that they chose to do something of personal interest [and] became a network which is...now steering a project to really start to take action on African young men's issues in society." SM

In the focus group there was considerable discussion around the ethics of networking when used within a community development context. One view which seemed to hold sway was that networking itself is a neutral tool and can be used for 'good' or 'evil', depending on the members and their motivations.

"So we're looking at something that's like a model of the kind of process of networking, as it stands as a neutral thing, and then underpin it with some principles and values that are core to why we would do it?" SM (focus group)

The panel wanted networking to receive better recognition within community development practice. This had been their motivation for becoming involved in the study. They wanted to see it carried out more effectively and more ethically. One person suggested there should be a "code of conduct which develops mutuality" (JM) and several people stressed that networking was a developmental process which was complementary to the end product and important in its own right.

"What you're trying to do is to build up the ability of local people, the organisations that they create to shape their lives as much as possible ... the process is in some ways more important than the outcomes. It's never one thing or another. A process is pointless if it isn't generating outcomes but in a way it's more important to get the process right." MW

LACK OF RECOGNITION

My original concern about the failure to acknowledge the value of networks was confirmed by the Panel Study. Community workers felt that the time, effort and skills they used in informal networking was often exploited by others for a variety of higher profile projects and more tangible tasks. One person argued that networking sometimes fell to the individual worker through default or talent.

"I don't think people can be given the task of networking. I think people just do it naturally. I certainly have, anyway. There's nothing in my job description that says I've got to be a networker. It's something that I've done naturally, so to speak. That's why I find it difficult to justify." PH (focus group)

There were mixed feelings about this rôle though most Panelists enjoyed networking and found themselves to be effective. They felt however that it was insufficiently supported or recognised, often relying on the dedication of workers who were neither tied to specific projects nor lone workers in hard-pressed voluntary organisations.

"What I find is that the results, the work that we're enabling to happen within the community. We know that a lot of that is down to the networking but people in the council, you know senior officers, don't necessarily know that things that have happened are as a result of our networking...I have to make them realise, make them aware that I am networking before they see the results of it." TD (focus group)

The flexibility and looser accountability of the generic community worker employed by a local development agency or intermediary body are dwindling commodities, whose disappearance may soon be regretted. However it is noticeable that networking skills and functions are increasingly included in job descriptions and person specifications. This welcome change has occurred since the inception of this inquiry, and it would be nice to think it was partially attributable to some of my earlier publications and presentations.

Panelists complained that one of the problems with networking was its intangibility. Networking rarely has palpable or attributable 'outputs' and, consequently, its value is often not appreciated by funders and managers.

"It's quite difficult to justify the fact that networking is an efficient way of achieving something, because a lot of people don't think it is; a lot of people think it's just chatting and wasting time." TD

'Networking' without productive outcomes was also criticised.

"Some people go to too many [meetings]. Networking can be an excuse as well. I meet lots of professional meeting-goers ... [who are] avoiding work,

avoiding the issues...There are some people using networking as an excuse not to do anything." GaS

There was a strong resistance to formally categorising and monitoring the processes of networking in order to label the different 'competencies' involved. Functional analysis of networking was seen as the 'kiss of death'.

"With networking, as soon as you start to put it in boxes or talk about it as a theory thing, it almost makes it sound like something people can't do because it's something more formal, whereas the beauty is people doing it without realising they're doing it...Acknowledging that that's what they're doing and acknowledging it as a skill, gives people confidence and empowers them. But as soon as you start putting it in a box, saying 'Well, you've got to do this networking, or learn abut networking', people are going to shy away from it." TD (focus group)

Networking was seen as something which was learnt through imitation, practice and reinforcement.

ACQUISITION OF NETWORKING CAPABILITY

Schön (1983:49) emphasises the artistic and intuitive aspects of professional practice which are evident in an ability to deal with complex and dynamic problems in "situations of uncertainty, instability, uniqueness and value conflict." Networking was regarded by the Panelists as highly intuitive and yet an acquired ability. Some people felt that it involved skills which could not be taught through formal training or categorisation, but was learnt through experience and observation of others. In this respect the community worker was seen as a significant rôle model for community activists. Residents should be actively encouraged to value and take responsibility for their own networking, by keeping information on useful contacts and valuing their existing skills in using connections within their families and communities. In the interviews and focus group people talked about their feelings, 'gut reactions' or intuitions in relation to networking. They found it hard to explain why they operated as they did, but were confident that it was effective. This seemed to be a combination of experiential learning and generalised faith in humanity. As Coulson observes "trust is a process of learning. It grows through use...and eventually it may reach a point where it is a matter of intuition and instinct" (1998:32). There was a general consensus that networking was a 'natural' process which was difficult to describe, let alone

analyse. Different views were expressed on whether networkers were 'born' or 'made'. Although there was one comment about networking as an 'instinct', mostly people felt that their ability to network had been acquired through experience, involving a combination of skills and 'personality'. Many recognised that they had developed a 'special' quality, which others lacked.

> *"The way I work is so sort of entrenched in networking, and I know that some of my colleagues don't find it easy to network."* TD

The majority attributed this to early socialisation, primarily within their own families. There was a particular emphasis on learning a set of values around pluralism and mutuality.

> *"Maybe it stems right the way back as to how you brought up in the first place ... in the sense that you accept people for what they are, you're no better or worse than anybody else, that we're all there to help each ... maybe there's that in the background that comes over to other people."* LM

Being immersed in collective activities was also a chance to learn skills in organising and communication. It probably helped people develop their abilities in social perception and in managing a diversity of inter-personal situations. A few Panelists also referred explicitly to their childhood experience as giving them a positive, secure outlook on life and a good sense of 'self'. There was agreement amongst the Panel that experience in early life may equip someone to use networking as a strategy for seeking support and potential collaborators. This echoes recent findings from social psychology which indicate that secure attachment experience predisposes people to use networking in later life to find social support and ask for help in practical matters (Wallace and Vaux, 1993; Larose et al, 1999).

The issue of whether networking was a 'natural' talent or an acquired faculty generated lively discussion within the focus group. Adults, especially female relatives, were seen as important rôle models, especially where they had been involved in community activities. Early kinship or community networks were described which had provided a stable and secure background replete with examples of domestic or local 'multi-agency partnerships' in which trust, diversity and a shared common bond were key components. There is plenty of evidence of women maintaining family and community networks as part of their domestic 'responsibilities' (Wellman, 1985; DiLeonardo, 1987; Doucet, 2000). This networking was often for their own benefit, survival even, as is particularly evident in the lives of Black

women experiencing both racial and sexual oppression (Bryan et al, 1985; Collins, 1990; Burke et al, 2000).

GENDER DIFFERENCES

Within the community work literature, networking is often referred to as a 'womanly' way of operating (e.g. Dominelli, 1995; Bryant, 1997) though there is no agreement as to whether this represents a socialised or a biological propensity. Young and Willmott (1957) highlighted the matrilocal aspect of community life in Bethnal Green, and Townsend (1957), using the same data, noted the important role of women in caring for older relatives. Subsequent studies have frequently commented on the role played by women in neighbouring and informal networks (Chanan and Vos, 1990; Bourke, 1994), running voluntary and community activities (Gallagher, 1977; McCulloch, 1997; Krishnamurthy, 2000), participating in regeneration partnerships (May, 1997), maintaining traditional values (Kristmundsdottir, 1999), sustaining solidarity and self-help (Campbell, 1993), building inclusive political coalitions (McWilliams, 1995; Page, 1997; Fearon, 1999) and generally keeping the peace (Kolb, 1992). Hillier and Hanson (1984) suggest that women "tend to grow their networks outwards by movement, by contacts [whilst] men make theirs through formal associations, with rules of entry".

Emotional labour (James, 1989; Hochschild, 1993) commonly features as an unacknowledged aspect of women's rôle in monitoring and managing feelings within the family (Duncombe and Marsden, 1998), wider networks (Rubin, 1984) and at work (Ingamells, 1996:155). It is said that women managers have a different, more egalitarian style of leadership, which emphasises active listening, building relationships and respecting different views (Hampden-Turner, 1994; Ibarra, 1997). Helgesen (1990) refers to this as the 'strategy of the web' and its emphasis on nurturing connections in order to deal with ambiguous information lends a post-modern slant to the qualities of transformational leadership (Barker and Young, 1994). Both emphasise the importance of gathering intelligence from a wide range of sources and using connections to learn and to persuade others to one's point of view.

Most of the Panel thought that their capacity to network was based on a subconscious 'inclination' or predisposition. rather than requiring specific knowledge and skills. And yet there was also a feeling that networking was a 'trick of the trade', a knack which *could* be acquired through experience or training. There seemed to be a gender issue here in that the men and women seemed to network in slightly different ways.

"I have no idea whether it's purely from my own experience. I think women seem to be kind of more open, it seems to come as second nature to a lot of women I work with to kind of talk to other people really, and to want to make relationships with other people in organisations and want to be seeing how that can be helpful. Also to support other people as well, and do nice things, like be thoughtful about people in other organisations ...It's something you don't have to learn exactly." FB

The women on the Panel appeared more concerned with maintaining connections, whilst the men alluded to specific tasks and functions for which they used their networks. Stackman and Pinder (1999) similarly found that gender differences appeared in men's and women's personal work networks with the latter being more 'expressive' and based on relatively intense emotional ties, whilst men tended to cultivate fewer, but more instrumental links with colleagues. This reflects Ferree's (1992) observation that women tend to derive their motivation and identity from the web of attachments in which they are embedded. A couple of the Panel felt that women were more 'natural' networkers because they were able to focus on many things simultaneously and were more committed to nurturing relationships. The men seemed more task-focused and wary of forming too close links with people they worked with. They expressed greater awareness of issues around physical safety, professional distance and the need to maintain clear rôle-boundaries. The question of the extent to which networking could be deemed a conscious or strategic process seemed also to reflect a gender difference. The women in the group felt that their networking 'just happened', whilst the men tended to see it as involving planning and deliberation.

'Nurturist' approaches to human development argue that our adult behaviour and thoughts are acquired through interaction with the environment, especially the social environment provided by our relationships with other people. Experience in early childhood shapes our 'personalities' through a process of socialisation - observation, action and selective reinforcement. We acquire those attitudes, propensities and abilities which are rewarded, and we seek out or create situations where we can exhibit behaviours that gain approval and tangible benefits. As a result women have "developed the foundations of extremely valuable psychological qualities" (Miller, 1976:27), including enhanced abilities in non-verbal communication (Hall, 1984) and emotional perception (Rosenthal et al, 1979). Gilligan (1982) suggests that this is particularly relevant to understanding gender differences in the skills and strategies which are used to manage social situations. She argues that girls learn

patience, awareness of others' needs and relationship skills through childhood games which emphasise co-operation and rôle-playing. In addition, adults tend to praise girls for being kind and thoughtful, whilst boys are rewarded for behaviour which is brave and independent. These differences become internalised as 'feminine' and 'masculine' characteristics and translated in later life into gendered rôles, styles of working and moral frameworks (Gilligan, 1988). These seemed to appear in the Panel Study in the different ways in which male and female Panelists described their networking. The former were more achievement-oriented, more instrumentalist, whilst the women tended to recognise that their work involved "therapeutic mediation", managing relationships through the expression of care and attention towards others (Kolb, 1992).

An alternative, but related, explanation attributes the enhanced social abilities of women to their subordinate social position and their consequent need to be sensitive and responsive to the requirements of more powerful men. Surviving oppressive situations often requires non-confrontational tactics, especially when the 'victim' is isolated or institutionally powerless. Change strategies involving subversion and subterfuge succeed only through a thorough understanding of power dynamics and social logics (Grabher and Stark, 1997). It has been noted that attentive listening and watching are characteristic of subordinates in many groups (Helgesen, 1990). They learn to survive by reading the emotions of dominant members in order to anticipate threats and seize opportunities. Meeting needs before they become demands is a useful (and necessary) conflict-avoiding strategy.

Tannen (1992) observed that women use talking to connect with others, whilst men use it to compete. Dunbar suggests that gender differences observed in men's and women's conversations (which he describes as a sophisticated form of grooming) can be attributed to different rôles within the tribe.

> "The most plausible interpretation is that [when people are conversing], women are engaged in networking, while men are engaged in advertising. In terms of creating the right kind of environment for the successful rearing of offspring, networking is probably the single most important activity that women engage in." (1996:177)

Although coming from very different scientific disciplines (primatology and neuro-pharmacology respectively) Jolly (1999) and Greenfield (1999) suggests that this was a particularly female trait, which lingers in the brains of modern women. Jahme (2000) suggests that this facility with non-verbal communication has a continuing impact on

career choices and social rôles that should be valued rather than denied as an inconvenient (for feminists) but genuine difference. This echoes my original motivation in wanting to demonstrate the skill and effort that underpins effective networking, and to celebrate it as valuable, but hitherto neglected 'women's work' in developing 'community'.

CONCLUSIONS

The findings reviewed in this chapter highlight the more intangible aspects of networking, notably the importance of trust, reputation, informality, commitment and spontaneity. These are vital characteristics of effective networking, whose operation are hindered by bureaucratic management and auditing procedures. Their development requires time and opportunities for face-to-face interaction within people's work programme. Short term project funding and tightly controlled objectives are inimical to networking as a method of community development. However, the profession also needs to consider how ethical issues arising from the inevitable bias and inequalities of informal networks can be addressed and overcome. These implications will be considered further in Chapter Twelve, which follows a brief exploration of communities as dynamic and complex social systems.

Section Four

Taking it Forward

Chapter Eleven

Complexity and the well-connected community

Chapter Twelve

Recommendations for policy and practice

Chapter Thirteen

Summary and evaluation

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Complexity and the well-connected community

"One must have chaos inside oneself in order to give birth to a dancing star"
Nietzsche (1878)

It is clear from the preceding chapters that networks serve an important function in society and that their existence within the patterns of everyday living is strongly related to what is generally understood by the term 'community'. Recent pronouncements from the European Union and government policy refer explicitly to 'social capital' (voluntary associations and trust relations) as underpinning various 'public goods' such as health, cohesion, inclusion and economic regeneration. The idea of 'community networks' incorporates some of the core values suffusing current concepts of a socially just and sustainable civil society, namely respect, equality, mutuality and (more recently) diversity. This chapter explores why the desire for 'community' persists as a dimension of society and seeks an explanation of how networking contributes to the development and survival of a well-functioning 'community', equipped with the capacity for self-organisation and collective responses to shared problems.

CHAOS IN THE COMMUNITY

As we saw in Chapters Four and Five, networks are the optimal mode of operating within turbulent environments, enabling 'chaos' to be managed in ways which enhance creativity and promote innovative forms of co-operation. Organisational studies suggest that network forms of organisation provide very effective means of coping with high levels of uncertainty and ambiguity (e.g. R.Scott, 1992; Easton, 1996). There is a broad agreement that (at least in the developed world) we live in more turbulent and insecure conditions (O'Riordan, 1998), that society is more `diverse, fragmented and polarised' (Burns et al, 1994:223; Danziger, 1997) with a blurring of roles and boundaries (Davis and Meyer, 1998), the untethering of identities from traditional social categories (Amit-Talai and Knowles, 1996), accompanied by a general fracturing and unravelling of social certainties (Marquand, 1998). Environments which favour networking-type interactions are characterised by diversity, autonomy, 'voluntary' choices, personal relationships (rather than formal rôles and regulations), risk and low levels of predictability. Recognising this complexity provides some insights into the dynamics of inter-personal connections, the fluidity of community networks and the functioning of small-scale voluntary organisations. Research on organisations and human interaction

has developed a growing interest from the 'new sciences', drawing on ideas from complexity theory in order to understand some of the more puzzling features of our social and organisational environment (see, for example, Wheatley, 1992; Goldstein, 1994; Jaworski, 1996; Cilliers, 1998; Byrne, 1998).

I became interested in ideas around chaos theory midway through the research journey and on re-reading the interview transcripts I began to notice how often Panelists made reference to aspects of their work which were felt to be unplanned or unpredictable. Chance encounters are an unexpected opportunity for sharing ideas and information which lead to a change of direction.

> *"Often it's the accidental meeting in the street where something completely new comes up that wouldn't have come up in a planned way...It's just that chance."*
> KT

Several Panelists used the term 'serendipity' (without prompting from me) and appeared to relish their ability to respond opportunistically to happenstance events occurring outside of their intentions or control.

> *"There's a strength in being organised out of informal chaos, I suppose."* CT

Panelists referred to things 'emerging' or 'flowing' spontaneously from chance happenings.

> *"I'm willy-nilly, I'm all over the place. It just goes bang. There's an issue. Something needs to be done and it's whoosh, it's all over the place."* GaS

Another practitioner was more definite about her rôle.

> *"People see me as that person who's always there...as someone who holds everything together throughout masses of chaos...you are seen as that kind of rock...that people keep hanging onto."* TD (focus group)

Paradoxically she sometimes saw herself in the rôle of catalyst, deliberately creating chaos to *"turn them all upside down"* when she felt a group was becoming rather staid or *'mafia-like'*. Panelists recognised the necessity of situations being 'out of control', to allow for spontaneity and to facilitate organic development rather than keeping to rigid action plans. They talked of their work as preparing a foundation for bigger community projects.

"I do find that you're building up [a web] in terms of your networking. It is about outreach, it is about exploration...but I get to a point where there's suddenly a critical mass of outcomes. I think 'yes, this is making a difference'." KT

Others refer to a 'buzz' going on, little cogs in larger machines, a fascination with inter-connectedness, and the importance of encouraging a variety of experience and interests to mix and merge within relatively safe environments. This effect was recognised long ago in Thomas's (1976) term 'interjacency' although the word itself failed to catch on (but see Mowbray, 2000:222). There seemed to be an implicit awareness amongst these Panelists that small occurrences can trigger much bigger events in ways which can be neither predicted nor controlled. They saw this as a vital, but misunderstood feature of their community development practice which was exciting, generative and mildly subversive. Gladwell (2000) refers to this as the 'tipping point', when trickles of apparently unrelated events become a torrent of co-ordinated activity. He highlights the rôle played by 'connectors', people who appear to 'know everyone', and act as key nodes in a vast and complex network.

KEY ELEMENTS OF COMPLEXITY THEORY

A state of chaos is said to exist where a large number of elements influence each other's behaviour to produce dynamic and *unpredictable* patterns of activity. Contrary to popular belief, a system in chaos is not operating at random (Eve, 1997) but iteratively such that the probability of events occurring is affected by immediately preceding and neighbouring interactions (Priesmayer, 1992). It is not possible to specify the detail of future events, only to forecast likely trends. A fundamental feature of complex systems is that of over-arching properties which *emerge* as a result of localised interactions between elements of the system. This 'property' appears to function as some kind of integrating mechanism by which 'chaos' is averted. Thus the co-ordinated flight of a flock of birds is the result of simple rules of interaction governing the relative positions of a multitude of individual birds.

Complexity theory encompasses chaos theory and is concerned with understanding how 'order' appears 'immanent' (enfolded) within apparent chaos, such that a complex system will achieve 'self-organised criticality' (Bak and Chen, 1991; Lewin, 1993:54). The basic tenets of complexity theory were derived concurrently across different scientific fields: quantum physics, artificial intelligence, embryology, evolutionary biology and meteorology (Waldrop, 1992; Lewin, 1993; Gell-Mann, 1994). More advanced theory has developed

through the study of non-linear systems in which apparently insignificant events have far-reaching consequences (Gleick, 1987). Complex systems comprise a multitude of units (nodes), connected in ways which are mutually influential, yet relatively 'local'. A system's complexity increases according to the number of elements in the system, and the levels of inter-connectivity (Eve, 1997). Complexity theory assumes that connections between elements are subject to relatively simple rules of interaction (known as Boolean logic) and that, in the absence of central control mechanisms, local clusters exhibit only limited awareness of the total system. Each unit responds systematically to signals received from its neighbours, and eventually the entire system settles into a state of dynamic equilibrium, featuring familiar, but unique configurations known as 'strange attractors'. The system has evolved, apparently spontaneously and without external interventions, from an initially random set of interacting elements towards stable patterns of self-organisation (Jantsch, 1980). The *actual* configurations which emerge cannot be predicted in advance, but adopt forms which are characteristic of the system and its environment.

Complex systems are open: they are affected by changes in the wider environment and they also have an impact on what happens around them. Their history is significant in that what happens in the present is influenced by responses and adjustments to previous interactions (Luhmann, 1995). Complex systems are able to 'learn' from the past and to adapt to changing conditions. The capacity to process and store information from a variety of sources seems to be an important feature of the inter-connections in complex systems. The neuro-physiological structure of the human brain is a prime example of a highly evolved parallel information processing system consisting of interactive neural networks which respond to and synthesise particularly salient input and memories to 'produce' our perceptions and behaviour (Bechtel and Abrahamsen, 1991; Amari, 1993; McLelland, 1993; McCrone, 1999). Intelligence is the emergent property of a complex system of neural activity which integrates our individual experiences within the highly plastic, self-organising, but functionally specialist, structures of our brains (cf. Minsky, 1988; Grossberg, 1988; Dennett, 1991; Rose, 1998). Perhaps 'community' is the collective equivalent, creating both 'social identity' (Tajfel, 1978; 1981) and 'social capital' (Putnam, 2000) because of its ability to generate, receive, compare and disseminate human knowledge and emotions. But as Claxton notes "the price that any society pays for specialisation is the need for internal communication – and the more complex the community, the more sophisticated its communication, both internally and externally, needs to be" (1994:27).

In human terms, groups and organisations crystallise and evolve in an environment of complex and dynamic social interactions. Computer models, known as cell automata (von Neumann, 1956), have been used to test complexity theory. Kauffman (1993) identifies three regimes of behaviour for complex systems: frozen, chaotic and 'melting'. Computer simulations suggest that systems with low levels of connectivity and highly similar elements freeze into static configurations. Populations which have reached these levels of fragmentation or homogeneity (either by choice or circumstance) become 'stagnant' and are unable to innovate or adapt to changes in or around them. At the other end of the continuum, systems in which the behaviour of elements is influenced by many highly diverse connections are too volatile and cannot achieve stability. The optimal state for a system operating in an uncertain, turbulent world is in the 'melting zone' on the '*edge of chaos*'. This term was coined by the mathematician Norman Packard to describe an intermediate zone of 'untidy creativity', between rigidity and chaos, where the system is best able to function, adjusting constantly to slight perturbations but without cataclysmic upheaval. Complex systems generate patterns of self-organisation, some of which are more useful than others. *The existence of 'community' achieves this for human societies, through the integrating and communication functions of informal networks* (Leydesdorff, 2001). The system maintains itself in a state of dynamic equilibrium through a process known as *autopoiesis* (Maturana and Varela, 1987; Mingers, 1995). In one of the earliest applications of systems theory, Bertalanffy (1968) suggests that a system is only able to achieve homeostasis (steady state through self-regulation) if its level of complexity matches that of the external environment, such that its communication capacity has 'requisite variety' to process the range of information impinging on it (Ashby, 1956). Computer simulations indicate that the sustainability and adaptability of a complex systems are dependent on the number of participating elements, their diversity and levels of connectivity (Kauffman, 1995).

In their study of local voluntary activity Curtis and Zurcher (1973) were able to identify a degree of order and co-ordination within community settings, demonstrated at organisational level through mutual affiliations, co-operation and liaison, and between individuals through friendship networks and overlapping membership. Perhaps these mechanisms maintain a community system at the 'edge of chaos'. Whatever the shared basis for the connections between individuals, it is evident from the research literature on social movements and the community sector that networks are crucial to the development and maintenance of collective action strategies (Tarrow, 1994; Chanan, 1992; Taylor, 1995b). Complex patterns of conversation, casual encounters and cross-checking ensure

that consensus and resources can be swiftly and sustainably mobilised for collective action (Klandermans, 1997). People's sense of 'community' derives from the unpredictable dynamics of mutual influence and interaction. It reflects real experience and emotions, encompassing the negative aspects of human relationships, as well as the rose-tinted emphasis on belonging, trust and loyalty (Whitehead, 1995). Community is the 'emergent property' of a complex adaptive system operating at the 'edge of chaos', supplying social cohesion without imposing formal or centralised control. In this respect, 'community' is not simply equivalent to a 'social system' (cf. Stacey, 1969), but rather the outcome of interactions within networks. Structuration theory might argue that the experience of 'community' reflects the agency of individuals and their organisations operating within and around civic, political and economic structures (Arhne, 1990; Giddens, 1991b).

'Community' represents both the context and the process through which collective problem-solving mechanisms emerge, in much the same way as life forms evolved from the 'primordial soup' of previous aeons (Kauffman, 1995). This phenomenon was recognised many years previously by the sociologist, George Herbert Mead, observing that

> "when things get together, there arises something that was not there before, and that character is something that cannot be stated in terms of the elements which go to make up the combination." (1938:641)

This represents an early form of systems thinking which recognises that different properties appear at successive levels of analysis and are the product of 'organised complexity' (Capra, 1996). Complex networks are the pattern of all living systems, in which evolution uses chance and necessity to assemble new entities and to sustain diverse and resilient eco-populations (Monod, 1971). Those forms of organisation which best 'fit' the current environment are those that survive. The precise format and membership of these combinations are influenced (but not determined) by factors in the environment, such as public interest, political expediency, funding regimes and the existence of similar organisations competing for the same resources (Milofsky, 1988b). Within the spectrum of civil society organisations, a familiar range can be discerned in the groups, forums, federations, coalitions, intermediary bodies and clubs which populate the community and voluntary sectors. They reflect prevailing cultural expectations, local conventions and often perpetuate existing differentials of power and privilege. These are the 'strange attractors' of complex mature systems evolving towards the 'edge of chaos', a process which can be encouraged through a networking approach to community development.

THE 'WELL-CONNECTED COMMUNITY'

'Community' was first propounded as an antidote to 'chaos' in a paper published just half a century ago by the National Council of Social Service (White, 1950), an idea which has echoed down the years (e.g. Henderson and Salmon, 1998:19-21) but not yet settled in either practical application or explanation. In Greek mythology, the gods Chaos and Gaia were regarded as inseparable and complementary partners (cited in Wheatley, 1992:121) and this provides important clues regarding the development of self-sustaining social systems (cf. Lovelock, 1979). Using this framework, **it is possible to re-conceptualise the purpose of community work as the development of 'community' by enhancing people's capacity to network individually and through their collective organisations**. Traditionally in community work the emphasis has been on helping people to establish and manage specific forms of association (such as neighbourhood councils, festival committees, self-help support groups or similar community organisations) as goals in their own right. The 'edge of chaos' model of community suggests that the purpose of such activities is simply to create opportunities for interaction. The Festival Against Racism attempted to do this around a set of core values whilst community workers in the Panel Study demonstrated how networking was used to support joint ventures which in turn strengthened personal networks and enabled complex inter-organisational coalitions to operate (cf. Shuftan, 1999; Bradshaw, 2000).

The overall function of such interventions (whether by paid professionals, volunteers or active citizens) is the development of a complex social system operating at the 'edge of chaos' which might be termed the *'well-connected community'*. Ideally this is based on flexible, self-reliant networks which contain, or have links to, a *'sufficient diversity'* of skills, knowledge, interests and resources for the formation of any number of possible groups and collective initiatives. The task of the community worker is to enable people to establish these connections and maintain the web, so that interactions promote relationships based on trust, reciprocity and respect. This mirrors the role of 'peace-weavers' in the Icelandic sagas, for as Zeldin notes in championing the role of intermediaries, "respect cannot be achieved by the same methods as power. It requires not chiefs, but mediators, arbitrators, encouragers and counsellors...whose ambition is limited to helping individuals to appreciate each other and to work together even when they are not in complete agreement" (1994:144). What people then choose to do with these connections will be affected partly by individual motives, partly by local circumstances, and partly by the social and political environment. Bauman (1987) casts the interpreter in a postmodern role, facilitating communication and comparisons between shifting and ambivalent worldviews. The

acknowledgement of 'chance' and emotion within the process does not diminish the influence of policy makers nor the skilled input of community workers, who need to develop "a reflexive awareness of the emotional processes at work in groups and campaigns" (Hoggett and Miller, 2000:360). Instead it highlights the impossibility of accurate forecasting and the need for flexibility around evaluation. Community development cannot be realised through business plans or the achievement of specific performance criteria. Rather it is about helping a given population (social system) move towards the 'edge of chaos' as a way of managing uncertainty and developing shared structures. This involves the establishment of dynamic and diverse networks to create patterns of interaction, which are neither utterly confusing, nor frozen rigid.

A system at the 'edge of chaos' is immensely capable of responding to changes in the external environment. It is certainly not isolated from the outside world. Links which cross system boundaries offer a further advantage in allowing for the import of new ideas and comparisons between different perspectives (cf. Granovetter's (1973) weak ties). Rosenthal et al (1985) suggest that 'weak ties' provide the communication channels within communities, whilst the strong ties support exchange relationships which allows resources to be shared. The 'well-connected community' has strong internal relationships, but also benefits from useful, if challenging links with people and organisations beyond its immediate boundaries.

The principles of empowerment and equality can be incorporated into a complexity model of community development, enabling it to be used to underpin a radical paradigm, independently of current values of social justice. As Capra recognises in his model of the 'web of life'

> "in ecosystems, the complexity of the network is a consequences of its biodiversity, and thus a diverse ecological community is a resilient community. In human communities, ethnic and cultural diversity play the same rôle. Diversity means different relationships, many different approaches to the same problem. A diverse community is a resilient community, capable of adapting to changing situations. However, diversity is a strategic advantage only if there is a truly vibrant community, sustained by a web of relationships. If the community is fragmented into isolated groups and individuals, diversity can easily become a source of prejudice and friction" (1996:295).

Discrimination, prejudice and social exclusion are not 'morally wrong' (and therefore contestable). They can be seen as dysfunctional in that they disrupt the free flow of information across the system and restrict the development of potentially advantageous collaborative arrangements. Equality issues must therefore be addressed in order to dismantle barriers to communication and to promote tolerance of difference within the networks. Anti-oppressive practice ensures *the integrity, diversity and authenticity* of the whole system, as well as dealing with individual cases of maltreatment. This involves tackling institutional discrimination as well as attitude change, embracing political, practical and psychological levels of transformation (Ledwith, 1997, Thompson, 1998).

Networking and 'meta-networking' are fundamental methods of community development. Professional practice assists individuals in making strategic and opportune connections in order to create and maintain collective forms of organisation. Schneiderman (1988) reminds us that opportunism was a cardinal Machiavellian principle of survival and it is important not to dwell on its current negative connotations. Civil democracy and community governance require dialogue, learning, negotiation and respect. In complex systems such as human society, 'community' reflects both the objective experience and the imagined 'spirit' of complex interactions, from which emerge the familiar 'strange attractors' of self-help groups and citizens' organisations. With active support it could become that dimension of our lives which is about tolerating diversity, promoting equality and acknowledging mutuality (Holman, 1993). The present model of the 'well-connected community' does not attempt to re-invent a nostalgic version of traditional villages or urban neighbourhoods. Instead, it proposes a complex, almost post-modern vision of an integrated and evolving web of diverse and dynamic connections. The purpose of community development is simply to support and shape formal and informal networking in order to facilitate the emergence of effective and empowering collective action. As society becomes increasingly complex, the maintenance of inter-locking flexible networks around a variety of interests and identities will constitute our best strategy for building mature, resilient and sustainable communities.

[A version of this chapter was presented at the 1998 conference of the International Association for Community Development, Edinburgh, and subsequently published in the Community Development Journal (Gilchrist, 2000).]

CHAPTER TWELVE

Recommendations for practice and policy

'Chaos or Community? Where do we go from here?' Martin Luther King (1968)

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AS META-NETWORKING

The complexity model of community development suggests that an important outcome of the community worker's interventions is being overlooked - namely the extent to which community networks are strengthened and diversified. As indicated earlier, community development can be re-conceptualised as 'meta-networking', by which I mean the co-ordination and management of inter-personal and inter-organisational relationships within complex systems of interaction (Gilchrist, 1999). Bennis writes of the empowering and socio-emotional dimensions of management and leadership, as equivalent to 'herding cats' (1998). This analogy will strike a chord with many community workers. The function of the community worker in facilitating inter-disciplinary and cross-sectoral partnerships could be further highlighted, particularly their rôle as brokers and mediators, identifying and supporting potential participants from 'the community' to work with others around shared issues and goals.

The community worker frequently provides the boundary-spanning link, the person who is able to operate within different settings and constituencies acting as advocate or interpreter, especially at times of misunderstanding or conflict. Using their knowledge of the social and political landscape the community worker guides others across unfamiliar terrain, identifying resources and obstacles along the way. The community worker also has a crucial rôle in 'networking the networks'. They will spin connections across the web, putting people in touch with one another, helping them to communicate effectively and generally supporting the more difficult links, the ones blocked by organisational barriers, cultural misunderstandings or prejudice. Or they might simply operate as a 'go-between', keeping the pathway open as a route for future co-operation. They work to establish bridges, rather than 'bonds' of intimacy, but need to be sensitive to any emotional connotations generated by these connections. The community worker represents an important node in the network: a source of information which others can use to make their own connections or to find support. Activities and shared amenities can promote opportunities for people to initiate and sustain their own links. Informal processes and relationships are just as important as the formal structures in providing both means and motivation for networking.

Members of the Panel clearly valued their networking, arguing that it was of intrinsic benefit to their community development practice and the people that they worked with. Although it may prove impossible to 'proceduralise networking' (Hosking and Morley, 1991:224), Panelists were able to identify specific strategies and outcomes which were achieved through networking. They were also aware of its limitations, disadvantages and what they termed 'bad practice'. The findings have a number of implications for both practice and policy. This chapter highlights these and develops Payne's (1993) advice to social care professionals for the wider community development field.

Firstly, it proposes a model of 'good practice' for individual community workers which draws together the experiences of practitioners' Panel and the Festival Against Racism. Secondly, it makes recommendations for community work as an occupation in terms of core principles, rôle management, training and support structures. Thirdly, I will consider implications for policy development in the context of current government programmes. It may be helpful to summarise the key recommendations before going on to explain why they might be important.

SUMMARY OF KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Networking should be explicitly acknowledged as a core activity within community development practice.

2. It should be included in job descriptions, person specification, work programmes and funding applications.

3. The techniques of network analysis could be used more commonly to provide a baseline account of how communities are operating, and, in particular, show in graphic form the isolated clusters and gaps in communication.

4. Networking should be monitored and managed through work reports, which identify informal interaction with key or new contacts as well as formal inter-organisational liaison.

5. An index of effective networking needs to be developed for performance appraisal. This could incorporate short-term impact measures, as well as longer term outcomes.

6. Similarly, longitudinal network mapping exercises should indicate how the linkages between groups and organisations within communities are enhanced as a result of community development interventions.

7. Support and training should be available to community workers (and others) to improve their networking abilities, and to recognise the difficulties and dilemmas inherent in networking approaches.

8. Opportunities for informal networking should be included within formal events, such as conferences, training courses or inter-agency meetings.

9. The importance of networking as a foundation for partnership arrangements needs to be recognised in the timescales for developing bids, delivery plans and formal management structures.

10. There should be greater flexibility in work programmes to allow for experimentation and unexpected developments arising out of networking.

11. Evaluation of community development programmes should include outcomes which relate to improved relationships and connections within communities, and between communities and organisations in other sectors.

12. The less tangible aspects of human interaction derived from intuition and informal networking should be recognised and valued as important ways of working with people to develop collective action and multi-agency initiatives.

13. The function of intermediary bodies in helping community and voluntary organisations to develop co-operative and 'learningful' connections across identity and geographic boundaries should be strengthened.

14. A code of good practice in networking may need to be established setting out ethical standards in relation to rôle boundaries, reciprocity, accountability, confidentiality, equal opportunities and covert influence.

15. The meta-networking aspect of generic community work should be incorporated into their employment conditions through long-term contracts with secure funding, and

supported by supervision arrangements which enable them to operate semi-autonomously across internal and external organisational boundaries.

NETWORKING AS WORK

It is clear from the Panel Study and the practice literature that professional community work involves proficient, sometimes expert networking, which requires intelligence, ingenuity and practice. It takes time and effort, involves preparation and strategy in terms of self-presentation and discovering the 'lay of the land'. Effective networking is skilled, strategic and sustainable, and can be improved through reflection and experience. It may be helpful to think of networking in this context as having two layers of professional competence. The first refers to relationships between the worker and others. The second aspect is what I have termed 'meta-networking': supporting and shaping the lattice of connections which weaves across the communities and links them into the wider world. Meta-networking involves the usual skills and processes of networking such as making contact, finding connections, crossing boundaries, building relationships and inter-personal communication. It also requires an ability to manage the resultant network of relationships as a resource which others can make use of. Networks have to be nourished otherwise they die (Hastings, 1993). This is difficult because the links themselves are multifaceted and delicate, whilst the web as a whole comprises a complex system of intricate connections.

Paying more attention to networking within the micro-practices of community work is likely to make it more effective and easier. Chomsky's (1957) distinction between competence and performance may have some relevance here in that it allows us to recognise that personal motivation plays an important part in building authentic relationships. Sustainable networks have to involve genuine commitment and mutual interests, a point apparent in the case study and emphasised by several of the community workers in the Panel Study. People used 'themselves' but did not lose sight of their professional responsibilities as agents representing their employers or as accountable to different sections of the community. They were strategic, but not always in ways which were pre-planned or explicit. In his examination of personal networks, Heald (1983) suggests that the "art of networking is to do it naturally and with pleasure", but for the professional community worker personal preferences cannot wholly determine the nature or content of useful connections. People may well be capable of constructing a web of almost infinite complexity but time constraints lead them to choose those links that are rewarding and convenient. The emotional significance of personal relationships is an important dimension of organising that has too often been denigrated in the literature (with the exception of Rowbotham, 1986 and

Fineman, 1993), but cannot be easily dismissed from real life (Beres and Wilson, 1997; Goleman, 1995; Wheeler, 1999).

The worker needs to be able to use themselves as a quasi-neutral tool, but also to recognise that their own identity (as perceived by others) may be a block to forming relationships, especially if differences in status or culture are involved. Preparation is helpful because the more that is known and understood about the other person or people (their rôle, their interests, their background, the context in which they operate), the easier it is to find connections and to avoid causing offence or embarrassment. In many ways the competent networker will use the skills and quality of a good host at a large party: making people welcome, drawing them into conversation and introducing them to others who they might find compatible or stimulating. Good networking should not be too blatant, nor overly focused (Heald, 1983). It is about facilitating interaction, helping people to make useful contacts and supporting the processes of relationship formation. Brokering and interpreting are important aspects of this.

SKILLS, KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING

Nature and nurture together ensure that we learn strategies which are useful within a range of environments. It should therefore be possible to create circumstances which increase people's capacity to network and to assess competence using some kind of index of performance (Stephenson, 1998). There are several aspects to this: skills, knowledge and motivation.

An Internet search for material on "community networks" invariably generates copious references to information technology and the use of computers to store, cite, compare and communicate all kinds of data (e.g. D'Antonio, 1991; Lipnack and Stamps, 1994). This privileging of technological networking over human interaction is a worrying but salutary reminder that knowledge management is an essential component of networking. The successful networker therefore needs to be able to acquire, assimilate and manage information preferably in a form that is easily accessed. Community workers need to have good administrative and organisational skills in order to do this. This includes use of one's diary and having some kind of system for holding and accessing information, whether this is an excellent memory, a large notebook or a computer database, or all three. It also means recognising that being an information resource is part of the job. This certainly echoed my own experience as a Centre-based worker. I was constantly being 'phoned or contacted as the person who would know the

answer to an array of questions (about the locality, other voluntary organisations, funding regimes, legal issues). There were times when I was so stretched with what I thought of as 'my own work' that I resented these distractions. Eventually however I came to realise that being a source of ad hoc advice and information was part of the job, and the demands on my knowledge base reflected my position in local and city-wide networks. Being able to respond positively to most requests reinforced my reputation, making it easier for me to influence others and to ask for help when I needed it.

Community workers do not only act as transmitters of information. They analyse, interpret, evaluate and synthesise information from an extraordinary range of sources. This deluge of information includes official statistics, gossip, rumour, policy statements, ideological dogma, legal documents, political demands, cries for help, dreams, aspirations, half-remembered impressions and formal reports. The effective networker is able, somehow, to make sense of this kaleidoscope of contradictory and incomplete versions of the world, assemble some kind of coherent assessment and then present this for others to consider. This requires complex cognitive processes by which patterns and connections are traced amidst apparently incongruent opinions, facts and beliefs. Networkers develop insights into intractable situations, are able fairly and accurately to present opposing views, and make sensible forecasts of future developments based on their knowledge of past and current events. Often these are political judgements in that power interests and differentials may need to be taken into account, requiring negotiation and compromise. The good networker must therefore develop and exercise a political analysis of situations, including their own ideologies and status.

Similarly, communication abilities are vital, and it would seem to be important for the good networker to be versatile within a variety of modes and across boundaries. This includes non-verbal communication. They need to be alert to the potential for misunderstanding and to anticipate friction amongst those involved. The social logics operating need to be carefully interpreted and adapted, especially if more than one culture is involved (Gaines, 1995). An important component of networking capacity is knowledge of the environment in which one is operating. This means having an up-to-date 'map' of the organisational field (and the relationships that weave across it) as well as an understanding of the conventions and traditions that may influence people's behaviour in social or organisational environments (Hosking and Morley, 1991:147,234). This has implications for people working across unfamiliar cultures and Triandis (1995) suggests that people acting as interlocutors need to learn to recognise and operate within different cultural and paralinguistic modes.

Network mapping exercises have been developed to encourage people to be aware of existing links and overlaps amongst organisations around them. These enable people to be more explicit about how they use (or could use) connections with other individuals or agencies (e.g. McCabe et al, 1997). By identifying actual and potential forms of co-operation, it is suggested that people can become more proactive, and consequently more effective, in their networking. Taket and White (1997) suggest that organisational diagrams are helpful in conflict situations because they encourage participants to interrogate (and adjust) the network arrangements rather than each other. Formal network analysis may have something to offer in this respect, particularly in identifying changes that may have occurred as a result of community work interventions. Understanding how the people one is working with are connected (or not) and how this affects the organisation of collective activities is crucial to all successful community development strategies. Computer simulations and network analysis and visualisation programmes are currently being developed to promote, manage and evaluate change, but have not yet been systematically applied to community development (Freeman et al, 1998; Freeman, 2000).

IMPROVING NETWORKING PRACTICE

Community workers can be helped to develop the networking side of their rôle through training and improvements in management supervision. They should be encouraged to experiment, to take risks and invest time in building up relationships within the community and with colleagues in organisations that they are likely to be working with. In their work on collective action, Marwell and Oliver (1992) refer to time as resource used to build trust amongst participants, and to the act of 'giving time' as an expression of commitment. This should be acknowledged as 'work' even if it does not appear to have immediate or tangible outcomes.

However, rigid monitoring and evaluation procedures can discourage innovation and risk-taking. It is not possible always to predict the outcomes of community work, and in any case the requirement to do so stifles the initiative and synergy which networking generates. In the past community work has been reluctant to demonstrate (and claim) its effectiveness in tackling problems and achieving results. As a profession, there has been an over-emphasis on 'process', rather than product and it is right that this apparent lack of accountability has been challenged (Key et al, 1976; Erskine and Breitenbach, 1994). However, it should be possible to develop evaluation frameworks which express the hidden benefits of networking. The 'ABCD' approach first developed

in Northern Ireland (Barr et al, 1996; Barr and Hashagen, 2000) goes a long way towards a realistic and credible model for evaluating community development interventions. They identify informal networks as an aspect of measuring progress and also as one of the 'inputs' needed to achieve change:

> "As well as tangible assets, communities are in one sense a sum of inter-personal and inter-group relationships. In a well-functioning community these will be well established and functional and a crucial part of how the community actually works." (Barr and Hashagen, 2000:56)

But even that fails to acknowledge the 'serendipity' effect in community work, namely that many perfectly useful and decent outcomes are not planned, nor even sometimes imagined. They appear instead from a fortuitous synchronicity in the 'teaming ocean' of everyday interactions (Cohen and Stewart, 1994), but are nevertheless significant (Peat, 1991). Community indicators used in participatory appraisals are designed to measure the feel-good factors of community life and offer further possibilities (MacGillivray and Zadek, 1996; Walker et al, 2000), as do the relational audits suggested by the Relationship Foundation (N.Baker, 1996). Morrisey (2000) reports on an action research study to evaluate citizen participation and learning which included the following as progress indicators: 'development of new networks', 'levels of trust', 'alliances amongst organisations', 'organisations with networks formed', and (for individuals) 'expanded network of relationships' and 'learning the importance of networking'. In particular, it will be important to develop ways of profiling and measuring the inter-connectivity' between individuals and organisations (Skinner and Wilson, forthcoming). This is an area that needs further exploration, but should yield important discoveries about people's aspirations for 'community life' and how this might be expressed in a variety of 'quality of life' criteria. More work is needed to establish the link between networking practice and community development outcomes, especially since the recent introduction of a local government power to promote 'social well-being'.

Attempts to enhance networking ability have included practical workshops and seminars (Gilchrist, unpublished notes) and manuals (e.g. McCabe et al, 1997; LGMB, 1998). These have tended to focus on the strategic aspects of networking, and assume that the requisite communication and relationship skills are already present in the occupational repertoire. Training courses and NVQ-type assessment frameworks include these, but they could receive greater emphasis within the curricula and assessment criteria for professional

qualifications. The ability to develop and maintain relationships with a *range* of people, and to communicate in a *variety* of modes is not given sufficient recognition as a necessary competence and this could easily be improved by requiring students to gain experience in a wider range of practice situations than is currently the norm.

There also needs to be greater acknowledgement by managers and funders that effective networking involves reciprocity - you have to give in order to get, and these gifts and favours are an *informal* investment for an unpredictable future return. Helping out another organisation with a temporary problem, taking a turn to do the minutes of a meeting, offering advice or a sympathetic ear to a colleague, 'lending' the use of a meeting room or photocopying facilities - all detract from one's own work in the short-term, but lay a longer term foundation in relationships of mutual support, respect and trust. The benefits of this work for the individual or the organisation rarely register in balance sheets or records of achievement, and yet are vital prerequisites for community development. The costs of networking are often invisible or absorbed by a few individuals. They need to be recognised and shared more fairly, with attention paid to gender and rôle issues. This is important not only on grounds of equity, but also to ensure that power (administrative and emotional) does not accumulate to a small, unrepresentative clique.

Because networks usually rely on informal relationships and voluntary interactions rather than on organisational procedures, problems can arise due to lack of clarity around rôles. This can result in blurred or even contradictory purposes of social interactions and confused accountabilities. Networks are poorly equipped to deal with internal conflicts and are sometimes expected to perform functions for which they are ill-suited, such as managing resources or implementing policy. Networks facilitate organisation, but tighter structures are needed for consensual decision-making and united, rather than parallel, action. This is not always recognised and tensions appear within networks when it appears that conventions or expectations are being violated, even though these are rarely made explicit. Community workers need to be aware of this and able to assist networks to anticipate and manage transitions between phases in their evolution. This involves organisation development, helping to set up appropriate formal structures and mechanisms. Similarly, at an inter-personal level it is probably all right to blur rôle boundaries but not to obliterate them altogether. The informality of settings and encounters is a crucial dimension to networking, and distinguishes it from formal liaison and inter-agency collaboration. However, it can result in confusion with colleagues and community members over issues of confidentiality, rumour and conflicting loyalties, especially when these people may also have formal responsibilities as your

employers and managers as is often the case in the voluntary sector. Adequate supervision and training would improve this, helping workers to be more conscious of rôle boundaries and better able to assert, or at least, manage these. The growth of multi-agency and multi-layered partnerships has accentuated this issue (Peck and Tickell, 1993), making it ever more important that community workers are able to work across organisational boundaries whilst maintaining both professional identity and accountability.

VALUING INTUITION

In an early exploration of the community work rôle, Williams (1973) advocates the use of an "imaginative sixth sense" when "playing the networks". Many of the Panelists similarly felt that their ability to form appropriate links and relationships was based on intuition and 'hunches' about what was going on in social interactions. Dreyfus and Dreyfus (1986) suggest that intuitive judgements are one of the characteristics of expert performance which are inaccessible to technical analysis. They incorporate an ability to recognise and apply learning from previous similar experiences. Heron (1996:112) recognised that at the heart of professional practice lies an 'ineffable knack' which defies measurement and description. The ability to perceive and activate potential connections is one of the 'knacks' of networking.

This requires political 'nous', most notably an ability to 'read' the internal dynamics of an organisation in relation to its external circumstances (Baddley and James, 1987). Studies of effective management and leadership identify important personal qualities, such as vigilance in processing information about the environment (Bryman, 1992:150) and sensitivity to the feelings of others (Bennis and Nanus, 1985). This seems to be especially important in that interpreting and responding to complex situations requires both analytical and intuitive thinking (Hammond et al, 1980). Again there may be a gender factor operating as there is evidence that women may have different modes of knowing compared to men, and think in the more fluid and lateral ways that comprise intuition and inductive logic (Belenky et al, 1986). Hoskings and Morley (1991:25) argue that "the skilled actor is a skilled perceiver." 'Haphazard hunches' emerge which cannot be entirely justified through a rational examination of the evidence but nevertheless seem to work in practice (Eraut, 1994). In order to respond appropriately in social situations and co-ordinate collective action, organisers develop a 'script' based on their knowledge ('framing') of similar circumstances. This provides an algorithmic guide to action. Just as chess masters (sic) perceive the position of pieces on the board differently from novices (DeGroot, 1965), so expert networkers demonstrate socio-cognitive skills in their appraisal of complex and

dynamic processes from observations of informal interactions. These abilities and insights are not developed overnight. They represent 'slow knowledge', accumulated through subliminal rumination on experience using the 'tortoise mind', rather than the 'hare brain' (Claxton, 1997)

ESTABLISHING AND MAINTAINING RELATIONSHIPS

Relationships constitute more than mere contacts or connections. They sustain people in their jobs, but also enable them to undertake specific tasks by providing access to vital resources, knowledge and influence which might not otherwise be available. In order to be effective, these relationships need to be authentic, reliable and holistic. They do not require intimacy, merely trust and respect. Inter-personal relationships within the community and between organisations need to be given greater credence within community development to ensure that they are developed and maintained in ways that contribute to the overall work programme of individual workers or agencies. The meta-networking approach requires a specific emphasis on relationships. It suggests that community workers need to have a good understanding of how relationships function and how they can be sustained. In their extensive studies of relationship formation, Duck and his associates (Duck, 1991; 1992) demonstrate the importance of communication (verbal and non-verbal) in regulating the social processes of adaptation and exchange. The transition from acquaintance to friendship involves strategic use of self-disclosure, sharing information about oneself and testing out levels of affinity (Miell and Duck, 1986; Fehr, 1996). The significance of 'everyday chit-chat' lies in the "process of discovery and bonding" through which credibility is established, attitudes are explored and uncertainties about the 'other' are reduced until those involved feel that they know each other and have a certain sense of mutual obligation. Workers will need to think about rôle boundaries and maintaining some professional distance between themselves and community members.

Duck's work focused primarily on intimate relations and friendships but is relevant to professional networking in that it emphasises how judgements about pace, compatibility and setting are used to establish congruence within routine transactions. For example, sometimes an off-the-cuff comment will suffice to make the point, whilst in other circumstances only a formal memo will do. Many theories of relationships are based on examining how they move through different phases whilst remaining balanced and equitably reciprocal (Gouldner, 1960; van Yperen and Buunk, 1990; Ikkink and van Tilburg, 1998). Duck (1991) suggests that different abilities are needed to manage relationships during these different phases. People need to recognise and take advantage of

opportunities to form relationships. They need strategies for encouraging likeable people into their personal ambit, based on an understanding of how relationships might evolve. They also need social skills to maintain and repair relationships during periods of conflict or adversity. Networking demands similar capabilities, but in addition it needs an appreciation of the social context and a willingness to actively intervene to assist other people to make their own relationships. This is especially important if the social environment seems alien or fragmented (Amado, 1993) or if people lack the confidence or the skills to initiate contact for themselves (Wall, 1998). This might be due to cultural differences, impairments, prejudices, power imbalances or perceived conflicts of interest. Community workers can facilitate these processes by finding connections, creating opportunities for shared activities and encouraging dialogue across apparent boundaries. Training in feeling and expressing empathy has been suggested as a way of enhancing attention and sensitivity to other people's feelings (Perlman, 1979:58; Howell, 1982; Egan, 1986). As Wood and Duck observe (1995), relationships are contextual. They are contingent on a shifting notion of 'Self', itself a "teeming mass of potentialities" (Gergen, 1991:8) which is negotiated and asserted in counterpoint to 'Other'. Networking requires self-awareness, strategies for self-presentation on a variety of stages (cf. Goffman, 1959) and skills in establishing rapport in situations ranging from the subtleties of one-to-one interactions through to the complexities of multi-actor social and organisational dialectics (Zorn, 1995).

CREATING OPPORTUNITIES FOR NETWORKING

Networking is an active and on-going process which flourishes more readily in some environments than others. At its most simple, meta-networking is about creating occasions and vehicles for people to make and consolidate connections with one another. Traditional community work activities do not seem to be directly concerned with building relationships, nevertheless these provide space and opportunities for informal networking. They may however unintentionally exclude some people or perpetuate current inequalities. Networking must therefore be based on anti-discriminatory practices which address issues around access (Byrnoe and Oliver, 1991), cultural appropriateness (Hopton, 1997; Hopkins, 1997) and the assumptions which constitute internalised oppression. If power is about the way political and psychological space is perceived and occupied, then networking can be conceived at one level as a method of opening up and shaping communal places which facilitate integration and co-habitation whilst promoting equality and diversity. Integrating mechanisms appear to function best when they are neither excessively bureaucratic, nor overly informal (Lawrence and Lorsch, 1967). Changing the structures and customs of an organisation can radically alter the pattern of interactions.

As M. Smith reminds us "however distorted our ways of communicating are, there is within their structures a stubbornly transcending power" (1994:159). Community workers' professional commitment to equality and empowerment makes it necessary to intervene in situations so that people are more able and more likely to interact with one another in ways which promote respect, trust and mutual influence. Attempts to involve people from disadvantaged groups should be genuine and practical, not tokenistic. This might involve the prior development of confidence and consciousness through supporting smaller, self-organised groups (e.g. of Disabled people). Above all, it requires that networking honours people's autonomy and their diversity (Ling Wong, 1998). As Pahl (1996) has emphasised, 'community' should not be imposed on people. Personal networks are largely chosen and shaped by those involved who increasingly consist of selected friends, rather than 'given' family or neighbours (Pahl, 2000).

A number of meta-networking strategies commonly involve food and entertainment. These might be regular opportunities to meet and mingle in a convivial atmosphere, such as a community centre cafe might provide. Preparing and sharing food together is an enactment of 'communion' which exemplifies the origin of the word 'community' but, as Nelson et al (2000:361) observe, it is also a "gendered burden". Conversation as a means of education and social transition is essential to humanity's future (Zeldin, 1994:17). Sporting activities (even competitive ones) are another means of forging closer links, perhaps because of their semi-structured and yet informal nature. Team building exercises often use these activities to create situations for improving trust and co-operation amongst disparate groups. An example from my own experience serves as an illustration. For a while the predominantly female staff team at Easton Community Centre played netball together once a week, providing a regular opportunity to break down status and ethnic differences between us. I am sure that this contributed to the atmosphere in the Centre and general willingness to help each other deal with minor problems and irritations. It has been suggested that many communal games were developed in order to express and diffuse tensions within a safe arena where rôles are clearly defined and power differentials de-limited (Milofsky, 1988c).

HONOURING DIFFERENCE AND DIVERSITY

One of the key political developments over the past twenty years or so has been the growth of self-organised movements around different forms of discrimination and oppression. Alongside demands for equal rights and equal treatment has developed a recognition that this does not mean treating everybody the same, nor expecting people to conform to prevailing cultural mores or social expectations. There is also a growing

recognition that many people, perhaps the majority, experience multiple, interacting oppressions (Alperin, 1990) and steps need to be taken to meet people's practical and psychological requirements.

It has been suggested that identity politics have resulted in fragmentation and a weakening of solidarity (e.g. Rowbotham et al, 1979; Solomos et al, 1982; Anthias and Yuval-Davies, 1992; Rutherford, 1990; Shukra, 1995), whilst others have argued that separate organisation is a necessary phase in the development of strong alliances (e.g. Ohri and Manning, 1982; Davis, 1981). From the Disability movement we have

> "a new view of integration [which] is underpinned by an entirely different philosophy, what might be termed the politics of personal identity. This demands, and has the confidence to demand it through a growing collective identity, that difference not merely be tolerated and accepted, but that it is valued and celebrated." (Oliver, 1996)

This approach requires what has been called the 'platinum rule' (Carnevale and Stone, 1994), treating others as they wish to be treated, with respect and understanding. Achieving this allows interaction between 'communities' on the basis of equality, tolerance and mutual learning (Sondhi, 1997). A commitment to dialogue and working with the dissonances that arise (Clegg, 1994) can be expressed through formal coalitions, ad hoc alliances or informal networking. It accommodates divergence, contradiction and dissent, rather than attempting to impose either unity in action or a spurious (and fragile) consensus. Networks are particularly adept at managing change and diversity, and are useful organisational forms for promoting genuine understanding, integration and liberation. The culture and values of such 'chaordic' organisations (Hock, 1995) will appreciate uncertainty and complexity, finding ways to work with difference and construct consensus when it is needed. Tolerance and transparency will be key principles in ensuring that power, intelligence and ownership are distributed across all stakeholders (Mulgan, 1997). As Bronowski (1973) observed in his account of the 'Ascent of Man' (sic) tolerance requires insight, imagination and an ability to interpret (understand) difference. Diversity supports dynamism because it juxtaposes new ideas and incompatibilities, which need to be accommodated or resolved. This is true for organisations as well as individuals. As Kondra and Hinings assert, "diversity is the sine qua non of change" (1998:750). It allows a range of options and therefore a flexible response to uncertain conditions. This is important for the

voluntary sector (Taylor et al, 1995) and for social integration at community level, especially during times of population flux (Forrest and Kearns, 1999).

Community spaces, groups and activities provide integrating mechanisms which are neither bureaucratic, intimidating nor remote. The networking approach to community development seeks to create communities "which are inclusive, open and creative, and in which difference is welcomed and valued" (Warburton, 1998:17). It echoes Aneurin Bevan's post-war vision of the 'living tapestry of a mixed community' and the value that ecologists place on 'biodiversity' within the global environment (e.g. Wilson, 1992). In the same way socio-diversity must form the basis of a continually enriched society, with all its contradictory values and symbols (Martin and Meyerson, 1988). A networking model of community development ensures that the strands of diversity can be woven into the 'rich tapestry' of our lives.

In this respect, community work has two contributions to make. The first is to provide the initial spans for building bridges across the divides of prejudice and ignorance (cf. Conway, 1997:150), to create a 'space of flows' (Castells, 1996). The second rôle is more challenging and involves an acknowledgment that equality must be actively constructed, tackling power differentials, disagreements and downright hostility (Albrecht and Brewer, 1990), even when this causes divided or confused loyalties (Phillips, 1987; Modood, 1992) or shame and outrage (Bunch, 1990). It involves developing a 'community of consenting participants' (Hindess, 1996) and building cross-cutting alliances which promote visibility, pride and communality. This implies work with those who are oppressed, developing confidence, esteem, skills, awareness (Pheterson, 1990; Steinem, 1992) and with those who are either benefiting from the inequality (e.g. through privileged access to resources or assumptions of normality) or actively defending it (Gilchrist, 1992).

SPACES AND PLACES FOR NETWORKING

Community development requires neutral spaces, which are neither private nor public, but *communal* sites of social integration (Harrison et al, 1995), where the process of community can be continually be enacted and renewed (Warburton, 1998). Oldenberg (1991) defines these as 'third places' which are frequented by regular users and have a playful, convivial atmosphere where conversation is the main activity. They feel like a 'home away from home', are accessible and accommodating to different people, levelling status and allowing visitors a low profile with few expectations (cited Schuler, 1996:42). There are neither

guests nor hosts, simply users who share the space and engage with one another as and when they choose. Corporations are increasingly recognising the value of networking methods and structures in enhancing learning and performance for their staff. Hewlett Packard, AT&T, Lucas and WH Smiths all use networking as part of their induction procedures and encourage staff to attend Sharefair events (Thatcher, 1996). Similarly, buildings such as The Ark in west London have been designed with minimal architectural barriers, creating comfortable communal spaces and open plan work areas (Hastings, 1993).

The importance of public places for networking is increasingly recognised by urban planners (e.g. Landry, 1995; Barton, 2000). Communal spaces provide arenas for social interactions which are not governed by overly formal etiquette. Cooper (1998) argues for the use of public spaces to create temporary communities, which she calls 'collectivities of strangers sharing equal regard'. She emphasises the importance of safety, open access, cultural diversity and civic responsibilities in promoting these. Factors such as traffic flow through local streets can have a major impact on the level and quality of community interaction (Appleyard and Lintell, 1969; Appleyard, 1981) and has often been the target of community campaigns. It needs to be a consideration in planning designs for sustainable neighbourhoods (Barton et al, 2001). Familiarity and mutual recognition are important components influencing how users of public space relate to one another, but so also are expectations that local heterogeneity will be acknowledged, perhaps even celebrated. Such spaces can be designed and shaped (using community art such as murals or sculptures) to encourage processes of interaction which promote diversity and equality, rather than simply reflecting the dominant presence. An unusual angle on the interaction of "lightly engaged strangers" is provided by Young's (1999) observations regarding the function of fictional communities (soap opera narratives) in urban populations. In a world of increasing uncertainty these are seen as liberating in that they provide 'safe conversational space', allowing people to explore contentious issues without entering into onerous or embarrassing obligations.

Community workers tend to have a more local, or identity-based focus but the principles remain the same. How can local spaces become genuinely 'communal' places which people can use for specific purposes but where they will also encounter *on an equal basis* people with different needs or interests? To some extent, community workers have always been involved in creating and maintaining 'third places' where people can meet for a variety of purposes and none (Twelvetrees, 1976:122; Gatehouse, 1982; Marriott, 1997:9). Community workers help people to share such facilities, dealing with the inevitable clashes

whilst encouraging conversation, integration and understanding. This may well not create 'harmony', but it will at least enable people to interact with greater tolerance and respect. Social psychology suggests that inter-group contact in which people begin to see each other as individuals (rather than as simply members of the 'other' category) result in the reduction of stereotypes and discrimination (Condor, 1990; Gaertner et al, 1996). Johnstone and Hewstone (1990:196-205) found that this effect is enhanced in situations involving co-operation rather than competition and where there are low levels of anxiety. The creation and maintenance of informal, communal spaces are probably just as significant anti-oppressive strategies as equal opportunities policies and a plethora formal training programmes.

As many people living in mixed neighbourhoods will testify, co-residence doesn't guarantee interaction or mutual obligation (Wallman, 1986) and community workers can play a role in facilitating communication and co-operation where it doesn't occur 'naturally'. Community projects engender the 'conditions for congregation and celebration' (Clifford, 1998:236). Retrospectively I realise that this is what I was attempting to do through my work at Easton Community Centre, simultaneously building bridges between different sections of the population whilst trying to create (and sometimes defend) spaces for marginalised groups to empower themselves and affirm their own identity (Breakwell, 1986).

Figure 9. Working across boundaries: two members of the Asian elders steering group – a Sikh and a Muslim

In that instance, I was working with a physical building with its own history and pattern of competing interests, where it was possible to create 'temporary' spaces around specific themes such as International Women's Day or One World Week. These provided the rationale for people from different groups to contribute and participate in shared events. The Bristol University study into inter-ethnic relations (mentioned in Chapter One) used the Community Association as a case study and commended our ability to acknowledge and address the tensions arising from our commitment to diversity *and* equality.

> "The issues that the C.A. struggled with vividly illustrate the complex interaction of the various dimensions of disadvantage of race and age, and of age and class, of race, gender and sexual orientation. The success of the Association in working through such differences could be observed in the way in which it validated different needs and expectations whilst not avoiding open conflict...the more informal characteristics of the Association were crucial – its friendliness, openness, the social skills and qualities of many of its members and workers, and the commitment to make things work in practice rather than simply in theory." (Jeffers et al, 1996).

This was evident in the style and spirit of our equal opportunities policy, but also the "democratic and permissive culture" of the organisation, which "had the capacity to contain conflicts without being exploded part by them"(ibid). Nelson et al (2000) describe similar approaches in their work with Somali and Asian women in Manchester, stressing the significance of language and listening in transforming barriers into borders which can be crossed. They conclude that "difference and commonality are not static opposites" (p.356), but can be shaped through the politics of love, trust and dialogue (c.f. hooks' concept of the 'beloved community', 1994b).

The Festival Against Racism adopted a similar model of constructing socio-political space, with a framework defined by common values (Gilchrist, 1995b). This allowed participating groups their autonomy, whilst encouraging interaction and joint purpose. In both cases, my rôle was to support and maintain access to the space, using networking to reach out beyond the initial boundaries, dismantle internal and external barriers to participation and actively facilitate communication and co-operation between people who might not otherwise have associated together. Many of the difficulties involved other people and institutions. Community workers frequently operate in situations where there will be conflicts between different groups and resistance to progress, especially if attempts at co-operation challenge vested interests. The 'outsider' can contribute by co-ordinating and facilitating such

interactions, helping people to communicate, suggesting alternative formulations, mediating and interpreting when things get awkward, and generally acting to repair the "rips in the tapestry of social life" (Pilisuk and Parks, 1986:167). Pindar's (1994) study of a community's response to racial harassment refers to the rôle of an external 'champion' to propel and support the inter-agency networking, thus ensuring that the core group was representative and democratic.

Communal spaces represent 'liminal' areas (van Gennep, 1960; S.Ardener, 1981) in which people meet regularly, exchange pleasantries and eventually begin to form low intensity, but potentially helpful relationships. Giddens (1990) refers to "the local milieu [as] the site of clusters of interweaving social relations" and this may explain the enduring dominance of the geographical dimension to definitions of community. It reflects the importance of 'place' as a site for unplanned, informal interaction (Massey, 1994) but the tendency to romanticise the village or neighbourhood as the pre-eminent (if not only) basis for 'community' should be avoided (N.Taylor, 2000). Perhaps we need to re-invent a (post)-modern equivalent of the Florentine 'passagiata' encouraging face-to-face interchange in an environment which has open access and few rules of engagement.

WALKING THE MARGINS

As the research progressed I became increasingly aware that many of the difficulties and frustrations faced by community workers derive from their position on the edges of organisations. They are everywhere and nowhere; marginalised, neglected and yet in constant demand as mediators between different agencies or groups. They form the interface and support the bridges across which information and resources flow to be used by others in ways which are not always acknowledged. This rôle is not incidental to the community development process; it is central to it. As Odasz (1995) pointed out, "most community networks are more communities of networkers than networked communities." Meta-networking is concerned with developing both confident networkers and vehicles for networking. Their position on the margins gives community workers a vital rôle in assisting other people to cross the boundaries. They are not so much gate-keepers as bridges, 'people-carriers' and signposts, helping people through the barriers and navigating 'safe' routes over unfamiliar terrain.

Community development recognises and attempts to overcome the obstacles that prevent or deter people from becoming involved in decision-making. A networking approach places further emphasis on cross-cutting forums and the informal

infrastructure of communities which develop relationships between members of different groups and provide channels for marginalised and dissenting voices to be heard. "A locality with a selection of 'bridging' groups is likely to have long-term capacity for sustaining regeneration" (CDF, 1996). This is particularly important for oppressed and minority groups where resources are limited, and yet there is an urgent need for solidarity and to influence policy (Qaiyoom, 1992; Emmanuel, 1993).

Closed or homogeneous sets lead to 'groupthink' (Janis, 1971) and sometimes unhelpful peer pressure (Hicks and Gullett, 1975), resulting in a dogmatic 'common sense' or reinforcing extreme bigotry as in the case of religious cults or political sects. Teams work best when they are coherent, but not closed to new inputs (Hosking and Morley, 1991). The boundary-spanning aspects of the 'weak ties' are therefore crucial in creating a climate for learning and innovation. The long range 'weak ties' in networks are especially important for transmission between groupings separated by geography, beliefs or culture (Watts and Strogatz, 1998). They support cross-fertilisation of novel or challenging ideas, and allow information (or whatever) to travel vast distances using only a few steps (cf. Milgram's (1967) 'small world effect' and the phenomenon popularised as 'six-degrees of separation' (Kochen, 1989)).

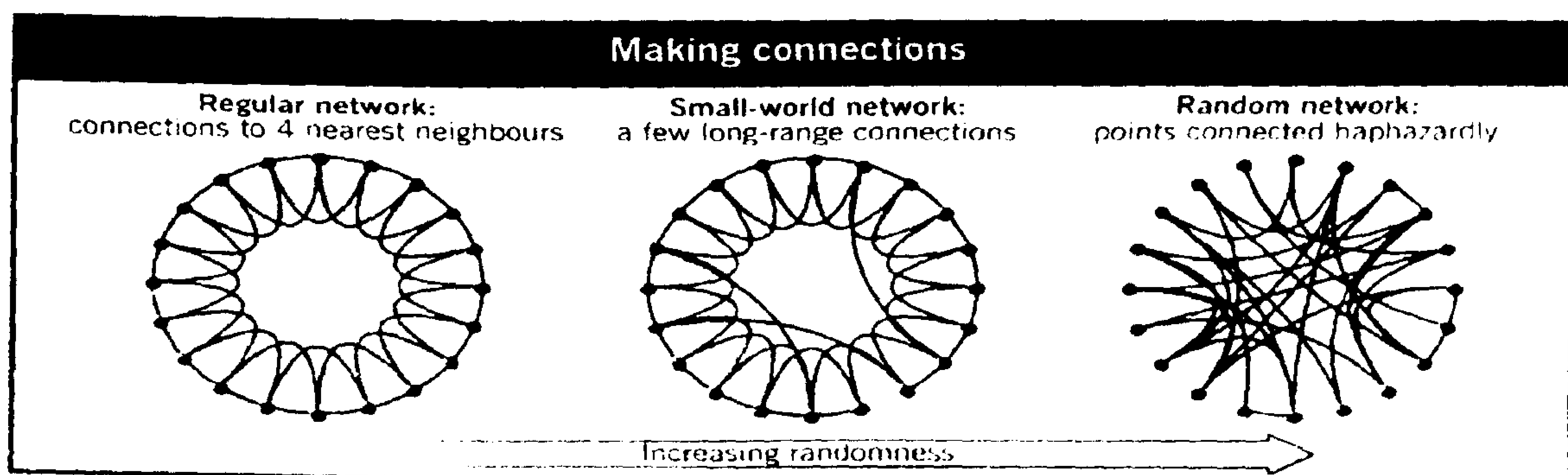

Figure 10. The role of 'weak ties' in creating small worlds. From Watters and Strogantz (1998).

These are the 'links that liberate' rather than the 'ties that bind'. Granovetter (1978) argues that weak ties contribute to social cohesion by providing links between sections of the networks which might otherwise remain isolated and mutually antagonistic. Strong ties, characterising intimate kin and friendship clusters, where members are connected through many overlapping links, provide multiple communication channels, and, like the Internet, this internal redundancy gives communities their resilience. If one relationship fails or becomes overloaded, there are several other possible information routes or sources of support.

The 'weak ties' of networks create 'distributed information systems', encouraging discussion, democratic decision-making and collective problem-solving (Wittenbaum and Stasser, 1996). They also open up opportunities for individuals (6, 1997a and b). Sustainable communities need both weak and strong ties. The case study and the experience of community workers in the Panel Study suggest that the primary task of community development interventions might be to provide the 'bridging' mechanisms, either through the networking activities of the community worker themselves or by supporting projects which create and sustain 'weak ties' between organisations and separate sections of the population (Barr et al, 1997;Taylor 2000:1027).

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

A number of implications flow from the above approach. Networking takes time, effort and attention (McCabe et al, 1994). For community development and partnership working to be effective and sustainable, networking needs to be recognised and adequately funded. It is noteworthy that two recent Home Office funds have been specifically designed to transfer knowledge and experience between communities, namely the 'Linking Communities' and 'Connecting Communities' grants launched in 1996 and 2000 respectively. Core funding for long-term generic community work posts is also required, allowing workers to understand and engage with community dynamics, build meaningful relationships and respond to issues identified by community members themselves. As Taylor (1995b) and others have demonstrated, the ability of residents to become and stay involved with regeneration programmes is developed through long experience of collective organising. Capacity-building schemes which take a remedial approach focus just on the skills and confidence of individual leaders (Wilcox, 1994) and ignore the hinterland of experiential knowledge acquired through collective action and reflection cycles (Kolb, 1984; Boud et al, 1985; Clay and Gilchrist, 1996). It also underestimates the need for dominant partners to learn how to communicate with and facilitate partnerships with marginalised communities (Warburton, 1998). As Chambers (1998:118) reminds us, "those with more power have more responsibility" and this includes responsibility for ensuring that the contributions of community representatives are both valid and valued.

Chanan (1999) argues that community involvement in regeneration initiatives depends on a foundation of community sector activity that is low-profile, often unseen, fragile but somehow enduring over time. Supporting this layer of active citizenship and mutuality is a

core purpose of community development and should be supported by government (Chanan, 1997a; Burns and Taylor, 1998). A networking approach to organisation involves a two-fold strategy: on the one hand, optimising the performance of specialist units (community groups), whilst simultaneously developing the quality and diversity of inter-connections (cf. Bauer, 1997). Funding policies need to secure existing good practice at community level, including sufficient money for positive action measures, such as crèches, interpreting and personal assistance for Disabled people. The tendency for grant-giving bodies to search out only new or innovative projects focused around specific 'problems' has distorted community work practice and undermined the basis for creative thinking and genuine community participation. Global and social changes suggest that

> "The future for work which links the neighbourhood to the wider world is likely to lie in looser and more flexible networks...but issues of transparency, accountability and access will need to be addressed if these networks are to be grounded in the needs of people in communities and in acknowledged democratic processes...It is likely that in a more fragmented 'postmodern' environment, networks and alliances will be the foundation on which empowerment is built. Community workers need to develop a practice which can work with allies across the institutional map to find the possibilities for change in an increasingly turbulent environment." (Taylor, 1995a:109 -110)

Meta-networking and a better recognition of informal networks may well be that 'new' version of practice. Community participation and accountability emerge from a complex infrastructure of informal networks and self-organising groups. It is this layer of interaction which is neglected by, and yet essential to the recent successes in community-led regeneration programmes (Stewart, 1998a). It needs to be supported both by generic community development posts (such as neighbourhood development workers) and by adequately funded, but independent, umbrella bodies. It may seem obvious that the existence of 'community' is a prerequisite for community involvement, and yet few policy officers or regeneration managers acknowledge that key elements of a community's capacity – networks, interaction, common purpose, collective identity and organisational infrastructure – may need to be in place before there can be effective and equal partnership.

Nearly all the Panelists commented on how opportunities for unplanned and unfocused networking were disappearing from their working (i.e. paid) life. Long-term strategies of nurturing potentially useful relationships were more difficult to justify, because they elude precise predictions of 'outputs'. And yet these informal, somewhat serendipitous, connections provide vital channels for information, resources and energy to flow through the circuits of civil society, linking community groups, local government politicians and officers, funding bodies and the array of voluntary organisations supporting collective action and citizen participation (Taylor, 1998). Clearly there *is* value in 'networking for networking's sake', but it either requires a leap of faith or more firm evidence than I've provide here to convince funders and managers, especially in relation to informal and unplanned interaction.

BUILDING NETWORKING CAPACITY

Formal structures and occasions are useful vehicles for networking, but they can be overly rigid and restrictive, especially when they emanate from local authorities or government departments. Community initiatives and processes are more organic, needing space and support to grow. Voluntary sector 'umbrella' bodies provide both the trellising and the nutrients for this growth, but are under increasing threat from local authority funding cuts and from the appearance of agencies with a more specialist function, for example supporting management training, volunteering or the social economy. Taylor (1997) following her review of Rowntree-sponsored research on the voluntary sector, recommends increased support for intermediary bodies, such as Councils for Voluntary Service, to help them service the networking of smaller organisations. Intermediary bodies can also act as social relays and brokers, activating and connecting informal networks into more formal partnerships (Skelcher et al, 1996).

Many intermediary bodies play a vital co-ordinating function: convening meetings, producing mailings, running training workshops, advice services and consultation exercises. Local forums, federations and network bodies provide a similar function, sometimes serviced by the CVS, sometimes with paid administrative support, but more often reliant on the dedication of a few hard-pressed individuals who are able (just about) to undertake these tasks on top of other work commitments. Studies of multi-agency partnership working (e.g. Wilcox, 1994; Goss and Kent, 1995; Hambleton et al, 1995; Stewart and Taylor, 1995; Skelcher et al, 1996; Hastings et al, 1996; Means et al, 1997; Geddes, 1998) have invariably found relationships and informal networks to have a major (and not always positive) impact on decision-making and co-operation. Regeneration partnerships tend to

involve prominent and 'well-connected' key players: community activists, voluntary sector professionals, local authority officers, who are able to influence decisions through their contacts with politicians and funders. Access to such networks is rarely either transparent or equitable, and is a major source of resentment and discrimination. This unevenness in the capacity to network has begun to be addressed and the most recent European Objective 4 documentation allocates funding specifically to build the 'networking capacity' of disadvantaged groups.

CONCLUSION

Government policy under New Labour has been strongly influenced by communitarian thinking. There has been a return to ideas of community participation in decision-making based on collective empowerment rather than the individualist 'user' rights enshrined in the various Charters introduced under Major's government. There has been further emphasis on partnership and multi-agency working but accompanied by an understanding that this requires 'capacity-building'. Whilst there is still a tendency to assume that the deficit lies with local residents rather than officers and representatives of the private and statutory partners, increasingly capacity-building is interpreted as an important element of sustainable regeneration and neighbourhood management (Duncan and Thomas, 2000; M.Taylor, 2000a). Indeed the evidence from job advertisements and professional courses indicates a potential renaissance for community development, albeit one that involves community representatives rather than genuinely engages or empowers local people. Without shared commitment and clarity around the *practice* of devolution, there is a danger that independent community initiatives will be subsumed into a rather top-down approach which delivers to the government's modernising agenda rather than pursuing community priorities (Burgess et al, 2001) .

This is particularly evident in relation to 'joined-up' thinking and social exclusion initiatives (Percy-Smith, 2000) The need for improved co-ordination of public services and funding is well-documented and echoes the experiences of local people faced by a proliferation of partnership and 'zones' emanating from different government (and European) departments (PIU, 2000, Stewart et al, 2000). The government's response has been to increase control at the centre, attempting to co-ordinate activity through a hierarchical model which belies its own commitment to devolution and subsidiarity. An alternative model would be a radical decentralisation of services and decision-making using community networks as a form of participatory democracy: creating local or

identity-based co-ordinating mechanisms (partnerships) which are able to take a bottom-up view of the situations causing concern (Collins and Lister, 1996). This would allow a holistic analysis of the causes of relative deprivation and the design of locally appropriate solutions which could address the range of factors thought to be implicated in social exclusion (Page, 2000). Local strategic partnerships (or their neighbourhood equivalent) represent an attempt to formalise this approach.

It is encouraging that recent Policy Action Team reports on neighbourhood renewal emphasise the value of informal networks and community involvement in building and maintaining social capital. A common thread throughout the recommendations is a recognition of the contribution of voluntary organisations and community groups, but marred by an over-emphasis on the rôles played by individuals, variously disguised as neighbourhood wardens, local leaders, social entrepreneurs, community champions and volunteers (SEU, 2000). The National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal asserts that "thriving communities are those which interact with their surroundings", suggesting that community activity (or volunteering as it is termed here) "brings people into contact with those outside their normal circles, broadening horizons and raising expectations, and can link people into informal networks." In addition to organised activities, the chapter on Reviving Communities argues for facilities, such as neighbourhood shops and multi-purpose venues which encourage chance contacts and informal interaction. In this context it is profoundly disappointing that the final version of the government's action plan to tackle social exclusion, the New Commitment to Neighbourhood Renewal, fails to mention community development at all (SEU, 2001).

Despite this omission there are signs that government policy is recognising the value of long-term interventions in building the 'capacity' of communities to engage with government programmes. The emphasis on partnership working requires greater levels of funding to be made available for intermediary bodies, at local and regional levels, which can construct and service consortia of voluntary and community groups, as well as support informal inter-agency networking. There appears to be an increased willingness amongst politicians and policy-makers to trust agencies and professions which are not under their immediate control, and to acknowledge that risk, discretion and occasional failure are inevitable corollaries of pursuing strategies which urge community enterprise and innovation. If these approaches are to be successful, community work needs space and opportunity for informal and serendipitous activities to operate alongside more formal task-related job or project specifications.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Summary and evaluation

" 'Only connect'. That was the sum total of her sermon" – EM Forster (1910)

There seems finally to be a tacit recognition of the significance of social networks in creating sustainable communities. Networks serve a vital function within society and the principles and processes of a networking approach to community development provide the means for achieving social justice and community empowerment.

THE PROFESSIONAL CORE

Despite strong professional values and principles, community work has suffered from lack of clarity over its core purpose and function. Recent occupational surveys all noted difficulties around finding a satisfactory definition (Barr, 1991; Glenn and Pearce, 1997; Purcell, 1998; Harris et al, 1999). Historically, there was much debate and resistance to the idea of community work as a profession at all. It was felt that this would bring with it elitist qualification demands and other barriers to participation. These were (and still are) legitimate concerns but I believe that a focus on networking and meta-networking as core occupational functions, creates a distinctive rôle that is unique and complementary to allied professions, such as teaching, youth work or social work. The purpose of community work is to help individuals and organisations to establish and make use of connections which reach across boundaries and lay the basis for effective collective action. Networking is not an incidental or peripheral activity. It must therefore become more strategic, more skilled, better managed and more realistically funded. As Chambers (1998) points out professional disciplines that deal with 'people as people', working in the "dirty, chaotic and uncomfortable conditions of the periphery" are poorly rewarded or respected (p.129). A new paradigm is needed which restores the value of this work, and locates networking at the heart of community development. The thesis has focussed on the more technical aspects of networking, illustrating the methods and attributes which community workers use to

- develop stronger community networks,
- promote interagency co-operation, and
- support boundary-spanning connections.

But community development also involves vision, principles and process. This inquiry has tried to reflect and encompass all these, seeking to demonstrate how attention to the processes of networking based on principles of equality, diversity and participation,

could create the vision of a 'well-connected community' which is empowered and in a state of dynamic equilibrium. Community development is fundamentally concerned with change and development (Henderson, 1997). It aims to promote change at the level of groups, organisations, society and even in the world order. However, as a professional intervention it is primarily about just what it says, the development of 'community'. Butcher et al (1993) see the 'end product' of community practice as a "neighbourhood alive with activity and cross-cut with networks of relationships, providing a locus for informal support and mutual aid", to which I would add, 'and for collective organising'. In many respects my conclusions were pre-empted by Flecknoe and McLellan who argued nearly a decade ago in their introduction to neighbourhood work that:

> "The community development process sets out to create the context within which meaningful relationships can be formed and through which people have the spaces to grow and change, and fulfill their potential...A high quality of relationships is the foundation for all community development work. Unless people are able to trust in others and share a part of their lives, collective activity is impossible...'Community' is that web of personal relationships, group networks, traditions and patterns of behaviour that develop against the backdrop of the physical neighbourhood and its socio-economic situation. Community development aims to enrich that web and make its threads stronger." (1992:7-8)

The model adopted here sees 'community' as neither a place, nor an agent of change, nor even a 'fuzzy set' of characters. Just as the 'mind' or consciousness does not reside in the neural connections and is neither material nor spiritual (Glynn, 1999), so the experience of 'community' integrates objective and subjective experiences. 'Community' is neither imagined nor constructed. It emerges from the "transcendent connectedness" (Frazer, 1995) of interactions and relationships weaving a complex and dynamic tapestry through everyday life. These occur in real space and real time but are not anchored in specific roles or localities. Lefebvre first observed in 1947 that "everyday life is defined by contradictions: illusion and truth, power and helplessness, the intersection of the sector one controls and the sector one does not control" (1958:21, second edition). As Boothroyd (1991) contends, 'community' appears in 'non-gemeinschaft' forms throughout 'post-gesellschaft' society (cited in Robinson, 1995). The research described here highlights patterns and textures within community networks of friendliness, familiarity and frequency. It identifies how community development practitioners operate across this 'gilded realm', hovering at the interface

between the public and private spheres of decision-making. 'Community' is conceptualised as a series of overlapping networks (Wellman, 1999) comprising stretched, loose-knit ties arising from local and activity-based patterns of interaction (Bridge, 1995).

The development of 'community' is both an aspiration and a principle (Warburton, 1998:18; Schwartz and Schwartz, 1998). There is general agreement amongst social scientists, policy-makers and most 'ordinary' people that community represents a public 'good' (Jacobs, 1995a). Anything which supplies social motivation and removes from the individual their sense of separateness enhances their physical and emotional well-being, even transitory and imaginary companions (Argyle, 1996b; Ornish, 1999). Community work however focuses not on the welfare of individuals but on the development of collective experiences and potentialities. Managing the 'web' of inter-personal and inter-organisational linkages is a vital professional function that promotes the diversity and dynamism of communities, both important features of complex systems. The networking model of community development finds strong parallels in Chamber's paradigm of the 'new' people professional:

> "Its principles, precepts and practices resonate with parallel evolutions in the natural sciences, chaos and complexity theory, the social sciences and business management...[D]ecentralisation, democracy and diversity combine. Multiple local and individual realities are recognised, accepted, enhanced and celebrated. Truth, trust and diversity link. Doubt, critical self-awareness and acknowledgement of error are valued." (1998:140)

Whilst it is true that a proportion of the work is conducted through one-to-one conversations, assistance and support, networking is primarily about helping people to form connections which will be beneficial to them personally, and facilitate their participation in broader activities and decision-making. Work with individuals is a necessary, but not sufficient contribution to the establishment and maintenance of groups, organisations and multi-agency coalitions. This is what Thomas (1995:15) refers to as the 'lost meaning' of community development, the work which "strengthens the social resources and processes in a community by developing those *contacts, relationships, networks, agreements and activities* outside the household" (his emphasis).

Networking contributes to the social construction of a shared reality which underpins collective organising and is mediated through a "complex web of relationships" (Parikh, 1999). It creates an 'enacted' environment (cf. Weick, 1979; Smircich and Stubbert, 1985) in which a range of possibilities is present to be evoked according to necessity or whim. The importance of relationship processes is well-known within the professional field and I make no claims to have invented or discovered networking. It has been suggested that at least half the work in organisations is done through networks which are invisible to management (Stephenson, 1998). My contribution has been to demonstrate the extent to which this layer of intervention and 'knowledge capital' relies on and is enhanced by constant, but largely unacknowledged networking, often undertaken by women within families, work situations and the wider community. In particular it has illustrated how much of this takes place through informal interactions involving socio-emotional perceptions (Zabrowitz, 1990). Face-to-face interaction is a major component of networking because it allows the 'hidden dimension' (Hall, 1966) of non-verbal communication to function: managing first impressions, exerting subtle forms of influence, interpreting responses and regulating the pace and level of interaction (Patterson, 1991). My research has examined a sample of the micro-practices of networking within community development, revealing it to be skilled, strategic *and* serendipitous. The theoretical model developed in the course of the study envisages community as a complex system in which inter-locking and iterative connections are manifest in a political economy of personal relationships, local customs, organisational structures and cultural institutions based on trust and respect. The model acknowledges the significance of schisms and power relations within such systems, including factors relating to ethnicity, class and other dimensions of oppression. Ignorance, prejudice and discrimination create barriers to understanding, mutuality and social inclusion that community workers can help people to overcome or dismantle by establishing and maintaining the 'bridges' and arenas for shared communication and co-operation. These increase in strength and value the more they are used (Greenhalgh and Worpole, 1997) and although this thesis has concentrated on networking as a 'quasi-neutral' set of techniques, networking offers an effective tool for honouring diversity, promoting equality and managing the tensions which arise from cultural differences. Community development is about creating a world of dynamic equilibrium based on social processes and evanescent structures, which exhibit resilience rather than stability (Wheatley, 1992).

I have put forward a model of the 'well-connected community' and the idea of 'meta-networking' as a core function of community development practice. This is

fundamentally about nurturing, extending and activating informal social, political and professional networks using personal links and organisational development to hold the 'community system' at the 'edge of chaos'. The community worker as meta-networker has an inevitably Machiavellian approach and must be both strategic and opportunistic. They need to maintain a balance between the formal and informal aspects of the community infra-structure, operating within a complex accountability matrix in a context whose salient features include both political and psychological processes. If organisation represents the fusion, but not ossification, of values and power (Clegg, 1994:168), then networking is the means for putting into practice a professional commitment to community empowerment. Community development is not simply about networking practice, in the sense of skills and strategy. At its 'moral heart' lie values and commitments which are enshrined in the processes and relationships (Dutta, pers. comm.) that prevent communities from unraveling or becoming disconnected from the rest of society (K.Harris, 1999).

Whether or not the use of complexity theory to develop the notion of 'community' at the 'edge of chaos' constitutes a new paradigm for community development or simply a new perspective remains to be seen. My attempts to present the 'meta-networking' model of community development (through conference presentations, workshops and articles) have been well-received by practitioners. Further evidence will be needed to convince funders, managers and politicians of the value of networking activities, though there is increasing recognition of social networks and informal processes within policy guidelines and the plethora of new 'community' initiatives currently emanating from the Downing Street thinktanks (West, 1999). Since embarking on the inquiry I have come across earlier writers making the links between networks and community development. Milofsky (1988a:7) wrote "community development requires network-building" and Bell's evaluation report refers to networks as "the crucial steps which take community work on the road to community development" (1992:32). Bell emphasises the need for unforced opportunities for people to meet and work together, building mutual recognition and confidence. He also sees community networks as creating "a new stratum in the power structure which offers the possibility for long-term and important change." Perhaps my contribution represents a re-discovery of the significance of networking, rather than an invention. In its use of complexity theory, the thesis does, however, provide a original explanation of *why* networks form the basis for an optimally functioning social system, characterised by mildly 'chaotic' interactions leading to the evolution of collective forms of organising which adapt or die in response to changes in their operating environment.

The circuits of power approach which underpins the 'well-connected community' model, includes links to powerful external bodies so that discourses and decisions can be negotiated in ways that empower rather than co-opt community representatives. O'Riordan calls this a process of revelation, such that

> "when consensus has been reached, initial presuppositions will have altered, and insurmountable policy blockages or inappropriate evaluation procedures, will have been exposed and addressed. This is a precondition of empowerment." (1998:111)

For Taylor (1998) networks "re-connect people and power" and provide an important part of a community's capacity to secure "viable and sustainable" regeneration strategies. By opening up experiences of oppression, exploitation and injustice to shared scrutiny, community networks encourage mutual responsibility and a solidarity which "recognises that people are not just individuals, that there is such a thing as society" (Jacobs, 1995b:21).

Networking opens up pathways across the social and political landscape, exploiting personal habits, local conventions and institutional power to improve the quality of life for individuals and create mechanisms for collective empowerment. Complexity theory suggests that a community poised at the 'edge of chaos' is able to survive in 'turbulent times' because it adapts and innovates organisational forms to fit the environmental conditions. In their analysis of post-socialist transformation in eastern Europe Grabher and Stark write that "change, even fundamental change, of the social world is not the passage from one order to another, but re-arrangements in the patterns of how multiple orders are woven" (1997:36). The 'well-connected community' model can be seen as an aspect of Grabher and Stark's "complex ecology of social logics", that captures the essential organic dynamism of multiple, reiterative interactions, rendering 'community' such a vital and enduring dimension of human life.

What is not yet clear is how we could tell whether a given social system was operating at the 'edge of chaos'. Derricourt and Dale (1994) suggest a 'matrix' form of evaluation which could be used to track changing agendas and alliances in an "unpredictable arena" of shifting loyalties and identities. Perhaps at some future date it may be possible to construct computer programmes similar to the 'cell automata' models used in the early development of complexity theory (Veblen and von Neumann, 1956) which

could be used to model and test proposed interventions using questionnaire surveys and mapping exercises to monitor changes in relationships and configurations. The challenge of monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of networks is only beginning to be addressed (Wilson and Skinner, forthcoming).

The outcomes of community development are about promoting and managing progressive change in the configurations of social or organisational relationships. If, as I am suggesting, the professional intervention is about meta-networking, then we need to find ways of evaluating community development in terms of improvements to inter-personal and inter-organisational links within wider networks. This involves looking at the intricacy and effectiveness of the individual relationships (Parikh, 1999) as well as levels of diversity and 'connected-ness' across the whole web, including interactions with the 'outside' world (Mulgan, 1997). There are ethical and emotional dimensions to this work.

One approach might be to think of community as a micro-version of civil society, and therefore consider notions around 'social citizenship' (Seligman, 1992): the extent to which a community is able to reconcile individual interests with the common good through the development of a 'reflexive imagination' and local conventions (Tester, 1992). Another possibility is to extend the metaphor of community as a communal 'brain' (cf. Morgan, 1986:ch.4). In the same way as 'mind' can be thought of as what the brain does (Rose, 1998), with consciousness as the emergent property of interactions amongst the neural networks, so might 'community' be deemed the emergent property of social networks operating at the 'edge of chaos' (Capra, 1996). As Wilson (1998:106) observes "the brain is a machine assembled not to understand itself, but to survive...The brain's true meaning is hidden in its microscopic detail. Its fluffy mass is an intricately wired system." By analogy the effectiveness of a community might be assessed through its capacity to respond creatively to change and ambiguity (cf. James, 1999). "The test of a first-rate intelligence", wrote F. Scott Fitzgerald, "is the ability to hold two opposed ideas in mind at the same time and still retain the ability to function." (cited in Morgan, 1989). In the same way a fully 'developed' community should be able to solve problems through reasoning and experimentation rather than simple trial and error. It should also be able to accommodate multiple interpretations without disintegrating into confusion or fragmentation (Morgan, 1989). The intelligent community will demonstrate insight and imagination, responding to local or external perturbations and accommodating internal diversity. It will include a series of feedback loops which render it capable of learning from experience and develop strategies for

dealing with unusual situations and eventualities (Capra, 1996). Models of artificial intelligence compare the changes in neural connections which take place during learning to that of annealing, whereby the systematic application of heat or pressure alters the molecular structure of certain chemical substances (Bechtel and Abrahamsen, 1991). In particular, liquid crystals represent a fourth state of matter, between liquid and solid, in which interactions between molecules are neither rigid nor chaotic. The 'well-connected community' exhibits similar propensities, with a preference for alignment and order, but able to adapt 'plastically' to disturbances in the environment.

Emotions, evoked through a mismatch between expectations and reality, are a powerful basis for learning and motivation. As George Eliot observed more than a century ago, human reasoning includes 'emotional intellect', now popularised as 'emotional intelligence' or literacy (Goleman, 1998) and beginning to find its way into management thinking (Vince and Broussine, 1996; Nicholson, 2000). The expressive dimension of interactions must be acknowledged, harnessed and appraised through the lifecycles of community groups and voluntary organisations (Mason, 1996; Hoggett and Miller, 2000). Feelings of loyalty, admiration, love even, are often the driving force for many community and voluntary activities, but so too are the less positive emotions of pity, resentment, anger and fear, observed in the 'moral panics' (S.Cohen, 1972) which give rise to vigilante groups or campaigns against local threats, such as witnessed in the summer of 2000 in relation to suspected pædophiles. Some social networks are more effective at promoting mutual support and respect than others (Baron et al, 1992), which is why evaluation also needs to consider the micro-processes of community interactions, those exchanges and sentiments which determine the 'feel' of a good community. Justice and compassion are the 'grander' aspects of an ethical community, but they need to be reflected in and constituted from the small things: the gestures and glances which express care and fairness. It is these that are the essence of a committed mutuality.

Doyal and Gough (1991) identify two basic human needs - survival and autonomy. The evidence from this study and from everyday experience is that networking and networks are excellent means of achieving both. Can a 'good' network be the same as an effective one? The answer depends very much on whose perspective. The closed, self-promoting networks of the Mafia or freemasons could be said to operate extremely effectively for their own members, but are damaging for society as a whole. They appear to be increasingly ineffective in the modern world, due perhaps to changes in

civic life, public decision-making procedures and recruitment procedures which increasingly are expected to reflect the ethical values which form the basis for many social networks and voluntary organisations (Paton, 1992). Community development must incorporate core operating principles of transparency, reciprocity and equality to ensure that it facilitates networking which is accessible, equitable and sustainable. In his most recent consideration of the functioning and characteristics of complex systems, Kauffman (2001) recognises that some kind of intervention is necessary to create 'order from chaos'. This may involve a catalytic presence in the system or a sustained influx of energy (or both). Information is insufficient to create and maintain organisational forms. In some circumstances, the motivation and connections supplied by community workers are crucial to helping the 'well-connected community' to adapt to changing conditions in its organisational and political environment.

RESEARCH EVALUATION

Melucci has argued for a new ethics and politics in research, describing it as "a form of social action which introduces its own outcomes into the social field. In complex societies, research becomes a process of meta-communication, a self-reflective learning process" (1996:397). In many respects the approach described in this dissertation has unwittingly adopted this stance. It has been explicitly subjective and engaged, and this may have resulted in an over-representation of my perspectives within both the anecdotal and empirical data (Stevens, 1993). This bias is reproduced in the Panel members' evidence, since these also tended to be networking enthusiasts keen to demonstrate the value and effectiveness of their own networking. I embarked on the research journey with a purpose of demonstrating the value of networking practices to community development. My position incorporated a faith in 'community' in its own right and I shared this commitment with the participants in both studies. New paradigm approaches and feminist critiques of positivist and elitist research encouraged me to see the process as "collaborative, experiential, reflexive and action-oriented" (Reason and Rowan, 1981a:xx; Stanley and Wise, 1990).

Panelists found the process useful and affirming. It was experienced as participative, though onerous at times, and helped them to identify the processes and benefits of networking within their own work. This has been echoed in feedback on the workshops I have run in the past two years at various conferences. People seem particularly interested in the informal, inter-personal interactions and found it interesting to recognise how these aspects of their practice support the more visible goals. They also

embraced the notion of 'community' as operating on the 'edge of chaos', as this seemed to justify the more serendipitous aspects of community development work. I feel that I was able to provide an interactive learning process which was empowering for participants (Holland and Ramazanoglu, 1994) and did not exploit their practice or commitment (cf. Papadakis, 1993). There are issues around 'moral ownership' of professional experience used in reflective practice (Hargreaves, 1997), but I was able to protect people's confidentiality around specific incidents, and in any case was very transparent in my approach to how the material would be used and for what purposes. In keeping with Stanley's (1990) assertion that social science involves social interaction, it is perhaps significant that I am still in touch with 10 members of the original Panel and that they continue to provide me with ideas and material for the thesis.

However, my sample was small and did not include explicit identity-based perspectives on community development, for example in relation to informal networks, access to support, exclusion, overload, roles and accountability. It would have been useful to hear the experiences of Black, Disabled and other marginalised workers who themselves experience isolation and discrimination within the community development field, and who use networking to survive as practitioners (cf. Qaiyoom, 1992; 1990 Trust, 1993; Shah, 1993; Scott, 1994; Shukra, 1995; Farrar, 1996; Miller and Gowan, 1998; Balcha, 2000). Although my own gender and 'race' will have had some impact on the research process (Phoenix, 1994), nevertheless I feel that the combined experiences of the Panel produced a rich store of anecdotes and reflection which were explored with sufficient academic rigour to produce useful knowledge and understanding (Guba and Lincoln, 1989). The validity of the findings and conclusion derive from a coherence between propositional and experiential knowledge (Reason and Rowan, 1981b) and the apparent credibility of the 'well-connected community' model amongst fieldwork practitioners and academics (Leininger, 1994:105). The model is plausible. As 'un-alienated knowledge' it makes sense to both the 'consumers' and 'producers' of the research (Stanley, 1990:10). It fits with what is known already about how communities operate and current guidelines on effective strategies for community development. It also appears to be transferable across different settings as evident from the unsolicited encouragement I have received from community workers and researchers in Tasmania, Israel, Canada, Slovakia, Poland, the Netherlands, Scotland and Malaysia, as well as the UK (see Appendix X).

The choice of qualitative methods has proved an appropriate way of elucidating the more intangible aspects of networking. The case study of the Festival Against Racism provided an illuminating route into the issues around informal networking, particularly in relation to power, identity, informality and accountability. It may have suffered from being overly focused on my personal practice, but served its purpose as an exploratory device, charting the main themes and drawing out key issues to be pursued with the panel of practitioners. The limited triangulation provided by the Study design lends an epistemological validity in that theory developed here has been generated and tested against a range of experience using different tools of investigation. In addition to being exposed to informant review mechanisms, the ideas proved their validity by "being grounded in criteria of sound practice" in that they were regularly submitted to critical scrutiny through my teaching sessions at the University and practitioner workshops (Heron, 1996:158).

Obviously the scope of this inquiry has been limited by resource and time constraints. Its findings may be somewhat distorted by my experience of, and enthusiasm for, networking, but as Lynn notes, non-positivist research demands the "inseparability of the knower and the known, the subject and the object" (1996:147). I acknowledge my 'presence' in the inquiry, including the data, the literature review and the policy context. I have tried to maintain my involvement as a 'wholly authentic person' throughout all stages of the research project (Reason and Rowan, 1981a). I was not a neutral participant in the exercise, and have been open about my purpose and values in conducting the inquiry (cf. Ingamells, 1996). My approach departed from a pure grounded theory approach in adopting an explicit perspective and this may have affected (possibly even obscured) alternative interpretations of the evidence (Hammersley, 1995). Nevertheless I feel that the research has been worthwhile and provides a foundation for continuing inquiry and theory development. In particular, future lines of research could usefully link notions of social capital with the quality of relationships and connectivity of community networks. There is already an emerging concept of 'network capital' propounded by the Toronto school of network analysis (Sik and Wellman, 1999; Wellman, 2000), and the New Economics Foundation is also beginning to explore this approach to evaluating regeneration programmes (Lingayah, 2001; Sommer, pers.comm).

It would be useful to develop further understanding of the evolutionary cycle of informal groups and networks, perhaps looking at the relationship between organisational size, form and purpose. Morgan (1990:162) suggests that networks are manageable only up

to the limits of personal engagement and surveillance, and I have accumulated ample anecdotal and published evidence that networks function best at around 35-40 members, perhaps reflecting a trade-off between the costs of maintaining this number of links, and the benefits of their diverse contributions (cf. McPherson, 1983 and 1988). Computer simulations of networked systems also indicate that excessive connectivity and excessive reaction speed can be a problem (Kauffman, 1993), reducing the adaptability of the whole system (Mulgan, 1997:186). This should sound a note of warning to those who are over enthusiastic in embracing information technology as a base for community organising. It also suggests that within community development, networking between individuals has to be tempered by some degree of formal structure, requiring organisational development, to avoid tipping a system into chaos. A piece of action research linking specific training in networking for community workers and activists to local outcomes would be fruitful, and more work is needed around the evaluation of meta-networking approaches to community development. This could usefully draw together current thinking across the disciplines of urban design, public health, adult education and social inclusion.

THE POWER OF NETWORKING

In many respects the starting point for this inquiry was a recognition that 'things' happened as a result of informal interactions even though these often failed to register in formal auditing, monitoring and evaluation procedures (cf. Mayo, 1997b). Social relations and networks represent intangible resources in people's lives which can either be nurtured or allowed to wither through neglect. Networking ensures that personal and social capital are generated and maintained within communities, often through the inter-personal skills and unpaid efforts of women, either as volunteer community members, or in their professional capacities. Community workers (male and female) demonstrate a particular responsibility for the 'weak ties' that span socio-psychological boundaries, thus keeping open the channels of communication within and between diverse communities. The study has illustrated some of the techniques community workers use to in their networking as a tool for managing diversity, promoting integration and building "alliance across difference" (Mayo, 2000).

I felt that the drive for short-term projects and performance-specific contracts within regeneration schemes and funding programmes meant that a major aspect of community development practice was being overlooked. Like Schuler (1996), I feared that such disconnection would lead to the disintegration and eventual dissolution of social forms of

association and community. In a world characterised by uncertainty and diversity, networking approaches enable people to make links across society, to share resources and learn from each other, without the costs and constraints of formal organisational structures. Empowerment is a collective process, achieved through compassion, communication and connections. I hope I have been able to demonstrate that community development uses networking to develop 'community' and to promote 'strength through diversity'.

Afterword

"The end of all our exploring

Will be to arrive where we started

And know the place for the first time"

From the Four Quartets (Little Gidding) – T.S.Eliot (1944)

The naturalist John Muir once wrote "when we try to pick out anything by itself, we find it hitched to everything else in the universe" and this has certainly been my experience in compiling evidence for this thesis. Over the past seven years my awareness and understanding of how networks operate in my own life, as well in professional practice, has developed immensely. I have become increasingly confident in asserting, using (or avoiding) a networking role in a variety of situations, and on returning to the community development field have put my learning into practice.

I deliberately spent my first eighteen months in a new post with the Community Development Foundation 'networking' in very strategic (and occasionally serendipitous) ways to explore my new working environment and establish good links for the future. I was conscious of seeking face-to-face meetings (often in informal settings) to lay a foundation of connections and relationships. Many of these involved travelling to visit someone on their 'home' base, which was time consuming but a key investment. Other opportunities arose at conferences and seminars where I made a point of arriving early and leaving late, of scanning the participants lists to identify the 'useful' contacts whom I would then approach. As a consequence, I have developed both a map of what I knew would be a complex and dynamic organisational landscape and a set of supportive and knowledgeable people, including 'critical friends' who I can turn to for advice and occasional help. I include 'informal networking' as a category in my monthly work reports and am assiduous in keeping records of contacts and conversations. I have noticed that the 'meta-networking' function continues in my new role, albeit on an England-wide basis rather than simply across a city or neighbourhood. It appears to be valued by colleagues as well as proving very useful for my own purposes.

The focus of the investigation has remained with community development practice, despite the temptations to explore other academic disciplines. Mirroring Fook's research into radical social work, this has involved an intellectual struggle which has proved both "emotional and existential" (1996b:130). My research journal reveals how

embedded I was in the whole process of inquiry and how the theories emerging from the inquiry have impacted on the community development field. It is impossible to disentangle my role as a researcher from my contributions to recent changes in policy and practice. Two examples will suffice to illustrate this. Firstly, the final report of the SEU's working group on Community Self-help opens by stating that "networks which link local residents to each other are crucial to the effective functioning of communities and thus of society at large" (PAT 9, 1999). Secondly, it is no coincidence that the forthcoming National Strategic Framework on community development to be launched by the Standing Conference for Community Development this May (SCCD, 2001) contains a whole section on 'networking and strategic support', nor that I was asked to draft this. There is increasing acknowledgement of the potential 'added value' offered by community development practitioners in terms of providing access to the 'hard to reach' populations, in facilitating partnership working and building capacity at the interface of different sectors. The rôle of boundary-spanners, mediators, outreach workers and informal educators is becoming increasingly recognised, though there is still some way to go in identifying these as core expertise. I am satisfied that (given the inevitable constraints of a part-time Ph.D) the inquiry has achieved its purpose of adding relevant knowledge to our understanding of community development practice whilst preserving the original values.

Figure 11. Constructing knowledge at the 'edge of chaos' – the view from my desk !

Reason (1988c:227) refers to this kind of inquiry as creating "complex and at times chaotic webs of action and reflection, reason and emotion, individuality and collectivity" and this has certainly been my experience over the past few years. The challenge of 'writing-up' the thesis has been an exhausting process of trying to draw 'order out of chaos' (cf. Prigogine and Stenger, 1984) but as Heron and Reason recognised "accepting chaos facilitates the emergence of order...new ideas may be found by allowing, celebrating and encouraging it, going through the stages of confusion which the inquiry generates" (1981:50). I strove to make sense of a complex system of inter-connected ideas, knowledge and experience whilst remaining focused on a practice which is "contextual, holistic, complex, unpredictable and changing" (Fook, 1996c).

There have been periods when the task seemed overwhelming, even impossible, but my encounter with complexity theory somewhat paradoxically helped make sense of the self-reflexive and iterative processes I needed to go through in order for a structured thesis eventually to emerge. It is difficult to 'let go' of the project. I feel I am still learning and still developing my ideas, but I need to tidy up, resuscitate my own neglected social networks and move on.

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Appendix A

Proposal for Programme of Extended Study and Research towards a Ph.D. at the School of Advanced Urban Studies, Bristol University.

The context

The idea of networks and networking has become increasingly recognised in community work (and other fields) as a legitimate and effective form of organisation and communication. As a community development practitioner with many years experience in the voluntary sector, I am interested in exploring why the concept of networking has recently become so prevalent and to identify benefits and problems for community work practice.

I intend to investigate networks as associational means of organising, which are ranged along a continuum from informal relationship 'webs of communication' to formally constituted structures. In particular, I am interested in the values, organisational features, processes, skills and outcomes which characterise effective networking in community work.

Although much of the research would proceed from an investigation of practice, it would be supported through ideas and theoretical models drawn from a number of fields including social anthropology, organisational theory, cybernetics (communication systems), cognitive and social psychology, social and political sciences and community work theory.

A key purpose of the research would be to validate the processes and value of networks and networking for community development. In addition, I would hope to identify how networking can be improved as an effective and essential method of community work. This would all be underpinned by a strong commitment to exploring issues around oppression and developing anti-discriminatory strategies.

Research Questions

- What are the qualities which characterise "effective" networks?
- What are the skills and personal qualities which underpin good networking ?
- What are networks good for, and how do they compare with other forms of organising and communicating ?
- How open and "democratic" are networks ? How are networks different at different levels of organisation (local, national, international, identity-based, etc.) ?
- What values underpin the operation of networks ? What are the contradictions in these ?
- What relevance do networks have for social policy, especially in the fields of community development and community care ?

Methodology

I would adopt a "grounded research" approach, using a variety of qualitative methods, which might include participant observation, structured interviewing, surveys, in depth case studies, mapping exercises and practitioner "networking journals/diaries".

Appendix B

Festival Against Racism Flyer

April 15th 1994

Your organisation is warmly invited to take part in Bristol's first Festival Against Racism. As you can see from the information on the other side of this sheet, this is taking place across Bristol for the whole of September. All Bristol-based organisations which have a commitment to developing anti-racist work are welcome to contribute by organising or participating in some kind of event during this month. This could include a special event, an event that you already have planned or it might be a regular activity which could be focused around the themes of the festival - equality, diversity, justice and solidarity. Although there is some support available from the organising group, each event should be self-financing and arranged by your organisation. The Festival committee, which is made up entirely of volunteers, undertakes responsibility for overall co-ordination and publicity, but is not in a position to provide help with specific events.

The Festival is being promoted by the Bristol Anti-Racist Alliance and has recently received formal endorsement from the Avon Race Equality Forum. *We are optimistic that support will also be forthcoming from the City Council and other major city-wide organisations involved in anti-racist work. We are expecting that this will be confirmed very soon.*

Many individuals and community organisations have expressed a strong interest in this project, including the Asian Women's Network, Easton Community Association, the Malcolm X Centre, Bristol Trades Council, Anti-Apartheid Movement, Avon County Council Race Equality Team, the Positive Action Consortium, the Sikh Resource Centre, BREAD Youth Education project, SARI, Bristol City Football Club and Fulford Family Centre in Hartcliffe. Various events are planned which will provide people in Bristol with opportunities to take a stance against racism and to celebrate the multi-racial nature of our city.

We would be very interested in your organisation arranging an event (workshop, cultural event, open day, exhibition, public meeting or whatever) in September, which we would then publicise as part of a wider Festival programme. We are hoping to attract considerable media coverage, so this could also be an opportunity for your group to publicise its own activities and policies. If you do decide to participate in the Festival, it would be helpful to receive details of your event by the end of June. ***It would also be helpful if you could send a short letter expressing your support for the Festival as this will assist us in attracting funding and gifts in kind.***

I, or a colleague from the co-ordinating group, would be very happy to attend a meeting of your group or management committee to discuss the plans for the Festival in more detail. Please contact me on 510207 (h) or at the address below. I look forward to hearing from you in the near future.

With best wishes,

Alison Gilchrist (Hon. Festival Co-ordinator)

Appendix C

List of Festival events (taken from Evaluation report)

The Festival itself lasted from August 21st till the middle of October, with the main programme of events concentrated throughout September. There were activities arranged on nearly every day of the month, with something organised in most areas of the city. Over 100 organisations took part and over 100 different events were publicised in the programme. We know of others that happened but did not appear in the Festival publicity either because they were organised too late for our deadline or they were non-public occasions.

Events and Activities

The events that were organised included the following:

* *Exhibitions*: on anti-Irish racism; on the Travellers; on the elections in South Africa; on the slave trade; on the Anglo-Jewish community; on the situation in Angola; on contemporary religions in Bristol; and on the effects of racism in people's lives; the work of SARI (Support Against Racist Incidents); the work of social services to provide support for Black and minority ethnic people across the city; on the anti-racist work of South Bristol Community Education Service;

* *Social, arts and cultural activities*: evening of Bengali songs and poetry; children's disco at St.Werburgh's; youth rave against racism at Totterdown YMCA; African and Caribbean music festival; reggae evening at Malcolm X Centre organised by SARC; LaBoum World Music Club; Melv's lunch club; Kingswood Asian Women's group cookery demonstration; St.Mark's Road street party; Democratic Left social and discussion evening; the Plough's performing arts evening; poetry and literature readings at Waterstones bookshop; poets against racism evening; ceilidh in Southmead; Bangladesh women's group afternoon of activities; Cuban film evening; performing arts festival at Trinity Community Centre; Labi Siffre in concert; African dance and drumming workshop in Hartcliffe; benefit gig for Bristol Area friends, Families Travellers' Support group; Pyramid Black film festival at the Watershed; poetry workshop for Black poets organised by Leo's Enterprises; Black poets' evening at St.George School;

* *Educational work with children and young people:* activities programme and fun day at St.Paul's adventure playground; fun day by St.Pauls and Easton Daycare project; launch of European passport against Racism and its use in at least one school and several youth clubs; video blasts showing films about the situation in southern Africa and teachers' evening at the SARC; activities around anti-racism by local Woodcraft Folk groups across the city; Raj Vidya Vihar Saturday School session on "identity" and cultural awareness; Easton girls' exchange visit to Hannover; Kingswood youth centres organised month-long programme of social education activities around anti-racism; Hareclive Youth Centre use of BREAD educational pack Equalizer 2 to explore issues around racism; Eagle House Youth centre put on racism awareness week; south Bristol youth centres involved in drama workshops; Heartstone project working in schools on racism and bullying;

* *Political debates and public meetings:* ARA/Liberty meeting on the case for legislation on racially motivated crimes; Bristol Marxist Forum debate on how to build the anti-racist movement; ARA/Refugee Action meeting at Bangladesh House on the nationality and immigration laws; UNISON gay and lesbian group meeting on homophobia and fascism; CND/World Development Movement meeting to plan for Peace Festival in 1995; lectures on the origins of the slave trade and Bristol's

involvement in this and early anti-semitic activity; Oxfam meeting on the situation in Rwanda; discussion meeting on anti-Irish racism; NUS meeting at UWE on racial violence and harassment;

* *Conferences and Open Days:* on Development Education and Young People; on women working together on anti-racism; multi-cultural approaches to play; on the current situation in southern Africa;

* *Training workshops and meetings*: Anti-racism workshops organised for community workers and activists in Hillfields, Withywood, Bedminster and Knowle West; Transport and General Workers' Union workshop on racism in the workplace; SW TUC workshops on tackling racial discrimination in employment; SARI talk to Bedminster Forum; Bristol One Parent Project Open Afternoon;

* *Campaigning activities:* launch of the Friends, Families and Travellers' support group; work by the Communities Organised for a Greater bristol around homelessness; Kingswood Borough Council initiative on racial harassment;

* *Sports*: West Indian Cricket Club exhibition match; women's football tournament for Nicaragua;

* *Celebrations and Ceremonies:* Pakistan Independence Day; Trinidad and Tobago Independence Day dance; social to mark thirty years campaigning by Bristol Anti-Apartheid Movement for freedom and democracy in South Africa; Nigerian Independence Day celebration dance; handover of Bristol Churches Housing Association development for refugees;

* *Religious activities:* services for racial justice and healing at several Bristol churches co-ordinated by Keyboard Project; Satya Sai Baba open day and exhibition; introduction to Zen Buddhism.

Appendix D

Letter to interviewees

34, Heron Road,
Easton,
Bristol,
BS5 0LU.

Tel: 951 0207

November 24th 1995

Dear XXXX,

Re: Festival Against Racism 1994

As you are aware, I am currently doing some research into the use of networking in relation to community development. The process of organising last year's Festival made me increasingly conscious of how important informal and formal contacts were for developing the concept of the Festival and then putting this into action.

As part of my research, I have used the Festival as a case study to explore questions around networking as a method of organisation. I have been particularly interested in issues of power, accountability and 'values', and how these relate to notions of 'community' and 'civil society'.

I have spent the summer reading around these concerns and thinking about my own role in co-ordinating the September 1994 event. This has resulted in two conference papers, which I would like to write-up for publication. There is, however, a danger in just examining my own practice, as it is impossible to avoid a subjective bias. I would like the next stage of my research to include the thoughts and reflections of other people who contributed in significant ways to organising the Festival.

I am therefore planning to discuss with a group of key people how your experience of being involved in helping to organise last year's Festival relates to some of the ideas I am developing for my research project. I would like to meet with each of you individually first to explore your ideas around networking and the Festival. Enclosed is a list of the kinds of questions I will be asking. I hope that from these conversations themes and questions will emerge which can be followed up in a group discussion. The individual conversations would probably take about an hour each and the discussion group about two hours. I would like to tape record both sets of interviews with your permission.

I shall 'phone you in the next few days to find some dates which are convenient for all of us. It might be a nice idea to meet at my house in the early evening for the group discussion, followed by a meal. I also need to arrange a time for an initial 'interview'. I hope very much that you are still interested in taking part in this aspect of my research and look forward to some interesting conversations.

Best wishes,

Appendix E

Preliminary ideas for topics for semi-structured interviews with FAR organisers

Your role

How did you first get involved in the idea of the Festival ?

What were your initial contributions ?

How do you feel you contributed overall ?

What contacts did you bring with you ?

The co-ordination of the Festival

Who were the most significant individuals and organisation involved ?

Were there people who should or could have been involved who weren't ?

What reasons would you give to explain who did and who didn't get involved ?

Decision-making about the Festival ?

How were decisions made ?

Did you feel that you were personally able to influence how different aspects of the Festival were organised ? How ?

Do you think the organisations who sponsored the Festival or who organised different events wanted to have more 'say' ? How could this have been achieved ?

How were conflicts and disagreements dealt with ?

General questions

Why did this method of organisation seem to work ?

What were the benefits ?

What were the problems ?

What do you think held the Festival together ?

One year later, what would you say are the main outcomes ?

Appendix F

Letter and topic guide for FAR group discussion

34, Heron Road,
Easton,
Bristol
BS5 0LU

Tel: 951 0207

April 24th 1996

Dear XXX

Re: Festival Against Racism - Networking Research

I have now completed the individual interviews with people involved in different aspects of organising the 1994 Festival. I enclose a copy of the transcript of your interview and one of the papers I wrote for a conference presentation last autumn. I would be grateful if you could read through both of these and let me have any comments. I hope that this will facilitate the debate when we meet as a group.

I hope very much that you will be able to come to the group discussion. It will be held at my house, on **Tuesday, 21st May**, starting at 7.30pm. The discussion itself will probably take about one and a half hours, after which there will be a meal. Again, I will be recording the conversation.

I am interested in your reactions to my account and analysis of the Festival. What strikes you as important about what I am saying ? What do you disagree with ? The individual interviews have thrown up some interesting new ideas, which I would like to explore with you in greater depth.

In particular, I want to focus on the following questions:

How were informal networks used for encouraging participation, for decision-making, for accessing resources and for support ?

What was the basis for these informal networks ?

How did the Festival use and strengthen the connections between individuals and organisation ? and

What are the advantages and disadvantages of informal methods of organising ?

If you are unable to come on the 21st, but have further ideas you would like to contribute, please let me know. I shall be ringing you in the next few days to see whether you will be coming. I hope very much that the date is convenient and that you will enjoy the discussion.

Best wishes,

Appendix G

Proposed study of networking by community workers

Purpose: To investigate how and why networking is used by community workers as a methods of organisation and communication.

Key concepts and themes:

A. **Networking for empowerment, participation and equality (inclusion ?)** - the significance of values and principles of 'good practice'.

B. **The nature of links in networks and opportunities for contacts and connections to be made** - power dynamics, pragmatic factors, affinities and affiliations, purpose, processes, reciprocity

C. **The skills, strategies, circumstances and personal attributes of the community worker which enhances their capacity to network effectively at an informal level** - identity (gender, age, culture, etc.), reputation, common values and interests, inter-personal communication and relationship-building, job description and agency policy, tactics for establishing and maintaining links.

D. **The professional intervention of the community worker which uses networks to enable people to organise collectively through more formally constituted bodies** - putting people in touch with one another, identifying or creating common ground, crystallisation around a joint purpose, developing appropriate organisational vehicle for pursuing this, helping groups to move through different stages of evolution, and to dissolve if necessary.

E. **Problems, dilemmas and limitations of this approach** - managing informality and uncertainty, issues around accountability and organisational capacity, reproducing social inequalities and exclusion, distortions and blockages within information channels, over-reliance on key individuals rather than organisational roles, sustaining activities.

F. **Comparison with alternative methods of community development** - what might these be ? what are the benefits of using informal networks ? how can outcomes be evaluated anyway ? what are the circumstances which favour or require different methods of organising ?

Appendix H

SCCD article letter requesting volunteers for Panel

Developing Strength through Diversity

Some readers of SCCD News will remember that I am undertaking some research into how networking and networks are used in community development. I worked for 10 years as a neighbourhood community worker and I am interested in how networking can be used as a tool for empowerment and challenging inequalities. The results of the research will be written up for my Ph.D. thesis, and will also, I hope, contribute to the development of 'good practice' and a clearer understanding of our professional role by funders and managers.

The first part of my project was a case study of the 1994 Bristol Festival Against Racism, looking at how this event was co-ordinated largely through informal connections and chance encounters. Interviews with some of the key people revealed some interesting features of networks, such as the importance of shared values and trust in allowing relationships (of whatever sort) to be used as 'shortcuts' in encouraging people to take part and in gaining access to resources. It also allowed me to explore some important issues around power and accountability in semi-structured organisations, such as community groups or local political movements.

The next stage of my research will focus on the process of community work. I want to find out how and why community workers use networking in their practice, with a particular emphasis on informal and unplanned contacts. What do community workers actually **do** to establish and maintain their networks ? How do they make use of them in their work ? Why are networks seen as an appropriate method of organising ? Are they effective ? What are the problems associated with informal networking ?

In order to investigate these questions I will be working with a panel of about 15 current practitioners over the next year. I am looking for volunteers who are willing to contribute their experience and ideas to this research project. It will involve (i) completing a questionnaire about yourself, your work and your networks; (ii) keeping a 'practice journal' for a month (noting any network-type exchanges which occur during this period), followed by (iii) an individual interview of about 2 hours. If there is time I would also like to organise group discussions.

I am aiming for a representative sample of community workers across Britain and Northern Ireland, employed by local, regional and national organisations. The panel will also include community workers bringing a range of perspectives and life experiences around disability, gender, class, 'race', age and sexual identity.

If you are interested in taking part in this study and are able to contribute about 20 hours of your time over the next year, please send the form enclosed with this issue of SCCD News to me at my home address. If you would like to talk to me about any aspect of the research, you can phone me on 0117 951 0207 or at work on 0117 965 5384 (ext.4362).

Alison Gilchrist

Appendix I

Invitations to participate for specifically targeted individuals

January 16th 1997

Dear

Re: Community Development and Networking

You may be aware that I am undertaking some research looking at how community workers develop and use formal and informal contacts in the course of their practice. I am looking for volunteers to assist me in the next stage of my investigation and was wondering whether you might be interested in taking part.

My approach will be based on collaborative inquiry and I am seeking to recruit approximately 15 current practitioners who are willing to contribute their experience and ideas to the research project. It will involve (i) completing a questionnaire about yourself, your work and your networks; (ii) keeping a 'practice journal' for a month (noting any network-type exchanges which occur during this period), followed by (iii) an individual interview of about 2 hours. If there is time I would also like to organise group discussions. I estimate that it would require about 20 hours of your time over the next 12 months.

I am looking at the strategies and skills that community workers employ to initiate, maintain and utilise connections and relationships between themselves, organisations and key individuals in order to promote community development. I am particularly interested in issues around trust, empowerment, accountability and 'equality of connection' in relation to networks. I will consider both the benefits and limitations of networking, and how these relate to the identities and actual practice of community workers in a variety of settings.

What do community workers actually **do** to establish and maintain their networks ? How do they make use of them in their work ? Why are networks seen as an appropriate method of organising ? Are they effective ? What problems can arise ?

The results of the research will be written up for my Ph.D. thesis. It will also contribute to the development of 'good practice' and a clearer understanding of our professional role by funders and managers.

I am aiming for a representative sample of community workers across Britain and Northern Ireland, employed by local, regional and national organisations. The panel will include people who bring a range of perspectives and life experiences around disability, gender, class, ethnicity, age and sexual identity.

If you are interested in being a member of this panel, please complete and return the form enclosed as soon as possible. If you would like to talk to me about any aspect of the research, you can 'phone me on 0117 951 0207 or at work on 0117 965 5384 (ext.4362). I look forward to hearing from you in the near future.

Best wishes,

Appendix J

Initial letter from me to Panel

February 10th 1997

Dear

Re: Networking Research

Thank you very much for agreeing to contribute to my research on networking and returning the initial questionnaire with your details. I now have a panel of 15 people, who are active in community development around Britain and Northern Ireland at a variety of levels. The panel membership includes a range of backgrounds and identities, and I hope this will allow me to compare different experiences and perspectives on networks.

As indicated earlier, I estimate that participation in the study will need a commitment from you of about 20 hours over the next year. My planned timetable is:

January	Pilot questionnaires.
February	**Send out questionnaires to Panel members, for return by end of month.**
March	Analyse data from questionnaire. Pilot practice journal formats.
April	Prepare and send out pro forma practice journals for completion over 4 week period in May. Clarify any issues for panel members.
May	**Panel members complete and return journals.**
June/July/ August	**Individual interviews with panel members**, arranged on a date and location to suit you.
September	Analyse data; write up preliminary findings and circulate early conclusions to panel members.
October	**Focus group discussion(s)** for as many panel members as are available (possibly at SCCD autumn conference ?). Travel expenses paid where necessary.
Nov/December	Reflect on focus group results and write up study for circulation and publication.

My intention is to be as collaborative as possible in terms of sharing ideas at every stage of the process and being open about the purpose of the research. Confidentiality and anonymity will be maintained throughout the study and in the final report. If at any point, you have suggestions or doubts about your involvement in the panel,
please get in touch and discuss these with me.

Enclosed with this letter is a short questionnaire about **how networks feature in your practice as a community worker**. I am interested in your involvement in formal network-type organisations as well as your use of informal networking. Include your ideas about both the benefits and limitations.

I hope you find the questionnaire straightforward. Please mention anything you think might be relevant and use additional space if you need to. Don't worry about writing complete sentences; notes are fine as long as they are legible and make sense to me. The people who took part in the pilot said that it took them about an hour to complete. I would be

grateful if you could return the forms to me by February 28th, so that I can begin to analyse the results and move on to the next stage. Feel free to contact me if there is anything that I have not made clear. My 'phone number at work is 0117 965 5384 or you could leave a message at home. I look forward to hearing from you.

Appendix K

Application form for Panelists

Application to be on the research panel

All information shared by you in the course of this project will be treated as confidential, unless negotiated otherwise.

Name:

Current work:

Contact address:

Phone number: (day) (evening)

Please give a brief description of your current job and your involvement in any formal or informal networks.

Why do you want to take part in this study ?

Please describe yourself:

Gender Ethnic origin

Age Sexual identity

Class Are you Disabled ?

If you have any further comments, please use the other side.

Return to Alison Gilchrist, 34, Heron Road, Easton, Bristol BS5 0LU by January 31st 1997.

Appendix L

Participation rates for panels in each stage of the study

Panelist	Questionnaire	Number of Critical Incidents	Interview	Focus group
PH	Y	9	Y	Y
KT	Y	34	Y	Y
SM	Y	5	Y	Y
LM	Y	20	Y	Y
CK	Y	0	N	N
CT	Y	20	Y	N
GrS	Y	16	Y	N
MW	Y	12	Y	N
GaS	Y	9	Y	N
TD	Y	12	Y	Y
JM	Y	20	Y	Y
AP	Y	11	Telephone	N
FB	Y	10	Y	Y
GR	Y	0	N	N
Total	**14**	**176**	**11 + telephone conversation**	**7**

Appendix M

Postal questionnaire pro-forma (with spaces between questions reduced)

Networking and Networks:

Community Development

in Practice

Panel Study - Stage 1

QUESTIONNAIRE

You may find it helpful to refer to the following definitions:

NETWORKING - the creation, maintenance and use of links and relationships between individuals and/or organisations

NETWORK - a set of inter-connected 'agents' and the pattern of relationships between them

FORMAL - based on a collectively agreed structure and procedures

INFORMAL - operates without explicit rules

These are working definitions only and may well change during the course of the research project. Your comments are welcome. My main point is that networks can be formally organised or exist informally through personal links. Similarly networking can be conducted using formal and informal connections.

If you want to write more than there is the space provided for, please use additional sheets of paper.

Return by **Friday, February 28th** 1997 to Alison Gilchrist, in the stamped addressed envelope provided.

YOUR NAME:

1) **What formal networks are you involved with ?**

2) **What informal networks are important to you in the course of your work ?**

3) **What is it about these organisations and contacts that you find useful ?**

4) **What benefits are there for the people you work with ?**

5) **How do you ensure your continuing involvement in these networks ?**

6) **Would you say that some of these links and relationships are easier for you to maintain than others ?**

6a) **Why ?**

7) **In your experience, what would you say were the main problems and limitations of using networks for community development ?**

8) **Any other comments ?** (use more paper if necessary)

Thank you very much for your time.

Appendix N

Questionnaire findings

1) What formal networks are you involved with ?

Keib T

Voluntary sector consultative Committee (cf.CVS); Southwark Community development group;SE16 (networking group (local networks);BRDP (Bermondsey and Rotherhithe Development Partnership)(SRB group); Southwark Domestic Violence group; MAP (multi-agency panel) anti-racist network of statutory, voluntary and schools and community members; BASSAC (British Association of settlements and Social Action Centres)(national) and IFS (International Federation of Settlements); SCCD; LRN (London Regeneration network)(SRB issue based); SPCCG (Southwark Police Consultative Gp); S(Southwark?) Volunteers forum.

Susan M

VOSCUR - as the chair of the organisation I have access to 250 vol.sector groups.
Common Purpose - private/public/vol.sector comes together to address themes throughout the year. Semi-formal: supervisors I have met in the course of supervising students; particular "like-minded" assessors from my work with the Accreditation Unit; youth workers - both statutory and voluntary.

Gerald R

Regional black voluntary sector networks in West Midlands, Yorkshire/Humberside, London and East Midlands.

Caroline K

Secretary to Ely Community Development Forum - local residents, agencies and statutory organisations meet once a month to identify issues of local concern and evolve strategies to overcome them. County Council meetings - eg. play committee - to develop comprehensive approaches to play. Tutor on County-wide Health and safety course -> regular meetings/developments. NB. There are county department meetings which I avoid as I have such useful contacts through the Ely Community Development Forum.

Chris T

Local community committee - regular monthly meetings of individuals, groups, organisations; councillors and council officers - a representative structure to develop area based strategies for decentralised services, etc. Corporate working for community strategy - linked to formal meetings on play development; out of school provision; health issues; area regeneration initiatives on housing; community care issues with social workers - mental health strategy; disability groups and childcare. Task groups - linked to officers and local people on traffic; road safety; transportation and pollution; use of open spaces; environmental planning concerns; policing/community safety;economic development. At Community Centre - user community groups and management committee; playgroups; parent/toddlers; youth projects; councillors educ'n (???); sports social and recreational groups and mental health/ older people/ pensioners groups. In fundraising/training meetings - budgets; external funding; forms filling/ESF + SRB + lottery applications. At Community Festival Committees. Linked to environmental Local Agenda 21 - woodland creation; Green Fair; Red Rose Forest Steering Committee. Use of community buildings - with schools, PTAs, etc. Training - talks to groups.
Public information - at local library information centre. IT work. Project management at local Family Centre; churches; at Team Meetings; Link officers - vol. sector liaison. Strategic reviews.

Greg S
Newham Community Resource Forum
ACW (Association of Community Workers)
Social Research Association
ARVAC - (committee member)
Various E-mail lists - including youth and community work

Pete H
Wakefield District Community Network
SCCD
Barnardos
Tenants Participation Workers Forum

Mike W
All the formal networks I am involved in with my work are limited to the Boroughs of Burnley: most are networks of community activists or of professional working in organisations (statutory and voluntary) which provide services to community groups or to 'the community' or of both.

Specifically these networks are:
Burnley Borough Council Community Involvement Working Group
Burnley and Padiham Community Forum Working Group
smaller umbrella organisations of community organisations

It may be relevant to state that I manage staff who are themselves involved in separate formal and informal networks, including women's networks, networks of Black workers/Black activists, playworkers' networks, etc, and that these workers share information with me as appropriate from these networks and feed into the networks points which they may have developed in discussion with myself and others in the networks I am part of.

Gary S
SCCD
WEA
L.A's
National Union of Mineworkers
Charity Commission
Coal Industry Social Welfare Organisation
South Cheshire Community Workers Group
The boss.

Lynda McM
Redcar and Cleveland Women's Network
Redcar and Cleveland Voluntary Development Agency
Teeside Committee for the Employment of People with Disabilities
Parent/Teachers Association
Local Scouts and Guide Association

Terri D
South Gloucestershire Women's Forum
Yate Community Development Patch Team
Community development Unit Staff Team
Yate Community Profile Steering group

John M
International Federation of Settlements and Social Action Centres Eurogroup. Individual Associate - founder member of the group (Strasbourg 1990).Editor of the Eurogroup Quarterly Newsletter (Correspondence). Standing Conference for Community Development – Treasurer. Federation of Community Work Training Groups. Interim England Standards Board for Community Work Training and Qualification Community Matters representative (substitute) until recall conference in July 1997, also minute-taker at EIB meetings.
Community Matters. Community Matters in Essex representative on Executive Committee or one year only 1996/7. National Family Service Units. Trustee elected from Thurrock's Family Service Unit to the National Council. National CVS. representative nominated by Thurrock CVS and elected to the National Executive Committee. Community Matters in Essex. Vice chair of Executive Committee. Essex Association of Victim Support Schemes. Nominated representative from Thurrock Victim Support Scheme management committee (for area finance restructuring considerations which have been postponed presently). Thurrock Family Service Unit - was Vice Chair, now Treasurer. Thurrock CVS. Representative elected from Basildon and Thurrock Independent Advocacy Services. Deposit Guarantee Scheme - Thurrock CVS management committee representative on DGS Advisory Panel. Thurrock Community Information Service Project - Thurrock CVS Information Technology advisory role to the Thurrock Council on development of phase one - inclusion of voluntary sector - all media forms. Basildon and Thurrock Independent Advocacy Services - Board member, formerly Treasurer (1991 - 1996). Thurrock and Brentwood Victims Support Scheme - Committee member, formerly Treasurer (1989 - 1996). Brook House - Stonham housing Association Project - nominated chairperson of management committee providing hostel accommodation for homeless young people in Grays. Is an example of restructuring centrally that has resulted in the takeover and hence redundancy of voluntary effort. Ex National College for the Training of Youth Leaders - reunion no.2 for 4/5 April 1998 is in the pipeline. I was organiser for reunion no.1 held at Leicester 5/7/95.

Anne P
Federation of Community Work Training Groups
Northern Ireland Community Work Training and Education Network
Forum itself is a networking organisation
Northern Ireland Council Ethnic Minorities

Frances B
(was involved with SCCD on Executive Committee)
Knoll estate meetings. Joint play strategy group. Hangleton and Knoll SRB Greening Working party. Hangleton and Knoll Projects management committee. Knoll Community Association and sub-committees. Community work training unit group. North Portslade Community Project management committee. Regular Health of the nation meetings. Contact with Brighton and Sussex Universities ie. student placements.

2) What informal networks are important to you in the course of your work ?

Keib T
- inside many of the above there are important informal networks (not cliques or elites..but useful groups of like-minded individuals).
- there is also the 'network' of local people and staff who I have met across the above networks/ and other meetings. This is a personal network/contacts who I can rely on for support, information, help, etc.
- other Settlement workers (across Southwark/London)
- local people around Bede House, traders, shopkeepers, etc.
- networks of past jobs

Susan M

Lesbian and gay (activist) "community"

Seeing some voluntary sector people and youth workers

Socially - pubs, meals out allows discussion and exchange of ideas in a more relaxed atmosphere

Gerald R

I used to work in training, research and consultancy and these networks are still very important/useful.

I also used to work in community relations/equal opportunities and these informal networks of practitioners are still v. important.

Caroline K

Links with other local agencies - Barnardos, Housing Department, local planners, local headteachers, Ely Pastorale, Tenants and residents Associations, Ely Play Committee, youth workers, Before and After-school care clubs, TEC, Women's returners Unit, Business in the Community and key representatives in businesses from where we attract funding, Job Shop Extra and local community enterprise workshops, other county colleagues and most importantly, local residents of all ages.

Chris T

regular contact making over telephone and meetings in households; with individuals eg to discuss planned activities; issues. to increase community involvement in any number of local initiatives within area. regular meetings in Community Centre; pubs; social clubs with key players and activists linked to sustaining discussions and overall concerns in the area. This will include "making connections/working with" depth of work being undertaken eg on play; youth; environmental concerns. This will involve consultation/participation in groups and organisations. Conversation forms part of overall "reflective practice" in community development work. Settings vary but will include family households; community and youth centres; and in local day centres.

Greg S

National urban mission and church networks

Local churches in Newham

Local politics - Labour Party

Local authority staff

University of East London departments

Pete H

Contacts built up during previous pieces of work

Mike W

From amongst the people that I have contact in the formal networks, it happens that I meet some more frequently on an informal basis than others. Where this happens by mutual design, it reflects shared values and attitudes which we attempt to work on together in order to work up ideas and proposals which may then be directed to the formal networks or into the formal hierarchical procedures of the Borough Council or of other organisations.

More widely I am supported in my work by sporadic contact with but constant awareness of other individuals and groups who I know have similar values to myself and are attempting to work through similar issues. these are people/groups who I know either through personal friendships which have developed in previous work situations or which date back to student or school days and have been sustained partly through having gone into similar work locations (advice, social housing, youth and community work); or through contact

developed in the course of political activity; or through 'intellectual' work, ie. writing articles and book reviews for journals.

One specific example of this is with the Merseyside Popular Economy Group, which is mainly sustained by urban 'community professionals' who are also members of the organisation Democratic Left... I find it helpful and stimulating to consider the work and thinking they are developing, sometimes in partnership and dialogue with 'names' whose writing and thinking on the issues I find interesting and thought provoking.

Gary S
Management committees of each of the miners' welfare charities I work for. Volunteers and trustees. Colleagues and former colleagues from within the mining industry. Community work activists and practitioners.

Lynda McM
Present work colleagues
Ex work colleagues
Family contacts
Friends and contacts
Fellow students (see notes under 8)
Residents Associations and Community Forums in both the South bank and Grangetown areas where I work.

Terri D
Meetings with other community workers in both vol and stat sectors. Any social or professional gatherings I can attend in order to establish contacts. Events my children go to - I make use of informal networking opportunities. telephone communication between people I used to work with. friends/colleagues/school contacts. My local community "gossip" lines. People at UWE - students and staff. Young people at Fromeside Youth Centre and in/around my community. People in other fields of work not necessarily relevant for community.

John M
I should mention that there is a distinct difference in working professionally (ie employment) compared with voluntary working. being employed by a County Education Authority the worker had to liaise within parameters (terms of reference for community association workers) laid down by the authority. The employee was supposed to be an adviser/facilitator and not get involved with routine matters - like receiving membership fees; going to the bank. Five community associations survived to 1993.

We formed our own consultative group (we organised training for part-time workers as well) which had to take note of the Authority's "code of conduct" when making recommendations to the Authority. This informal group had continued since (with three of us. Two of us were made redundant and retired; the other is still working part-time for the Authority). We still meet quite frequently (we are presently engaged in making a National Lottery funding bid for a Community Matters in Essex full-time worker).

The difference is in approach - the volunteer can develop his/her own interests and if required become involved, whilst the professional might have to become engaged in tasks that he/she does not personally support or are unpleasant but have to be performed, There is also the professional stance (which has been my background but personally have disagreed with to some extent) of detachment (the overview) which leads to an impersonal style creating a "flitting" impression of doing some work with a group (ie an advisory input and possibly dropping further contact depending on the developmental stage) and moving onto the next group - this might be the worker's or the Authority's agenda.

The three of us continue meeting because we all network to Community Matters - two of us are licensed consultants for community associations and it is this link and the training that Community Matters provides that enables us to "cascade" in our other network links. Meeting together enables us to exchange experiences of these networks, obtain support for feasible ideas and discuss working practice. For example, through the third member working in a part-time capacity, we were able to re-open County Authority Education department representation on the Community Matters in Essex Executive Committee as support for community ventures virtually ceased after Spring 1993.

This group is not just a social chat group. It tries to help others achieve their aims whilst the professional tends to work to the achievement of his/her authority's policy aims. All three of us are also linked (when travel distance allows us) to the Essex Association of Community Work Training groups which is an ad hoc forum meeting about every two months arranging its own information/discussion programme which again is a forum but is on an "academic level" whilst our "gang of three" group meetings are on a practical level.

Anne P
Other community development workers offering support and guidance.

Frances B
Contacts with: - Health promotion department; Brighton and Hove Borough Council officers, esp. re: play + leisure + housing + parks dept.; Social Services via patch office, Family Centre, and Community Development team; the local church; community police/crime prevention dept; other voluntary organisations/community workers; Brighton and Sussex Universities.

3) What is it about these organisations and contacts that you find useful ?

Keib T
> support (personal and issue-based)
> information (for myself, my organisation and others)
> they help to develop better working relationships/build new working partnerships
> feedback on ideas, issues, problems, etc.
> brain storming at vital moments in project development or crisis resolution (beginning, middle or ending)
> contacts, contact-making or finding (directory function... except it's all in our heads)
> through 'networking the networks', seemingly unrelated information comes together to clarify or help progress seemingly intractable problems or issues.

Susan M
- getting information
- access to power/decision-making
- informal/friendship networks - sharing information in a useful, developmental way - supporting each other - 'calling in favours'
- understanding the 'bigger picture' (ie. Common Purpose)

Gerald R
They are useful for
i) information - sharing/exchange
ii) ideas - esp. problem-solving
iii) contacts - getting things done quickly
iv) support- a shoulder/ear to talk to/listen to

Caroline K
The issues with which I am dealing concern an area with its own unique identity and complexion. Within Cardiff and even amongst some county council colleagues, there is

prejudice and misconception about Ely. I therefore gain much from the local connections I have mentioned as we share a perception based on our experiences and contact with local people in Ely. Overtime, trust has been established with certain people (residents and workers alike) and I gain useful insights and support thorough my contact with them. Organisations such as TEC (ie. outside) also positively support Ely as their input gains them kudos (also true of Business in the community and certain others).

Chris T
In order to do my job effectively and efficiently I have t be aware of organisations and community groups - this is vital so that I can support local key initiatives and deliver services to self-directed or social action groups/activities with Salford's community strategy in my area. Linking groups and organisations and individuals is a key role in my job. This is (a) much (about ?) offering positive dynamic framework and new learning opportunities to improve resources and community services. This is also crucial and essential to community development practice in supporting local interest groups eg. for women's/ self-help organisations, etc. Charting(?)/progressing and evaluating the relationships in networks becomes an essential form of everyday practice. Formal and informal external appraisal of policies acting on community development objectives, with participatory analysis, and formulation of strategic service/community action plans is crucial in this process.

Greg S
Information sharing and exchange. Building a power base to draw down 'patronage and funding'. Mutual support.

Pete H
Mutual support/help/advice/shoulder to cry on or someone to let off steam on. I can usually contact someone who then leads me to contact someone else who can help, etc, etc (the 'I know a man who can' thing). Informally/cutting across agency/departmental boundaries/lack of hierarchy/Variety of contacts.

Mike W
Collaborative working with people with similar temperaments/views; intellectual stimulation/inspiration; provide feeling of not being isolated - even if in one's own day to day work you are not working collaboratively with these people, the knowledge that they - like-minded people - are themselves working through similar issues and processes where they are helps you in your work.

Gary S
Someone has always 'done it before'. You do not have to re-invent the wheel, you can use people past experience to help groups make informed decisions. The obvious ones - support and advice. Information.

Lynda McM
- An opportunity to share ideas/interests, skills/knowledge
- Access to advice and further understanding of issues
- Relationships established with others
- Confidence built up and around specific issues
- Broad based support established
- Provide a base for further action to be built on
- Empower individuals/ develop individuals interpersonal skills
- Exchange information

Terri D
It keeps my name and my face on people's minds so that when I approach people with a request or a need or to suggest working with them, I have already been able to pave the

way. I also can feel confident in that my reputation for commitment and pursuing of tasks and process travel around these networks and organisations. It is the laying of the foundations for much of my work. They cat as support for me.

John M

(edited version) ...voluntary sector very fragmented...a few of the professional agency heads met together and realised that the formation of an association might help groups acting independently and not succeeding might be more successful acting together. Developments in legal matters, charity commission requirements and 'changing goal posts' were scary factors causing man. c'ttee members to give up. "responsibility and accountability" became part of the vocabulary.

My original Community Matters link has helped cascade these matters to my contacts. Many groups still work in isolation and feel threatened by the outside world..... lead an organisation along a maladministration path and possible dissolution. Some of this is due to the replacement of management committee members who do not receive the appropriate handover and induction.

One of my roles could be considered as that of a catalyst... sharing particular information unknown to the organisation, might cause a review of priorities... in an attempt to put matters right.........Similarly representation from one network to another... enabled a local protest on one network which progressed to a regional forum to be taken up by another more appropriate organisation through a representational presentation of the problem.

Further, the formal hierarchy of an organisation illustrates task achievement routes through departments and/or offices/branches. As community workers we like to be regarded as agents of the "informal"/personal approach, some of us like this to be within a formal framework, but by virtue of this philosophy it is the informal/personal which works across these formal hierarchies, enabling information/ideas exchange and provides opportunities to formulate and test out arguments for propositions; improving the profile of an organisation; obtaining support for one's efforts. There is also a greater chance that an idea will receive credence with joint personal consideration than being presented through formal impersonal channels by an individual. It is a vehicle for empowerment, but one must ensure that this is for all and does not enhance empowerment leading to power by an autocrat...

Anne P

Generation of work - contacts with more locally based groups. Ideas. Filling gaps in provision esp. education and training provision. Support from individuals involved in networks. sense of belonging. space to discuss and work on common issues.

Frances B

They provide a vital role re: exchange of info. and knowledge esp. re: funding opportunities, use of resources, useful contacts, training opps, info. on new legislation, etc.

Also, they can provide support for me as a worker (peer support) and friendship ie. space to let off steam!!

Working with other agencies helps provide new ideas/stimulation re: development of new initiatives. There's the establishment of trust and honesty.

4) <u>What benefits are there for the people you work with ?</u>

Keib T

> Bede is a Settlement with six very different projects - having a generalist networker is often useful to them in most of the ways outlined above.

> Information, contacts and 'where to get started' tend to be the most common from colleagues

> the Director (and occasionally project managers) usually wants my overview (often the result of networking)
> the same is true for individual Bede users and the organisations I serve with technical assistance, etc.
> [I find my networks useful **because** they help the people I work with].

Susan M
Voscur - for members - information update, access to decision-making, participation in SRB bids, etc for the voluntary sector

Common Purpose - for those not from the voluntary sector an opportunity to gain understanding of what the VS does

- at a personal level, I believe I have a good skill in 'translating' mysterious concepts into manageable information
- people benefit from my enthusiasm and passion for what I do and believe in and, I am told, from my leadership qualities.

Gerald R
The networks - especially the informal ones - definitely help to sharpen my focus at work, save time and also, keep informing my process at work.

Caroline K
I hope that people benefit from my wide-ranging contacts, built over the last 7 years and my previous experience in past jobs such as Salford. Probably my particular skills are in negotiating and in times of constant cutbacks, fundraising through increasing links with business and grant-giving bodies seems to be becoming my forte. I also have community working friends in other parts of the country and consequently have perhaps a wider network than some other county colleagues - and am prepared to use it. I retain in particular, links with work in Edinburgh (my home) and can share their ideas with those in Ely.

Chris T
* more effective contact with/between individuals, groups and organisations
* better effective and maintenance of groups objectives and needs
* better inter-agency/ partnership working
* more support in obtaining resources/funding/grant applications
* improved local services in community care/community strategy policy framework
* immediate access to local services to identify concerns and issues
* better planning of local services in area
* more growth in 'sustainable' organised activity to promote a safer area and a better quality of life.

Greg S
Mostly long-term or trickle down, though local networking building at best is empowering at grassroots.

Pete H
Benefits have been for the people in the project team I work in and for the groups I work with.

For the project team my contacts with SCCD have been extremely useful giving us all access to more information re: CD nationally and lots of ideas to keeps us fresh in our work.

For the community groups I'm working with, some of the above but also the chance to encourage them to meet with other people from other groups and agency workers to share experiences and learn from each other.

Mike W
Directly - ideas worked up collaboratively turn into projects which benefit colleagues / members of community groups; best practice is transferred from other places/ organisations to my local context.

Indirectly- I am a happier, more resourced and stimulated and therefore better worker.

Gary S
Using community development techniques to work within a 'traditional' charity has meant that sometimes I challenge established custom and practice. Being able to call on my network to prove that these techniques work has been invaluable in changing the culture of miners' welfare.

Lynda McM
- Greater awareness of local and national issues
- Consciousness-raising - new information, ideas circulated
- Helps to link individuals together to share activities skills
- Allows easier access to groups concerned with specific issues - know who to contact, etc.
- Having established personal contact earlier can reduce conflict between workers and campaigners
- Individuals opinions are wanted/listened to.

Terri D
They get to exchange views/ideas with me without always having to 'book time' with me. They can find out about how I work, my values, etc. and piece together a more whole picture of the kind of person I am - also to understand my limitations and boundaries.
I can pass on things to other networks/ people and help other people to tap into networks. I often take leaflets or notices of events from one organisation to others via formal and informal networks. People can get support.

John M
Commitment to the organisation, certainly as a volunteer, has to be conveyed by example to the organisation..............Commitment implies involvement and much of this can involve staff contacts and very often these are on an informal basis.
.......they can be helped by recruiting external expertise for particular purposes...........

Some advisory/information points can be presented as a form of training.....There is the capability to influence.... the result could extend the organisation's horizons and lead to a review of the organisation's objects, taking on additional responsibilities. In some instances, managing committees do not realise that a community development exercise is unfolding.

Management committee members and external expertise can be drawn together to achieve tasks which the staff are not able to achieve.....this helps to promote the ownership feeling and a sense of belonging to the organisation on the part of management committee members.

Anne P
They can access groups/networks. Also work gets a higher profile.

Frances B

Info on: funding, legislation, access to affordable/accessible training, professional support for specific groups/pieces of work.
Access to students on placement, resources, expertise, keeps up a two way information flow (ie. between grass-roots community groups and local authorities/social services, etc.), promotes a better understanding of issues (local and national).

5) <u>How do you ensure your continuing involvement in these networks ?</u>

Keib T
> I regularly attend the ones that matter to me (I prioritise them)so that I am there when they set their next meeting. My diary is a crucial factor.
>I get actively involved in the working parties/groups which always builds deeper working relationships and often results in something more tangible(eg. discussion paper, conference, leaflet, etc.)
> regularly (6-12 months) review of all of my networking with my line manager
> sense/listen to feedback on my own role and contribution in particular networks

Susan M
Regular contact with people; having a public profile; now having had a business card printed; making myself available and accessible; being open and honest about my involvement and realistic capacity to influence decisions, as well as being clear about my personal and professional limitations; being trustworthy, a proven track record of maintaining appropriate confidentiality

Gerald R
The informal networks are maintained usually by friendship/contact. The formal networks are maintained by receiving/doing minutes, agendas, going to meetings, newsletters, etc

Caroline K
As secretary of the Community Development forum, it is obviously easy to be constantly involved. In other cases I get minutes for meetings and therefore try as often as possible to attend those. Having made contacts I obviously contact the appropriate people of and when appropriate.

Chris T
Overall involvement in these networks requires regular planned meetings which define agendas and set realistic aims and objectives for good community development practice In order to be working effectively to meet the demands of all comm. groups, and to support new initiatives that emerge through local comm. council/committees - this has to be negotiated according to staffing and voluntary commitment. Local forums ensure planning/monitoring and evaluation. Task groups structure is useful to ensure forward planning with local community reps. and council officers. In terms of continued community involvement this requires finding new ways of access to different formal and informal networks in the area.

Greg S
Some of them I convene by mailing list. usually the meetings - formal and social Occasional one-on-ones or phone contact. Some conferences - seminars.
Increasing number of e-mail contacts, especially at non-local level. Living in the borough, my kids use local schools/community centres. We go to a local church neighbours and local friends.

Pete H

By participation in forums, seminars, conferences. Using contacts and building up inter-dependence between us. I'm part of the steering group which organises the Wakefield network and I spend quite a lot of time organising meetings/producing mailings/updating contact lists, etc. which I think ensures that the network continues to grow and develop.

Mike W
Meeting people; phoning people; paying subs to receive periodicals.

Gary S
Mainly by giving as much as I receive. 'What goes round. comes round'.

Lynda McM
- Have an optimistic attitude - help maintain group morale.
- Try and contribute constructively, share information/skills
- Encourage others to attend - generally on an informal basis
- Monitor funding/policies/support
- Help to advertise group - possibly word of mouth, poster/leaflet distribution, contact community newspaper, etc.
- Target, contact other groups on behalf of the network.

Terri D
I keep in touch by 'phone; by attending events which may not necessarily be on my pet topic or local area because I know I will meet people there. I ask to be out on mailing lists or to invite me. If I see someone out socially or even just in Tescos, I try and stop to exchange a few words. I ask people to "remember me to so and so" when they see them. If I can't attend an event I will still phone the person to see how it went and maybe meet up another time.

John M
....a simple idea...and its fulfilment can have an immense number of spin-offs. Attendance at [conferences] provides a "refreshing" experience. That is new faces also attend adding a depth of new experiences; new ideas and new approaches that can be taken back to the network, sometimes as practice models.

I also offer my expertise and knowledge as appropriate; sometimes I am also asked for this. The actual representation hat is discarded as I am expected to work for the good of the organisation.....There is also a need to be committed to the mission statement of the organisation. The involvement is that the key tasks enabling their achievement can be discussed; reviewed; discarded and/or amended. Hence I feel part of a developing process. Involvement becomes a variety of tasks within one organisation. This experience often leads to an advantage for other organisations wanting similar help.

Anne P
By attending meetings. **Participating**. Ensuring that management committee are kept up to date with issues.

Frances B
If it's appropriate I aim to become a member of a formal network or there in an observer capacity. (or get copies of the minutes if possible). I keep a look-out for new info; get the project put on appropriate mailing lists (cost can be a barrier at times!). With some we aim to meet on some regular basis - often this may be once every 2 /3 months to exchange info. etc. With others we phone and chat, meet for cup of tea/drink etc.

6) Would you say that some of these links and relationships are easier for you to maintain than others ?

Keib T
Yes
Susan M
Yes
Gerald R
Yes.
Caroline K
Yes.
Chris T
Yes - within formal networks probably.
Greg S
The most difficult ones are with Council officers.
Pete H
Yes.
Mike W
Yes.
Gary S
Yes.
Lynda McM
Yes.
Terri D
Yes.
John M
Yes.
Anne P
Yes.
Frances B
Yes.

Why ?

Keib T
Some are: more relevant to my work; more relevant to my personal commitment to issues; are more fun/enjoyable/relaxing to be a member of (though this is never the main reason, but it can be a strong influence)... the line management review helps here, stimulating, effective or more productive; touch on or relate to my future plans/personal or professional development; have the right mix of people involved; far better serviced or organised than others

Susan M
Other people's interest/commitment levels; personalities; trustworthiness; whether they will join informal coffee/alcohol sessions; VOSCUR - depends on individuals/organisations involved due to time commitment, having a forward vision, understanding the bigger picture I do this work in voluntary time.

Gerald R
It is easier to maintain the formal networks because there is a clear structure/process However, because it takes more effort to maintain the informal networks, it often seems that there is a better quality to those relationships than in the formal ones.

Caroline K

Partly through choice - it is obviously much easier to maintain links where they are founded on similar approaches and views - it is worth making the effort ! It is easier if you are constantly meeting people eg. residents and workers in my area of Ely. I find it increasingly difficult to attend County Council meetings as I don't believe we give enough thought to the differences between communities and therefore the need for different approaches accordingly.

Chris T
Overall part of my current workload is related to implementing local strategy and Agenda 21 initiatives. The commitment both in terms of community involvement and support is providing exciting, despite the extensive demands, and practical/organisational problems. Formal links and regular trusting relationships facilitate clarity in information sharing, and the effective delivery of community development services. Practice is not officer controlled or led, but locally controlled. Relationships are therefore long-term and easily sustainable in running and developing local centres and projects.

Greg S
They are too busy, too constrained by bureaucracy and developmental empires, too short of funding. Most do not live locally. Increasingly this is the case with paid staff in voluntary sector as they are tied into contract culture.

Pete H
Time - I have more contact with some members than others. It's easier to maintain contact if you have things in common whether these are work or leisure interests.Harder to maintain links within SCCD because of distances between us all (perhaps the internet could help this).

Mike W
The links that are easier to maintain are those which are generated spontaneously in the course of work which my job description causes me to do on a week to week basis; time to maintain some other contacts needs to be created by me - or them - and these contacts would not be automatically maintained if effort was not made... where work coming down or up the Borough Council hierarchy to me becomes very pressured, this both acts as a barrier to maintaining the informal networks - and makes it more necessary.

Gary S
Because I do not have to have a political/cultural debate with like-minded people when facilitating change. However it could be said that the learning gained from this debate is worthwhile. I could challenge this as I find it repetitive.

Lynda McM
- Some have established a more trusting and relaxed atmosphere, therefore feel more comfortable in sharing experiences,etc.
- Some need specialised help, possibly to secure funding, help with activities, etc, needing specific skills.
- Often more established/formal networks have systems in place and operating effectively.
- Some just close the doors top outsiders - probably not physically but by structure of group or by attitudes of group members.

Terri D
Some happen without me trying - eg. local contacts, being at places where other people are - others have to be created - eg. to make a point of attending a meeting or a forum or remembering to phone/write to someone if I have promised.
Also networks do not, for me, just fit into neat slots - one network overlaps another - sometimes this makes it easier, sometimes it's difficult to decide which 'hat' to wear.

John M
One difficulty is compatibility. From the representational aspect one might be verbally in agreement with an organisation's "mission statement" but in the operative situation comparing this with one's own values and the way other organisations operate (and this can be similar topics) I somehow become "quiet" or withdrawn.

The sheer weight of numbers (eg.NAFSU Council has 30 members) can produce this effect as it is extremely difficult to make a contribution. This to me affects the decision-making process - too many contributions slow down the process and blurs the decision that should be correctly made for the benefit of the organisation. This also makes considerable demands of the Chairperson almost to the point of bullying the meeting into a "sensible" frame of working as some contributions can become flippant and irrelevant.

Some organisations I work with are aware of this and are attempting to make a smaller committee that has powers delegated from a Council of members to "execute" formulated policy...............

The'whole organisation' approach is succeeding because each branch realises the value (and the principles behind these) of its services to the communities served and the "deprivation" that would be caused if the network ceased to function.

There is the conflict situation, I have experienced in a national context. where the network (and the executive committee) is becoming staff-led......

Anne P
If networks (are) appropriate to work have been inherited. If they do not hold same value base. If they are not participative.

Frances B
eg. with social services - when the social workers I had as a contact left this created a 'gap' with almost a complete lack of communication for ages ! It took effort on both agencies part to establish new contact. So it seems that for me it's often the individual within an agency that I have the contact with and the danger is that when the person leaves the networking ceases !! (at least for a while).

7) In your experience, what would you say were the main problems and limitations of using networks for community development ?

Keib T
- they can become cliques, elites, exclusive
- they can run out of steam, energy, focus
- want to self-perpetuate beyond their sell-by date. They become social clubs, etc.
- when 'talk' replaces or becomes a substitute for action
- when they become vehicles for others(statutory and voluntary agencies) not consulting (or by-passing) the real community
- when they are not representative of a community but end up representing it (when they can't recognise their own limitations

Susan M
* personality clashes
* powerful individuals with a range of undeclared interests
* dishonesty/"users"
* where are the structures to ensure the following:
    - accountability
    - communication

- equality and access
- 'fair' participation

* you need to feel "in" (experienced enough, clever enough or having something to bring to the table) to be able to feel you are permitted to join certain networks.

Gerald R

Obviously, the main limitation in using networks for community development is that especially informally, your contacts are usually people who basically agree with you, or you like/get on with.; and this could lead to a sense of complacency, not challenging ideas/practices, etc. Because much community development work is isolated, networks are definitely essential to maintain knowledge, information and support.

Caroline K

There is a danger that organisations and workers can become stale, dispirited and run out of dynamic ideas. It is important that this doesn't permeate through to all those involved - hence the need for contact with people in other places. This is particularly true when people spend a good deal of time setting up a project for example and then seeing it fail to take off. Contrary to what I said earlier, there is a danger that depending only on local contacts (no matter the benefits) can lead to insular approaches. This, however, can be overcome by ensuring that you look outside the area. It is hard also to find yourself in work situations with people whom you don't agree with and don't feel an empathy as the outcome inevitably will be less productive.

Chris T

'Situational' networks are loose associations held together by bonds based on shared interests. These networks are a means of casting and influencing identity management/ and the style of intervention of any community development practitioner. There are endless barriers that need to be worked through in any formal and informal network.

So the aims/objectives of any group can be interpreted as a 'serviceable network'. from the viewpoint of organisational policies; situational networking can obstruct efficient organisations but the profound importance of networks remains local, autonomous and is a context where individuals become respected. Institutions that govern our communities are grounded in enforced identities of class, sex, age, race, caste, disability, etc. This stubbornly created inequality; however, through the celebration of the diversity of different networks this can produce powerful forces for social change and development in any community.

Greg S

Because networking is seen as a luxury - it's not a measurable output for most professionals - it can never flourish unless someone will take responsibility to convene and tend the networks. I often take on the role of convenor because I see it as valuable and have a relatively free hand to use time in this way. (I'm a privileged minority).

Pete H

Not everyone you need to be in touch with wants to be part of a network. Networks seem to be good at attracting like-minded people but what about those buggers who want to do things the way they have always done. Some networks can exclude some (from ?) becoming involved unless you fit in (I suppose this is true of all networks). Lack of time - could spend lots more time on networking but this could end up becoming all that I do. There's got to be some 'pay-off'.

Mike W

I find this an odd question, as I think that community development is impossible except through creating and sustaining networks of community activists. One does often see

though, the results of the temptation to 'develop' community projects 'from above' - not always by the local state either....'top down' approaches are also taken by community activists, voluntary organisations, etc.

Possibly one of the reasons for this temptation is that the development and cultivation of networks takes time, and when one is task-oriented, often for reasons which are imposed, such as funding deadlines etc, this cultivation is often short-circuited.... hopefully this research will help focus the reasons why networking is not an optional extra in community development, but is absolutely integral to it.

Gary S
The diversity of people's understanding of the issue around which people are focused, this leads inevitably to enforcing ? 'the rules', ie. democracy. It gets the job done but those who disagree with the majority decision often feel disaffected as you don't have the time to pick it up as an issue.

Lynda McM
- Lack of resources either financial or staff time to fully meets the requests of the network particularly when new/setting up - who will organise, administer the network, etc ?
- Often when a report is produced, based on information gathered, consultation, etc. little support is given to allow effective follow-through action.
- Difficult situation can arise when/if network members decide to campaign on issues which are connected to employer (in my case the local authority).
- By encouraging the empowerment of individuals this sometimes can lead to some individuals becoming "power mad" and unwilling to share ideas, etc.
- Networks need to constantly be able to adapt to new ideas/issues, therefore need someone committed to identifying new areas or the network can go stale.

Terri D
Some people expect tasks to be achieved and do not understand the importance of the groundwork stage which I feel is an essential part of community development.
It can be hard work educating people who do mot network easily. It is time consuming when trying to tap into networks initially - to become accepted, etc or when trying to set up new networks.

Some limitations Some members of networks do not effectively 'network' with others so the original network can become a closed group rather than a network. Some groups, esp. disadvantaged groups may be fearful of networking esp. if professionals are involved - may be seen as intrusive.

John M
I think we need to distinguish between what constitutes a network and what constitutes a relationship. "Networking" is becoming a loose meaning word and I think is mistaken for he forming of a relationship. Often at conferences, at the social activity time, delegates are said to be "networking" when they pull out their diaries and say "yes, I can manage such a such a date to talk about social services referrals of homeless people". This could be two people or more. These contacts have the capability of becoming "knowing who is who" relationships. Like our community workers group mentioned above this is a relationship group that has become a node that features in our respective personal networks. We three are 'link pins' at this node. A relationship could represent the informal aspect of "networking" whilst networking could represent the fomal disciplined structure which is adopted by many voluntary organisations/networks.

I am arguing that a relationship occurs first; the informal aspect before the formalisation. This might be the starting point of a future network, or the latch mechanism to an existing

network. Without this process, one of the community worker's "tricks of the trade", many steering groups exploring the feasibility of forming into future organisations would not come to fruition. Like a Community Centre - people come together with a common activity purpose. Once this has been agreed then the affiliation and communication process begins to join an appropriate network. Some of this though depends upon the calibre (the strength of the contribution made by the participants) of the relationship.

Indecision could lead to inequality and weakness, and possible failure of the attempt to form an organisation. Community-wide this would also account for why some communities are better-off than others. There is a "capacity" element, that is the ability to associate and communicate whether it is to forma relationship or to join a network. This means that lack of association prevents a community from expressing united and corporate views. To the community worker, "networking" is "second-nature" and through this the worker is able to cross relationship/network boundaries (even extend them). I am sure that many of these relationship/informal encounters are not recorded and a wealth of experience, ideas and practice innovations is lost and this works to community disadvantage.

As a youth worker, I was always told "if you want to solve a problem find the true group leader causing the problem". I think this also holds in community development and the community worker should pass on his/her "networking" attributes to lead community groups to help them develop their own "capacity". Along with activity development (the task element)is the personal development aspect of group members . As well as skills audits, assessing the contribution that group members might or might not be able to make to a relationship/network, maybe there is a need for mapping "affiliation" networks to find the link pins. Discovery of these can lead to tracing expertise and sometimes the link pin person does not realise they posses a certain attribute but others do.

Anne P
Time consuming. Consulting, negotiating. Discussion. Talk time. Often management/staff feel that the time would be better spent developing our own work as opposed to developing networks.

Frances B
I'd say networks are **essential** for community development. However the main problems include:
- lack of time, cost (if it involves travel/training), lack of priority (ie not high priority) (can become too task oriented or too focused on own geographical area/own area of knowledge), competition for funding (can lead to not wanting to share information/knowledge), short-term projects/short-term employment.

<u>8) Any other comments ? (use more paper if necessary)</u>

Keib T
Alison - my apologies for missing your deadline. I was writing the attached report on my recent networking visit to India for BASSAC/ISF. I presented it yesterday. Hope I'm forgiven.

Susan M
I think gender, race and other identity politics (eg. age, class, disability, sexual identity) make a huge difference and has impact on workable networks. And when/where the informal networking takes place is also exclusive/excluding re: childcare if in a pub, late - teetotallers, people who (don't ?) smoke are put at a disadvantage.

Gerald R
—

Caroline K

—

Chris T

- None at this stage. (It might be appropriate for me to send you more background literature on community development practice in the authority where I am based. If you require more details on the policy framework and background papers on local initiatives please request them ?)

Greg S

Are nets just holes surrounded by string -or a single string arranged in an interesting structure.

Pete H

Hope this is OK Alison. I've been quite busy recently so your questionnaire has been filled in at the last minute. Sorry. Sorry. Sorry. See you soon.

Gary S

I can't work without networks therefore they need to be rationalised and practice guidelines worked out.

Lynda McM

Alison- I'm very pleased to be participating with your research and hope you find my contributions useful !! I have just started studying on a day release basis for the certificate of Higher Education in Social Studies at University College Stockton, so I am hoping that this new network will also prove positive for me. Good luck with your research and I look forward to hearing from you again.

Terri D

I am finding at present that a network I am just getting into but also supporting as a community development worker, are very accepting of me because so far I have helped them move forward in ways they agree with. But I am now about to recommend that they do not do something they wanted to because it is not appropriate - this may affect my "place" in the network for a while.

John M

John also attached an article he had written called "networker". The main points are that informal approaches help cut through the red ape of bureaucratic structures to make changes in the organisation. Also that effective networking happens on an unplanned basis, leading to a series of'spin-offs' (eg.meeting up with former tutor in Israel). Also formation of Thurrock CVS, which has about 45 members and has resulted in new initiatives and joint working, esp, between local authority and vol. sector. Talks about involvement in SCCD as a link pin intermeshing with and thereby influencing other networks eg.Community Matters, FCWTGs and youth leader working party.

Concludes article by asserting that we need "affiliation audits" to identify missed opportunities for drawing in expertise and advice. "Drawing a sketch map might help - we are all link pins".

Frances B

I'm sure there are lots of other networks I use but I can't think of them right now - as this questionnaire is already late! Problems = lack of time/not high work priority !! SORRY.

Appendix O

The material sent to Panelists for the critical incidents recordings

Networking and Networks:

Community Development

in Practice

Panel Study - Stage 2

CRITICAL INCIDENTS RECORDINGS

Definitions

NETWORKING INCIDENT - an interaction which may be deliberate or unplanned which contributes to the development of your work or which you think you may be able to use at a later date for a more specific purpose. There is an outcome as a result of the contact or exchange which contributes positively or usefully to community development.

NETWORKING - the creation, maintenance and use of links and relationships between individuals and/or organisations

NETWORK - a set of inter-connected 'agents' and the pattern of relationships between them

FORMAL - based on a collectively agreed structure and procedures

INFORMAL - operates without explicit rules

These are working definitions only and may well change during the course of the research project. Your comments are welcome. My main point is that networks can be formally organised or exist informally through personal links. Similarly networking can be conducted using formal and informal connections.

Examples of networking incidents

* Chance encounters and conversations with someone already known to you

* Approaching someone (a stranger) who you think may be useful to you

* Sharing some time and ideas with a colleague or friend (eg. over a cup of coffee or a pint)

* Overhearing conversations containing relevant information

* Being introduced to someone by a mutual acquaintance

* Putting someone in touch with someone else

* Striking up conversation with someone after a meeting or during a break

* Contacting someone you know because you think they might be able to put you in touch with someone you need to know

* Attending an event or venue because you expect to meet with useful people or to make new contacts

Examples of useful outcomes

* Got to know someone (better)

* Gave information about my work

* Gained support for my project

* Influenced a decision in 'my' favour

* Received personal reassurance and encouragement

* Learnt useful new information

* Saw another point of view

* Got a sense of the issues

* Got some advice

* Was able to make use of someone else's equipment

* Found out who I needed to contact about something

* Changed my opinion about something

* Was able to pass on some information

Was able to offer support to someone else

* Arranged a more formal meeting with others

Networking and Networks:

Community Development

in Practice

NAME:

CRITICAL INCIDENTS RECORDINGS

For each incident, tell the story in your own words of what happened, who was involved in the encounter or conversation, how the connection was made and what you think the outcomes are. Indicate both long-term as well as short-term benefits.

Try to write the story in about 500 words or using two sides of A4.

Ideally I would like you to include approximately 10 incidents which were planned and 10 incidents which occurred by 'accident'. It would also be useful to give a range of settings, not all of which are directly related to work.

Return to Alison Gilchrist, 34, Heron Road, Easton, Bristol BS5 0LU by July 31st 1997. Tel: 0117 951 027

(20 identical pages each with the following)

Incident:

Date:

It may be useful for you to use the questions below to guide your story.

What happened ?

Where did the interaction take place ?

Did it happen in 'work' time ?

Who was involved apart from yourself ?

What was the basis for the connection ? (eg. friendship, colleagues, introduced by someone else, etc.)

To what extent was it planned ?

What did you do to create or make use of this opportunity ?

What was significant or useful for you as an individual ?

How do you think it will benefit (or hinder) your work ?

What did you feel about the incident ?

What (if anything) do you think might happen as a result of this interaction ?

Any other comments ?

Appendix P

Critical Incidents Recordings - Main Themes

13 on panel. * indicates those who responded to the SCCD article. The others were all approached directly by me.

Number of incidents submitted

AP	11
JM	20
PH*	9
MW*	12
LM*	20
GrS*	16
CT*	20
TD*	12
GS*	9
SM	5
KT*	34
FB	10

Outcomes/functions

Creating new connections

Creating space for connections to be made, suggesting contacts, making links - AP1, AP3, AP10, PH2, PH7, GS4, GS6, SM5, GrS9, GR12b, TD2, CT16, MW6, LM1, LM3, LM5, LM9, LM14, LM16, LM17

Making referrals, introductions - TD5, TD10, LM19, LM3, LM9

Setting up the contact for future communication and collaboration - SM3, SM5, GrS8, TD2, TD4, TD5, TD7, TD8, TD10, CT15, MW2, MW5, MW12, LM1, LM8, LM12, LM17, LM19, LM20, AP6, AP7, FB1, FB9, FB10

Access to new contacts and resources - AP5, AP7, GS7, GrS2, GrS7, GrS15, MW6, LM1, LM4, LM10, LM11, LM15, FB8

Consolidating/implementing opportunities for collaboration

Clarifying possibilities/roles for collaboration - AP1, AP2, AP4, GS8, GS9, SM1, SM3, GrS1, GrS7, GrS10, GrS11, GrS14, GrS15, TD6, CT4, MW3, LM7, LM11, LM13, FB7

Identifying mutual interests, shared values, common experience or need - AP3, AP6, AP8, PH9, GS4, GS8, GrS15, TD8, LM13, LM15, FB4, FB10

Exchange/exploration/affirmation of ideas, cross-fertilisation - GrS2, GrS4, GrS8, GrS16, CT17, AP3, AP6

Planning specific pieces of work, allocation of tasks and responsibilities - CT8

Setting up a further meeting - SM2, MW7, AP2, AP9

Spreading the workload, access to other people to help - JM6, GS8?, GrS6, CT4, LM4, LM6, FB1

Sharing the blame/glory/risk - GS1

General liaison and relationship maintenance

Developing and improving inter-agency liaison, multi-disciplinary understanding - CT1, TD12, CT6, CT11, CT12, CT13

Consolidating, improving/broadening relationships, staying in touch - AP1, AP11, PH2, PH6, PH8, PH9, GS6, SM4, GrS3, GrS10, GrS16, TD8, CT18, CT19, MW4, MW8, MW9, LM5, LM12, LM16, LM18, LM19

Offering/finding support and encouragement - CT7, MW1, LM6, AP11, FB4

Team-building, feeling comfortable, trust-building - AP1, GS6, MW4, LM14, AP2, PH6, PH9, MW8

Showing hostility/appreciation (ie. emotional attitudes) - JM17, JM19, GrS5

Learning about others' attitudes, hidden agendas, etc. - MW1, MW4, LM9

Giving/receiving professional feedback - TD7, LM3

Reporting back on or catching up with developments - CT10, CT15, CT20, LM17

Public relations

Establishing, maintaining credibility/profile - GrS8, TD1b, TD5, TD7, MW1, MW9

Promoting/explaining own work or own organisation - AP2, AP5, AP8, AP9, PH8, SM2, SM3, GrS14, TD1, TD10, LM2, LM4, LM11, LM20

Canvassing for work - SM4, SM5, GrS1, AP2, AP8

Enhancing foundation for one's own practice

Gaining knowledge about another's organisation or work - SM4, GrS9, GrS12, LM3, LM5, LM8, LM20

Reinforcing and updating knowledge (picking someone else's brains), sharing info - JM15, PH1, PH2, PH3, GS7, GrS10, GrS15, TD8, CT8, MW11, LM2, LM8, LM12, LM16, LM19, FB4

Getting the bigger picture, awareness of power and emotional dynamics in wider context - JM19, GS6, GrS13b, TD12, MW1

Awareness raising; seeing things from a different perspective, identifying a practice issue; gaining an insight - TD2, TD3, TD9, MW1, MW5, LM7, LM13, FB8

Recruiting allies/collaborators around a particular issue, identifying potential new members/activists - PH4, SM2, TD2, TD6, CT3, CT15, LM2, LM3, LM11, LM20, AP5, FB8, FB10

Bringing forward (serendipitously) a task, conversation or piece of work - GrS3?, TD4, MW1

Using existing contacts to gain access to expertise/resources/information - CT18, LM15, FB3, FB5, FB6, FB9

Shared Learning

Group learning/ training - CT11

Learning from the experience of others - AP3, GS5, (LM1), LM4, LM14

Comparing experiences - JM9, GS4, TD8, MW1, MW3, LM13, AP3

Consultation and co-ordination

Opportunity to raise and respond to specific issues; forum for consultation - CT6, LM12

Bringing together different interests to reach consensus - CT2, CT13, MW7

Influencing decisions

Improving confidence/assertiveness of self and/or others - JM6, GS4, TD5

Persuasion/influence to a preferred course of action - JM20, GS3, TD9, CT14, FB6

Improving decision-making - GS6, MW7

Making suggestions and recommendations - PH5, GS3, TD12, LM16

Dealing with risky situations

Checking out uncertainties - JM7, GS3

Exploring difficult issues/contentious issues - JM14, PH1, PH6, GS2, GrS10, GrS11, TD7, TD9, CT3, CT5, CT17, MW5, MW10, LM7, LM12

Passing on awkward requests or unratifiable information - JM13, MW4, LM12, FB2, FB9

Finding out the unexpected - JM16

Circumstances

In work time

Work-related social gatherings (leaving-do's, lunches within or after meetings, liaison socials, launching ceremonies, open days, breakfasts at residentials, after AGMs) - AP9, AP6, GS3, MW9, LM19, AP3, FB7, FB8

Regular meeting - GrS9, GrS16, TD8, CT5, CT10, CT17, MW7, MW11, LM15

Conferences/training event/seminar - SM4, GrS8, GrS12, CT1, CT8, CT11, MW6, LM14, AP10

Planned contact/visit/meeting - GS9, GrS3, CT4, CT16, CT19, LM6, LM12, AP2, AP8, FB1, FB6

Organised exchange - GS4

Convened or requested meeting in an informal setting - GS8, GrS7, GrS10, CT2, CT3, MW10, GS2

Calling in - GS6, LM7

Telephone research - GS7, TD10, LM9, FB9

Electronic (e-mail, internet) - GrS4, GrS6

Expanding a conversation, task, visit - GS6, JM20, TD3, LM12, LM20, FB2, FB3, FB4

Community activity; handing out leaflets with telephone contact; chatting to members of the public, registering attendance; survey of residents - TD2, TD3, TD5, LM2, LM18, AP5

Indirectly Work-related

Chance conversations eg. on street/related premises whilst undertaking work related tasks - GrS1, GrS12b, TD7, CT20, MW5, LM10

On the way to/from meetings - JM6, MW3

Chatting after meetings - JM7, PH1, MW8, LM13

Overhearing conversations - PH3, LM12

Leisure activities

Pubs - AP4

Holiday/leisure encounters SM2, SM5, AP7

Non-work activity (shopping, children playing, school concert, festival event, Scout AGM, etc) - TD6, CT15, LM11, LM16, LM17

Non-work activity (political affiliation, education course) - MW2, MW12, FB5, LM5

Walking home/paths crossing - FB10

Nature of the link

Serendipity (Public) - TD9

Referral - TD10

Friendship - MW4, AP4

Convenience - LM7

Colleague - MW3, MW11, FB2, FB3

Official capacity/role - Gr5, TD1, TD7, MW10, FB1

Ex-colleagues - SM2, SM3, Grs12b, LM12, LM15

Previous experience of over-lapping work, contacts - GrS6, GrS1, GrS7, GrS10, TD6, TD8, TD11, LM7, FB7, FB10

Common interest group - GrS16, MW2, MW12, LM5

Connection through someone else - LM16, AP7

Neighbour - FB9

Other Issues

Being aware of people's 'other hats' - GrS10, TD11

Shared membership of non-work-related activity - GrS1

Mutual connection - GrS3

Meeting outside work contexts allows a more equal exchange - TD7

Individual relationships support inter-organisational collaboration - AP1

Accusations of 'social climbing', manipulation - TD7

Impact of informal/social relationships - AP2, AP4, AP6, PH4, TD8

Maintaining reciprocity - TD8

Positive links allow difficult issues to be addressed - TD8

Being confronted with painful experiences - TD9

Storage and retrieval of contacts (memory, records) - TD10

Persistence and strategy - TD11

Risk-taking, investment - TD11

[Confidentiality, esp. inter-agency ? - FB9]

Lack of time, failure to prioritise - CT10

Blurring of work and personal identities/roles - MW2, MW12

Informal networks as subversive, hidden forces on formal decision-making procedures - MW4

Style and venue of meetings can influence ease of discussion and networking - MW7, MW8, MW10

Need to be conscious of one's approach to 'mingling' - MW9

Opportunities for PR - AP11

Gaining access to agencies which are better resourced or have higher status in order to harness their 'clout' to the initiative - FB1

Appendix Q

Questions/topic guide for individual interviews

(Aiming for 90 minutes of recorded conversation)

1. Do you think you are a 'good networker' ?

2. Can you state what you do when first establishing contact with someone ?

3. What do you do to consolidate and maintain your (work) relationships ?

4. What do you do when things get difficult ?

5. What would you say were the main skills for effective networking ?

6. Would you say that you are strategic in how you network with others ?

7. What personal qualities (in your character, values system, professional style, etc.) do you use to support your networking ?

8. What community development principles do you try to bear in mind which might relate to your professional role ?

9. How can you tell whether your networking is effective ?

10. How do you think it contributes to the development of the communities you work with?

11. Are there aspects of community development which you believe are not amenable to networking ?

12. What do you think are the benefits of networking for community development ?

13. Anything else you would like to add ?

(26th November 1997)

Appendix R

Summary and main themes from the individual interviews

Purposes and functions of networking

Developing profile and reputation for the individual or organisation
Access to a range of experience and expertise, not starting from scratch, not re-inventing the wheel (several, inc. GS), learning from other people's mistakes (PH), failures (FB)
Drawing in other perspectives and angles
Having an overview of the landscape, a map and knowing where you fit into that (MW), gaining a sense of self within the community (SM)
Relationships and contacts as the main resource (GS)
Developing a holistic approach, Gestalt (JM)
Having local knowledge (LM)
Gaining clarity, especially in complex or conflictual situations, exploring differences (MW), making sure everyone knows what's going on (GS), risk-taking, exploring difficult issues (informal settings)
Mutual education
Allowing a number of voices/views to be articulated/formalised (KT) during consultation processes
Empowerment - information and influence
Collective action
Building alliances
Lobbying in order to make concerted progress on an issue
Ensuring representation and participation
Enhancing democratic processes
Social engineering - putting people in touch with one another, selecting people to be on committees, etc. Nurturing 'rising stars'.
Bringing in the right mix of skills, views, influences (KT, FB)
Acting as a fulcrum, influencing decisions indirectly
Preparing the ground for collaboration and formal partnerships
Facilitates multi-agency approaches and better co-ordination, esp. when tensions or crises arise
Links across sectoral or departmental boundaries (PH) esp. policy officers and funders hearing views of 'grassroots' people
Off the record advice (PH), advocacy, opinion-giving, etc
Identifying issues, generating the work (GS)
Seedbed for other initiatives to emerge
Challenging insularity (GS)
Finding support for the isolated worker, safety net, shoulder to cry on (PH)
Non-managerial supervision, checking out (GS)
Keeping in touch with reality, ordinary experience (GrS, KT)

Networking as a technique/competence *(skills and methods)*

Communication - listening, attending, asking questions, encouraging people to talk about themselves
Seeing the whole person, showing a genuine interest
Using body language and non-verbal communication to discern emotions, picking up vibes (LM) and to convey own feelings and motivations
Making people feel comfortable, at ease, establishing a rapport
Levelling the playing field (MW), acknowledging diff. abilities and levels of understanding (GS)
Information technology - e-mailing, database of contacts

Telephoning for initial contact, but importance of face-to-face meetings (PH), emotional content
Information storage: recording and retrieval - memorising tactics, card index, notebooks, diaries, address books
Sharing information - business cards, leaflets, newsletters
Making oneself memorable, having an impact (TD), putting oneself in situations where I'll be noticed (SM)
Following-up conversations (GS), staying in touch; not just dipping in and out, 'reminding people that I'm still there' (LM)
Recognising familiarity - names, faces and context, details, trivia, personal touches
Networking as a 'natural' tendency (TD), second-nature (FB), instinct, personality (LM)
But also learning from experience - sales and marketing (TD), working with people (LM), etc.
Gender difference - learnt as a result of early upbringing (LM, FB)
Noticing people on the 'edge' of gatherings and bringing them in (LM, TD)
Holistic approach - ability to analyse and synthesise, make connections, esp. identifying and targeting key people (GS)
Finding the common ground, assessing the similarities (SM)
Multi-tasking - juggling lots of projects, information, plate-spinning
Educated guesses - seeking out possibilities (GS), it just happens

Personal style and qualities

Having a good sense of 'self' and one's own values, being grounded, good early childhood experiences
Knowing who you are and using that, carefully and consciously (MW)
Clarity around personal boundaries, but not feeling restricted by job titles, going outside your usual circle (SM), stretching the boundaries (JM)
Being friendly, but not a friend (KT)
Reliability, carrying out commitments
Being trustworthy, personal integrity, telling the truth (GS)
Honesty, straightforwardness (TD), sincerity (PH), genuineness, consistency (LM, GS)
Optimism and positive outlook, having faith in humanity (GS et al)
Clarity around professional role and agenda (MW, PH, etc)
Non-judgmental, accepting (LM)
Caring, compassionate, commitment to people/customers
Approachable, popular, charming, warm, friendly, welcoming, sociable, informal but not casual (JM)
Happy talking, chatting over cups of tea, whatever
Being adaptable, able to relate to a range of people - making them feel comfortable, not specialist
Confidence (LM) or 'being in the right mood' to approach strangers (PH)
Willingness to take risks, stick one's neck out, being a bit cheeky or cockiness (TD, SM), aiming high within hierarchies (LM)
Assertiveness (GS, JM)
Openness to the experiences and ideas of other cultures (LM). fascination with mix (GrS, KT)
Valuing pluralism. Having a 'broadness of spirit'. Not being 'defensive'.
Empathy
Intuition, picking up on 'vibes' (LM)
Willingness to share (resources and information)
Maintaining reciprocity within relationships, not being exploitative, mutuality, exchange, giving and returning favours
Being supportive and helpful
Often with 'behind the scenes' role, the 'goal-keeper, safety-net, willingness to 'muck-in', enjoying being a generalist

having a good sense of the group or team
Willingness to learn from others
Having experienced other cultures and professional disciplines (KT, GS, LM, TD, MW, etc.)
Respect and appreciation of difference
Curiosity, nosiness about other people
Informal style, adapting to others' expectations in dress, language, etc.
Prepared to face up to conflicts and controversies (MW, LM), being critical or contentious (JM), challenging and not afraid to ask awkward questions, rock the boat (KT), gras[ping the nettle (GS)
Able to find the common ground and compromise where necessary (LM), non-confrontational (GS)
Being flexible and adaptive to changing circumstances
Not being happy within bureaucracies (GrS), maverick individualists ? not organisational people (GrS)
Choosing a career that allows these talents to be used constructively (SM, LM, FB)
Enjoying bringing people together, relishing diversity and complementarity

Role and strategies adopted by the community worker

Personal disclosures, building trust, faith, enabling people to get to know me (TD), allowing the sussing out (KT)
Saying difficult things using informal settings or impersonal means (GS)
Using humour (LM), fun and enjoyment; having a laugh (TD), sharing a joke (MW)
Establishing links and relationships through outreach and community exploration - laying a foundation, reaching critical stage
Preparation and research - finding out what useful connections might be made, establishing possibilities, creating opportunities, targeting individuals
Planning actions, but making it seem casual (LM), allowing one to make mistakes (TD)
Having a long-term vision
Expressing passion, commitment and enthusiasm
Attraction - love, liking, even passion, chemistry, bond
Seeing organisation or project development as a phased activity, and being tactical about who to involve at different stages and when to share information and tasks
Anticipating or identifying possible connections, drawing people in, sheep-dog impression
Being pro-active in research and contacts - arranging visits, asking for information, etc.
Clarity about role and responsibilities, professional agendas
being an 'outsider', esp. conflicts and antagonisms (PH, LM, GS)
Being available, ubiquitous, having a presence
Giving time and attention to people
Being opportunistic in using encounters, contacts
Following-up contacts with definite action or agreements (JM, LM, TD)
Analysing power dynamics within groups and networks; and working with/against these,
Finding the right level to 'equalise' the encounter as far as possible
Being at the hub of a communication web, acting as an information conduit/resource, flower centre point with petals around (JM)
Keeping in touch with lots of people, but recognising limitations (LM, KT, FB) so...
Especially those that are at the hub of other networks (KT, FB)
Network maintenance: Keeping relationships ticking over, visiting rather than phoning or posting something, passing through, waving (MW,TD, LM), phoning up for a chat (GS), even when there is no immediate task or issue (GS)
Checking out with 'ordinary', grassroots experience
Suggest, steer and encourage, but not try to lead or control
A facilitator rather than a doer (LM)
Being aware of current issues and dynamics, trouble-shooting
Acting as a link-pin (JM) between networks and organisations, networking the networks (KT)

Broker, interpreter for 'community',intermediary, directives from local government
Providing leadership (from the fringe (JM) or from the midst ?), *standing firm in the middle* (KT)
Convening meetings
Attending conferences, workshops and meetings and being pro-active in making contacts with other participants (checking attendance lists and targeting specific individuals, depending on *work in hand*) (KT, JM)
Seizing opportunities, picking up on incidentals, off-the-cuff remarks
Infiltrating, influencing decision-making not otherwise privy to
Seeking connections and establishing commonalities, enabling people to make the links themselves (PH, LM), organising visits (GS), introducing people to one another, suggesting contacts, giving names and addresses
Organising mailing systems
Noticing and passing on useful information to others (GS, KT, LM)
Co-ordinating new developments
Dealing with disagreements, through mediating, brokering

Monitoring and evaluating effectiveness

Feedback from others mainly, thanks for suggestions, being invited to other forums (KT), 'warm fuzzes'(GrS), sense of being appreciated (GrS), asked for information and help (GS, GrS, LM)
Hearing about connections that have been made (GrS, TD, KT)
There's all this buzz going on (TD)
Reviewing levels and range of contact across one's 'patch' (MW)
Pruning the network to a manageable, but critical mass (KT)
Being self-aware - balance between personal interests and professional roles
Investing in relationships for long-term gain - time and effort (MW), laying the foundations for future work (TD)
Problems with justifying, proving the effectiveness of networking to managers, funders, etc (TD, LM)
Slow starting (TD)
Uneasy balance between getting things done and not getting them done (MW)
Unpredictability
Invisibility of outcomes - feeling the process happening (TD), being part of it, becoming part of the landscape (MW)
Un-attributable interventions
Emphasis on dynamic process - organic image, growing, nurturing, sap, not glue (KT)
Learning, connecting, empowering, self-determining

Networks as a resource, a form of organisation

Encouraging co-operation, rather than competition
Maximising potential, synergy
Complementarity of skills, knowledge, etc.
The whole being greater than the sum of its parts
Limitations - 40 ?
Working groups of 6 - 8
Very light structures, fluid and flexible
Referrals through personal contact and recommendation
Access to information and resources (KT)
Liaison across different levels and sectors
Establishing layers of contacts
Crossing organisational boundaries
Non-market solutions to problems, addressing needs
Alliances

Use of external networks (churches, political affiliations, family connections, recreational activities)
Making sure everybody gets heard (GS)
Information is power (GS, LM)

Developing communities through networking

Countering tendencies towards social fragmentation and individualism
Mixing, breaking down barriers - exciting
Helping people to share, to break down isolation
Safety, trust, awareness, understanding
Solidarity in the face of adversity and oppression, finding allies
Mobilisation around common cause (TD), developing a voice, relating to sources of power (MW)
Principle of sustainability
Not encouraging dependency, working towards withdrawal from the beginning
Involvement and ownership (GS)
Self-sufficiency, self-advocacy and resourcefulness (TD, MW)
Establishing or opening up communication channels
Widening horizons (LM), making connections with other experiences, seeing the wider picture (PH), getting a broad spectrum of experience together - contrast and compare (KT)
Creating patterns of contact, of activity (MW)
Encouraging/supporting people to attend meetings
Interweaving diff. talents and interests around shared concerns
Networking as fundamental to the process of community development
Progressing an issue or project, couldn't do the work without it esp. as lone workers with few resources
Accessing resources and influence - short cuts
Gathering and communicating useful information, not formal research
Contrasted with one-to-one work (casework, advocacy, counselling, sensitive negotiation)
Identifying training needs, but not delivering workshops or courses

Issues and constraints

Being aware of status differentials
Tensions with equal opportunities mechanisms and principles, reputation, recommendation, referrals, responding, good will (putting oneself out for those you know and like)
Need to be inclusive, but also recognise identity-based self-organisation which are empowering
Cliques - excluding people
Ethical questions - honest professional interaction (SM, KT)
Abuse of power - doing 'deals', maintaining privilege
Manipulative ? (PH) Unease at 'using' connections (LM) or people (GS)
Starting small and building up from initial contacts . It's the how of the process, not always the who ? Knowing at what stage to open things out. (MW, TD)
Things going wrong if the foundations of relationships aren't put in (LM)
Managing uncertainty, chaos (FB), unpredictability
Formal structures, protocols and procedures can inhibit networking (FB), but are sometimes necessary (MW)
Partnership arrangements which lack clarity over responsibilities resulting in a blaming culture and inter-agency confusions (FB)
Tensions with line-managers (GrS, LM, TD, MW)
Accountability (MW, et al)
Rigidity of statutory and legal requirements
Increasing pressures on time for informal, unplanned or social interactions (FB, LM)
Work overload - being too responsive, too available (LM)

Having too much information, burn-out (SM)
Competition around funding
Emphasis on outputs and targeted performance criteria
The random (chaotic) nature of chance encounters
Destiny, serendipity or strategy ?
Confidentiality around very personal information
Working with fundamentalist dogmas (GrS, MW)
Importance of feelings, gut reactions (GS, SM) hunches, rather than conscious, evidence-based analysis
Emotions - affinity (SM), personal friendships (GrS, MW)
Impact of shared values (GS)
Professional meeting goers, an excuse not to do the work (GS)
Is networking a natural, in-born instinct, talent ? Are there natural-born networkers ? (SM, GS, etc) or is it a capacity that is learnt through early experience ?

Reflections on the research process

Not being aware of networking as a conscious process before
Having to think about own actions and motives (LM, SM, TD, etc)
Pulling out, flushing out the theory
Excitement of recognition and increased awareness
Pleased to be contributing to the research project
Need to make the effectiveness more conscious more explicit
Feeling validated, legitimising the craft, professional strategy

Implications for practice

Long-term perspectives
Relationship building - not just communication, wariness around IT as a replacement for opps. for face-to-face interaction
Training and awareness
Monitoring and evaluation

Appendix S

Preamble and topic guide for focus group discussion

Attendance: Lynda, Keib, Sue, Pete, Fran, John, Terri

Focus: On the purpose, principles, processes and practices of networking within the context of community development

Groundrules: The session will last approximately two hours and will be audio-tape recorded. It is helpful if people try not to interrupt one another and for only one person to talk at once. There will be time at the beginning for brief introductions and time at the end for questions about the research generally. Confidentiality will be respected in terms of the individual contributions, though, of course, the whole discussion will provide material for the research project.

The purpose of the group discussion will be to explore in greater depth a few of the main themes that have emerged from the different stages of the Panel Study. I am therefore interested to hear different opinions about some of the issues that have been raised and am not expecting to establish a consensus around any particular questions.

The 'interview' will be guided through the following topics, using roughly the questions indicated. My role will be to 'steer' the conversation and make sure that everyone is able to participate in the discussion. I may be fairly directive in focusing the group and moving from one topic to the next, in order that we cover the main issues in the time available.

At the end, everyone is invited to an informal 'de-briefing' over lunch (my treat) in a nearby cafe. Hope you can all come.

<u>Topic Guide</u>

A) **Brief introductions** Your name and current involvement in community development. Why did you become involved in this research project ?

B) **Maintaining your networks** Is this a conscious, strategic process or something that happens 'naturally' ? How do you justify the time and effort that you invest in networking ? How do you manage your accountability within different (and sometimes overlapping) networks ? In what ways do you review and evaluate the effectiveness of your networking ?

C) **Facilitating inter-agency communication and collaboration** How does informal networking contribute to the development of collective organisation and partnership arrangements ? In what ways is it different from formal liaison ? How is networking used to bring together the 'right mix' of participants ? How is it used to resolve conflicts ?

D) **Appreciating diversity, managing uncertainty** Is the current emphasis on networking a useful response to the changing nature of community development ? How do networks contribute to the co-ordination of fragmented activity ? Are they effective in promoting co-operation rather that competition ? What is the relationship between informal networks and the development of 'a sense of community' ?

E) **Power and inequalities** How do networks reflect or perpetuate social inequalities ? How can networking be used to empower those who are excluded or marginalised in decision-making processes ? What power do you exercise in your networking ?

F) **Recommendations for 'good practice'** Do you think networking is a 'natural talent' or could it be improved through training and greater professional awareness ? How can the effectiveness of networking processes be enhanced and demonstrated ? What would you say were the core values or principles of 'ethical' networking ?

G) **Reflections on the research process** How do you feel about having participated in this project ? Do you feel that you have personally gained from your involvement ? How do you feel you have contributed to the development of networking theory ? Are there any questions about any aspect of the Panel Study ? Are there any concerns about how I am going to use the material for my Ph.D. or for publication ?

Appendix T

Themes and issues from the focus group discussion – summary sent to Panelists
(April 1998)

The Process
The group discussion involved seven of the research panel members and took place at the end of end of SCCD's annual conference in Brighton. All the participants had been sent or given a copy of the topic guide before the session and those not coming to the group were telephoned in the week before to find out if they had any specific comments or questions that they wanted to feed in to the group discussion. Two of the group were not conference participants but traveled to Brighton especially to take part in the discussion.

The discussion lasted two and a half hours, with one participant arriving late (train delayed) and another having to leave early. The group was seated around an oval table, each person having a name card displayed in front of them and with access to refreshments throughout the session. Two tape recorders were used with pressure microphones, placed towards either end of the table. A volunteer assistant took notes of the non-verbal interactions and also recorded the order of speaking to aid the subsequent transcription. She was introduced to the group and her role explained along with assurances of confidentiality.

The atmosphere was generally relaxed and there was active and focused engagement with the questions on the topic guide. Nearly everyone had read the report summarising the individual interviews and drawing out the main themes. Some people had prepared notes which they used to underpin their contributions. After the introductions, I encouraged people to think of the discussion as a debate, emphasising that I was interested in their disagreements as much as in finding areas of consensus. There were certainly areas of strong agreement, but also a number of issues of contention.

Networking as a core process
The main point of agreement was that networking was regarded as intrinsic to the community development process and that without it, other things that were more formally recognised as the purpose of community work jobs became difficult or impossible. In particular, great emphasis was given to the value of face-to-face interactions in building up trust and knowledge about people as individuals. Relationships were seen as the bedrock of the work, the foundation on which everything else was developed. Informal networks were characterised as the 'social infrastructure' of communities, the essence and core purpose of community development. It formed the basis of joint working, bringing people, ideas and resources together in order to achieve collective action or to develop sustainable partnerships.

An under-valued role
The group felt that the importance of informal networking was not sufficiently understood nor recognised by the 'decision-makers', those who fund, manage or monitor community work. There was general frustration expressed at the lack of investment in long-term generic community work, which would allow workers to build up and maintain their contacts in an area, and act as a resource to other agencies. People felt that where this had happened it was as a result of personal choice or circumstance rather than funding policy. Time was a significant factor in establishing a worker's credibility and knowledge-base within geographic communities and several people described how their work in an area over many years (seven, ten, eleven), often through a number of successive or overlapping jobs, had endowed them with a presence and function which could not have been acquired over the short-term. They had become a stable feature of the social and professional environment: a rock during times of upheaval, a fulcrum, a fountain of useful information, the key link between separate networks. In short, by using time, effort and skills

for informal networking which tended to go unacknowledged or were even criticised, they had become both a resource and a tool for others to use for a variety of higher profile projects and more tangible tasks.

There were mixed feelings about this role which most panelists embraced because they enjoyed it and found themselves to be effective in making links, which helped people to work together and get things done, both individually and collectively. One person argued that networking sometimes fell to the individual worker by default. It was vital to community development generally in an area, but often relied on the dedication of workers who were not tied to specific projects or lone workers in hard-pressed voluntary organisations. The flexibility and looser accountability of the generic community worker employed by a local development agency or intermediary body are dwindling commodities, whose disappearance may beginning to be regretted.

An investment for future developments

Certainly, there was considerable exasperation at the additional (invisible) burden this created for community workers who are still committed to this way of working. People felt their willingness to provide information was exploited and that they were often seen as the key people in networks to the extent that it was difficult to withdraw or 'sit out' for a while. Individuals felt they worked hard at creating or fostering the less convenient or comfortable links. They made efforts to stay in touch, to send apologies, to maintain their information systems, to take an interest; and that this commitment can result in feelings of being over-loaded or taken for granted. Mostly, networking was referred to as a core process of community development, though it appeared in no-one's job description. Putting people in contact with one another was mentioned as a particularly significant aspect. Constructing a 'good working group' involved knowing a lot of people and knowing a lot about them.

Limitations of formal organisations

Meetings were seen as useful opportunities to find out who was interested in what and to identify potential allies, but people were also quite sceptical about 'networking for networking's sake' and agreed that one measure of effective networking had to be action, making a difference to what happened next or in the medium term future. Rigidly structured organisations or events might appear to fulfil certain performance targets, but they masked or neglected the informal exchanges which accompanied or derived from such activities. They were seen as inadequate or restrictive and yet provided a vital forum or opportunity for informal networking. Initial connections were frequently made which could be followed up through more informal conversations.

The importance of relationships

There was a clear sense that it was the development of these more personal relationships, through which people grew to know and trust each other, which provided the strength, the durability, the flexibility of community-based organisations. But these had to be 'authentic', based on a reciprocal process of give and take and involving 'natural' rather than forced, strategic connections. Personal affinity between individuals was recognised as a crucial substrate, but it was felt that it was also important (and possible) to build effective links with people whom one didn't like, but who were necessary for the work. The theme of relationships, as contrasted with contact, connections or simply communication, reverberated throughout the discussion. Relationships underpinned people's dedication to their jobs, but also enabled people to undertake specific tasks by providing access to vital resources and influence which might not otherwise be available. Networking rendered the work achievable, sustainable and enjoyable.

There seemed to be three aspects to this. Firstly, networks incorporated elements of structural redundancy, especially where there were multiple lateral inter-connections ensuring that the removal of one strand (connection) or node (person) did not result in the collapse of the entirety. This has considerable value in the context of a sector plagued by

short-term employment contracts and reliant on the involvement of volunteer activists. Secondly, panelists noticed that their knowledge of the range of people involved in particular initiatives made them alert to potential friction and conflicts of interest. They could then intervene to ease the tension, obviate perceived competition, or pre-empt conflict before it flared to unmanageable proportions. Thirdly, relationships created the emotional and mental space for the community worker to encourage and support the involvement and development of individuals, especially those from the more marginalised sections of the community. Networking was a means of informal social education, encouraging wider participation and ensuring that people developed the contacts, the skills, the knowledge and the confidence to move into positions of collective leadership and assert their own perspectives.

Power and equality

Empowerment and challenging inequalities were identified as two of the fundamental purposes of community development, with networking seen contributing to both of these. It allowed and involved people in taking risks, infiltrating and subverting powerful cliques in order to expose them or create a state of mild chaos. Networking was seen as a vehicle for change, through mutual education or a more radical re-distribution of power. Networking could open up channels of communication and influence, revealing and disturbing existing patterns of privilege and decision-making. It assisted the self-organisation of oppressed groups and drew people into collective action within their local communities.

It formed a basis for the formation of multi-agency partnerships in which agencies drawn from across quite different sectors and organisational cultures were required to co-operate, each contributing their particular views, resources and motivations. It was argued that for communities to participate with any degree of equality, other partners need to both understand and respect community development as an approach to regeneration and/or service delivery. Informal networking with local authority officers and representatives of the private sector was used by panelists to explain and illustrate the principles and processes of community development. People were quite scathing of the kind of tokenistic behaviour that had become subsumed under the term 'networking', where this was felt to be short-term, superficial, expedient and exclusive. They felt that networking had become merely 'fashionable' or was reluctantly carried out because of the requirements of current funding regimes. Good practice, it was argued, incorporated certain values and involved a sense of long-term purpose, even if the outcomes could be only expected rather than predicted.

Underpinning values and principles

The group discussed what they understood as the ethics of networking used within a community development context. It was recognised that networks were as liable to create and perpetuate inequalities and sustain power elites. One view which seemed to hold sway was that networking itself is a neutral tool and can be used for good or evil, depending on the membership and their motivations. Socio-political inequalities (based on class, gender, 'race', etc.) were seen as reflected in and perpetuated by networks. An example from one city of male 'stitch ups' in particular pubs was readily echoed from workers in other cities. This elicited severe condemnation and assertion that one of the roles of the community development worker was to challenge these inequities and semi-covert 'dealings'. Good practice was about openness, integrity and inclusion - working towards the wider benefit of one's designated community or catchment area. However, it was recognised that there were implications in not 'joining in' with the dominant networks: missed opportunities to enter into dialogue with decision-makers or obtain those 'confidential' items of gossip or useful information. In order to gain access to these networks people either used alternative route to influence ("weaving a different web") or took risks which involved exposure to intimidating situations or criticism. There was also some debate about the principle of 'self-interest' and a recognition that community workers often assisted people experiencing oppression or a shared need to self-organise in order to address a common issue.

Networking as an acquired skill and conscious strategy

This issue generated lively discussion, mainly focused around the question of the extent to which networking was a 'natural' talent. There was some agreement that experience in childhood or early adulthood may equip or predispose someone to use networking as a strategy for finding support and seeking out potential collaborators. Parents were seen as important role models, especially where they had been involved in community activities, and kinship or community networks which had worked in providing a stable and secure background might well provide examples of effective 'multi-agency partnerships' in which trust, diversity and a shared common bond were the key ingredients.

Something of a paradox emerged in the debate, in that networking was regarded as highly intuitive and yet a learnt ability. Some people felt that it involved skills which could not be taught through formal training or categorisation. There was a strong resistance to formally categorising and monitoring the processes of networking in order to analyse the different 'competencies' involved. Functionally analysing networks or networking could be the 'kiss of death' by which this intangible patterns of human interaction would be bureaucratised into oblivion. Rather networking was seen as something which was learnt through example, imitation and reinforcement. The community worker was an important role model for community activists who should be actively encouraged to value and take responsibility for their own networking, by keeping their own information on useful contacts and valuing their existing skills in making and using connections within their families and communities. This was felt to be particularly relevant for women, who were often dependent on mutual support, especially whilst they had the major responsibility for young children.

The question of the extent to which networking could be deemed a conscious or strategic process was further explored and seemed also to reflect a gender difference. As in the individual interviews, the women in the group felt that their networking 'just happened', whilst the men appeared to see it as involving greater deliberation and planning. It was suggested that whilst the strategy might be conscious (identifying useful connections, responding to gaps in the web, etc.), the actual processes on building relationships needed to be natural, otherwise the links are perceived by those involved as false and worthless. The community worker might indeed be a catalyst in the interaction, in the sense of making things happen whilst remaining relatively unchanged, but they nevertheless had to be genuinely involved and to take responsibility for their own actions.

Developing theory from practice

Panelists expressed a very positive sense of having been involved in a project that would have important implications for community development practice. They felt they had benefited personally from the process, even though it had required a major commitment over the year. People felt that the stage of critical incidents recordings had been particularly demanding, but that it had helped them to reflect on their practice, identifying patterns in their work and tracing through processes of development from initial contacts to actual project outcomes. The minutiae of networking had become more visible, as had the broader purpose. People realised that it helped them to deal with complex and uncertain situations, and that their role in maintaining and servicing networks was crucial in ensuring that voluntary organisations survived in the current climate of social anomie and explicit competition for funding. Several mentioned that they felt validated by the research process and that it had improved their practice, by demonstrating the inter-connectedness of their working relationships and making them more strategic in addressing 'gaps' in their networks.

Panelists recognised both the importance and the difficulty of 'proving' the value of networking to managers and funders. Indeed for many this had been their initial motivation in contributing to the research project, hoping that it would provide clear evidence and theory with which to justify their own investment and skills in networking activities.

Even though it had been difficult and time consuming, people acknowledged the value of recording and reviewing networking incidents. But they mostly enjoyed the chance to talk about their practice in the individual interviews and group discussion. Oral communication was regarded as a strength for 'good networkers' and that these latter stages had been the culmination of a well-structured process.

Overall, individuals in the group felt affirmed through their involvement and that it had contributed to their professional development. They welcomed the idea of developing theory that was grounded in practice and hoped that it would go some way towards convincing others of the effectiveness of 'ethical' networking for community development.

Appendix U

Letter to Panelists with evaluation form

April 11th 1998

Dear

Re: Community Development and Networking

Enclosed is a copy of my report from the focus group discussion. I am happy to send a copy of the transcript to anyone who was at the session but since it is a 47 page document I hope you will understand that I have not sent it automatically, only to those who specifically request it.

I am about to embark on the next and final stage of my Ph.D. which is to write-up the findings into a coherent argument. I estimate that this will take me until August 1999 to complete the thesis for submission. I enclose a copy of the working abstract just for interest's sake, but if you have time, I would be interested in your comments.

In the course of preparing the thesis I intend to write at least a couple of short articles reporting on the preliminary findings for publication within the field (e.g. SCCD Newsletter, ACW Talking Points). I feel it is important to get the ideas circulated as soon as possible so that they are available to other people for application and constructive criticism. In particular, I am planning a piece on "Ethical and effective networking - good practice issues" and a more 'academic' article on the research process, looking at the rationale and methodology of the approach I used.

I am therefore asking you to do two last things for me. Please could you complete and send back as soon as possible the enclosed evaluation form which asks about your experience as a participant in the research project. Secondly, (and only if you are willing), could you sign the section which agrees for your name to be included as a member of the Panel. As I have said before, anonymity will be protected for specific contributions, but I would like to acknowledge and publicly thank each of you, and if appropriate, credit the support of your employing organisations.

I would be grateful if you could let me have these back by the end of April or very soon after Many thanks for this and everything else over the last year or more.

Best wishes,

Final Evaluation Form

Name:

Please indicate the extent to which you agree with each statement, by ringing a number (1 to 5) against each sentence. 5 means strongly agree; 1 means strongly disagree. If you have further comments, please just use the space underneath or write on the back.

1.	I understood the purpose of the research		5 4 3 2 1
2.	I was kept sufficiently informed at each stage		5 4 3 2 1
3.	I felt I could ask questions and make comments about the research process		5 4 3 2 1
4.	I felt I was participating in a collaborative investigation		5 4 3 2 1
5.	I will have contributed to the development of theory		5 4 3 2 1
6.	I feel that the project is applicable and relevant to fieldwork practice		5 4 3 2 1
7.	My own practice and awareness had benefited		5 4 3 2 1
8.	I enjoyed doing	the postal questionnaire	5 4 3 2 1
		the critical incidents	5 4 3 2 1
		the personal interview	5 4 3 2 1
		the group discussion	5 4 3 2 1
		generally being involved	5 4 3 2 1
9.	The overall design (the different stages) helped me reflect on and understand my use of networking		5 4 3 2 1
10.	I would be willing for my name to appear in the acknowledgements of the thesis and other publications		5 4 3 2 1

Signed: Date:

Appendix V

Article for SCCD Newsletter (October. 1998)

"Connectors and catalysts - effective and ethical networking for community development"

Members of SCCD may be aware that I have been conducting some research looking at networking as a core component of community development practice. This article reports briefly on those findings and puts forward a framework for an alternative approach to community development which I hope will stimulate discussion. I am proposing a re-formulation of community development which is primarily about the development of 'connections and relationships', rather than organisations, services or activities.

The model promotes the notion of the 'well-connected community' as the main purpose of community development. It

* acknowledges and works with the complexity of social life;
* emphasises the importance of inter-personal relationships and good communication;
* asserts the value of informal networking as an active and strategic intervention and
* identifies the key function for community development practitioners as creating the conditions and opportunities for people to make and maintain their own networks.

NETWORKING FOR LIFE

Networking is not a new activity. Nor is it something that relies on sophisticated computer technology. It is a natural and ancient aspect of human life which is fundamentally about the formation and maintenance of relationships. There is plenty of evidence which demonstrates that individuals who have robust social connections are less prone to physical and mental illnesses, recover more rapidly from emotional crises, and have a strong sense of their own identity (Pilisuk and Parks, 1986). These networks contribute to our survival as individuals and enable us develop collective problem-solving in a rapidly changing world

We use networks to manage our lives and co-ordinate joint activities. They help to make sense of the social environment and give us access to resources, information and expertise which might not otherwise be available through formal channels or market forces. Our experience of 'community' is essentially made up of these informal networks the chosen, accidental and given links with others that shape and colour our everyday lives

COMMUNITY AS A SHARED RESOURCE

The concept of 'community' is notoriously vague, yet currently very much in vogue. It involves certain levels of interaction amongst people who are connected through some kind of shared identity or common experience. But what is 'community' for ? Why do we (as individuals, workers, charities, the state) devote so much time and effort into 'developing' it ?

A sense of 'community' is often seen as a 'naturally desirable' aspect of human society. It makes us feel good and generally enables us to cope better with life. I would argue that it has a wider function which is about a capacity to process complex information and to co-operate across different interests and organisational boundaries. Communities which are 'well-connected' are better able to learn from experience and to organise themselves in response to conflicts and outside threats. The 'social capital' of communities is vested in the informal networks, providing important forms of social support and regulation. Community

networks can be effective channels for mobilisation and communication but are also oppressive for people who don't conform to shared norms and expectations. Links with powerful outside agencies are useful in that they enable communities to influence the decision-makers and to gain access to the resources they need

MANAGING COMPLEXITY

In an increasingly complex and dynamic society, networks allow communities to respond positively to unexpected changes in the social environment. The purpose of networking is to establish, extend and replenish the set of connections through which people learn from one another, exchange information, share ideas and resources, and develop co-operative strategies for accomplishing collective and individual goals. These networks are most effective in managing complex situations if they include links between a range of diverse elements and are connected into more stable and far-reaching sources of power and knowledge. This ensures that different perspectives and fresh information can be brought into the discussion, allowing a deeper understanding of situations and consequently more effective action. Open and equal relationships obviously contribute to this especially when they include a "critical diversity" of views and social identities

Community networks support the constant dialogue and reflection from which is generated collective intelligence, shared expertise and a sense of solidarity. These are the real strengths of 'community'. Furthermore networks often allow for a pooling of resources in times of hardship, and for risk to be distributed across a wider range of participants or activists. This is important if an agreed course of action involves significant costs or challenging the status quo.

NETWORKING IN PRACTICE

Over the past two years I have worked with a panel of thirteen community development practitioners to investigate the 'art and craft' of networking, specifically to find out how networking is used to promote empowerment and equality for disadvantaged groups. The research has involved a postal questionnaire, recordings of 'critical networking episodes', individual interviews and a focus group discussion. As anticipated the findings confirm the vital importance of networking to community development and further reveal the extent to which networking should be valued as core activity for all community workers. See Gilchrist (1995) for an initial exploration of these issues.

Community workers (and others) use networking in ways which are both skilled and strategic. Networking can be seen as a constellation of several related functions, which I shall refer to as the 11 M's. These are

* **mapping** the social and organisational landscape, tracking the links between people, power and resources, and identifying the blocks and barriers along the way;

* **making** contacts and **maintaining** inter-personal connections

* **managing** and **monitoring** the overall network, to be aware of ruptures and gaps in the community fabric, caused by personal antagonisms, local feuds or assumptions about who 'belongs' in the web

* **mending** and **merging** networks, often by acting as a **mediator** or go between in situations of prejudice or where direct links break down

Networks provide the crucial underlay for collective action and democratic decision-making within the broader social arena. Community workers are therefore involved in using networks to

- **motivate** and **mobilise** people to participate in consultation exercises, community activities and campaigns.

- The final 'm-word' is **moving on**, making sure that the links developed are independent of the worker's involvement, and can be used as springboard to new contacts and relationships.

BOUNDARY-SPANNING

An essential aspect of community development is to enable, empower and encourage people to form and sustain their own networks, to deal with tensions and to be bold in creating fresh, sometimes challenging links.

Many of these processes happen spontaneously, but potentially useful connections can sometimes be blocked or distorted by discrimination or social exclusion. Modern life often feels fragmented and dis-empowering, dominated by market forces and bureaucratic institutions. Networks provide a counter-balance to these, facilitating communication across psychological and organisational barriers. 'Assisted networking' by community development workers may involve formal liaison between the relevant agencies, but also requires substantial informal work building and maintaining good relationships amongst the individual participants.

INFORMAL SUPERVISION

For the research study, I used a definition of networking which emphasised "the creation, maintenance and use of links and relationships between individuals and/or organisations". I asked the community workers in my panel to describe how they used networking in their practice, and to identify those skills, strategies and personal qualities which they thought supported 'good' community development. I was particularly interested in the informal networking which happens 'around the edges' of the formal mechanisms: the chance encounters and casual conversations between colleagues, community members and potential collaborators. The research shows that these sometimes happenstance, sometimes planned activities provide vital opportunities for informal supervision, problem-solving and 'working up' new initiatives. They allow risky ideas to be exchanged and boundary-spanning alliances to develop. It is probable that these unacknowledged and virtually invisible encounters enable many community workers, often operating in relatively isolated or peripheral posts, to continually learn from and be inspired by their own and others' practice.

As well as the benefits for individual practitioners, informal networking carries advantages for the development of community-based initiatives. It nurtures the social infrastructure of communities, the 'primordial soup' which nourishes the emergence of community-based initiatives and the evolution of formally established partnerships and voluntary associations. Good communication is important but the development of 'community' is primarily about generating and maintaining respectful and trusting relationships. Exciting, if rather convoluted, insights into this aspect of community development can be found within the scientific models developed to explain the behaviour of complex systems.

LIFE ON THE EDGE OF CHAOS

Human societies can be envisaged as complex systems. They have no no clear boundaries and everyday life comprises a myriad of micro-interactions between individuals, each

influencing the other in ways which are not entirely predictable. Complexity theory suggests that such open-ended systems tend to evolve patterns of inter-connectivity which are characteristic of life at the 'edge of chaos'. These processes of self-organisation (autopoiesis) occur either spontaneously or as a result of some catalytic intervention, producing new forms of association which evolve to 'fit' the currently prevailing circumstances.

Traditional models of community development have emphasised the roles of professional workers as 'facilitators' and 'organisers' of collective initiatives. Community workers often find themselves helping people to set up and manage voluntary groups or to become partners in joint ventures with the local authority. Funding is given in order to establish a project, run a service, arrange an activity or provide a communal resource. The emphasis is on managing efficient organisations, which achieve measurable goals. Complexity theory suggests a different approach in which the community worker's major contribution is as a **connector** (putting people in touch with one another) and as a **catalyst** (introducing that vital ingredient which sparks off self-organisation).

EVALUATION AND ACCOUNTABILITY

In complex systems the slightest nudge can lead to massive shifts in the course of events. These processes are not pre-determined or controllable, and their outcomes cannot be forecast with any degree of precision. This explains why long term targets for community development are as meaningless as many community workers have always known them to be. This is not to say that community development agencies should not be accountable, rather that their achievements cannot be monitored through specific performance criteria. Community networks should be evaluated in terms of the quality and quantity of their connections and the degree to which they are able to generate innovative and sustainable solutions to common problems and concerns.

COMMUNITY WISDOM

A key feature of network-type structures is their capacity to communicate across organisational boundaries: gathering, checking and constantly updating information from a range of sources. Community networks provide a tool for collective learning and parallel information-processing. Like the human brain, the 'well-connected community' is intelligent. It is able to integrate information from a range of sources, to interpret that information in the light of previous knowledge and to construct a holographic model of the world which can be accessed from any number of standpoints and applied to unexpected circumstances.

The wisdom and maturity of the 'well-connected community' arises from the diversity, the flexibility, the vibrancy of its relationships. Its internal bonds and external links are major factors in the empowerment of its members and its ability to achieve change through interaction with the environment. Participatory democracy needs both informal networks and formal organisations within civil society actively contributing a whole range of ideas and resources to public debate and conflict resolution. Prejudice and discrimination create obstacles and distortions in the communication channels, impeding the function of the 'community' as an information-processor. This is why anti-oppressive policies and practices should lie at the heart of effective community development. The 'ethics' of networking (equality, transparency, reciprocity) are necessary (and desirable) for the networks to properly function as a community resource.

CRITICAL CREATIVITY

Good experiences of co-operative working build a foundation of trust, understanding and solidarity, ensuring that relationships are sufficiently resilient and flexible to cope with local difficulties and disagreements. The development of 'community' is about helping a complex

social system to operate at 'the edge of chaos'. Sustainable transformation in a changing world are more likely to emerge from this state of dynamic equilibrium. A community which engages itself and others in dialogue, celebration, critical reflection and experimentation will achieve empowerment, creativity and a deeper learning. The values of diversity, equality and mutuality lie right at the heart of community development. They are also the core principles of effective and ethical networking.

These are difficult ideas and I have struggled to find ways of expressing them simply in the space available. I am currently writing up the research for my Ph.D thesis and would welcome comments. Many thanks to those colleagues who have already contributed to the development of this model, especially the participants in my panel who have mostly been drawn from SCCD's membership. They are Pete Hulse, Lynda McMann, Teri Dolan, Keib Thomas, John Mayhew, Greg Smith, Frances Brown, Gary Smith, Susan Moores, Caroline Kay, Mike Waite, Chris Trueblood and Anne Pendleton.

Appendix W

Article for SCCD Newsletter (May 1999)

"Serendipity and the snowflakes"

This may seem a rather curious title for an article about community development. I have used it to convey two important aspects of a model of 'community' which I hope will make sense to members of SCCD. It uses from complexity theory to examine and explain the importance of networking in the development of mature resilient communities. This is a sequel to the 'Connectors and catalysts' article which appeared in the Winter 1998 issue of SCCD News and carried forward the argument in more detail.

Community as a complex system

Complexity theory has developed from the study of complex systems within the scientific domains of (for example) meteorology, genetic biology, ecology and archeology (Lewin, 1993). It encompasses chaos theory, and seeks to understand (amongst other things) the ways in which order seems to emerge out of 'chaos', without the need for outside interventions or an internal control mechanism. Complex systems consist of a multiplicity of elements connected with one another through local links and clusterings. Within the system occur dynamic and recurrent interactions and each element responds to the combined input of its neighbours according to fairly simple rules.

The effect of these patterns of mutual influence is the appearance over time of complex, but stable configurations, known as 'strange attractors'. Their approximate shapes reflect characteristic of the system - the nature and diversity of the interacting elements and the extent to which they are connected. Their specific content are determined by features of the environment in which the interactions take place. Snowflakes are one example of naturally occurring 'strange attractors'. Their hexagonal shape is constant for all snowflakes and is governed by chemical rules for the molecular combination of freezing water. The unique beauty of each specific snowflake captures the specific environmental conditions in which it is formed, namely the temperature gradient and degree of saturation of the air through which it falls. Computer simulations of complex systems evolving over time, using relatively simple (Boolean logic) equations have produced exquisite images of natural looking patterns, which have come to be known as 'fractals'.

My complexity model of 'community' proposes that the familiar forms of self-organisation and decision-making that regularly appear in human societies are examples of fractals, order crystallising out of apparent chaos as a result of countless interactions and environmental pressures. In particular I am arguing that the 'optimal' community (which I have previously termed 'well-connected') is one which is able to adapt effectively to external changes and to sustain its own forms of collective organising and governance. This state is achieved when the relevant human system reaches and maintains itself at the 'edge of chaos'.

Order at the 'edge of chaos'

Complexity theory suggests that complex systems can be ranged along a continuum. At one end we see a situation where the connections between the elements are sparse and rigid so that the system barely responds to changes in its environment. Its interactions appear frozen or stagnant. At the other end, the system is in a state of chaotic disequilibrium unable to settle into any kind of stable pattern. Between these two extremes is a region of the spectrum for which the mathematician Norman Packard

coined the term the 'edge of chaos'. It has been suggested that naturally occurring complex systems spontaneously evolve towards this state of dynamic equilibrium, with micro-rules generating macro-order (Kauffman, 1995).

The 'edge of chaos' is achieved if there is a critical diversity of interacting elements and a balance between the costs and benefits of maintaining sufficient levels of inter-connectivity. Systems operating at the 'edge of chaos' are excellent information processors and highly creative. They are sensitive to slight changes in external conditions and internal events, generate innovative responses to these which adapt or evolve to suit the current environment. Complex systems are able to do this despite having no central control or co-ordinating mechanism, and without the need for local elements to have an overall awareness or sense of purpose. This process of self-organisation has been termed 'autopoiesis' and refers to the ability of a system to develop stable (but not static) patterns and structures to support continuing interactions.

Informal networking

In human terms these ideas can be translated into looking at the ways in which informal social networks are the foundation for our experience of 'community'. It is clear from personal experience and from social psychology that our thoughts and actions are influenced by the behaviour and attitudes of those around us. We are not autonomous, and yet we do have a sense of 'free will', believing that our decisions and responses are not pre-ordained, even though they are affected by previous experience. We interact on a daily basis with friends, neighbours, colleagues and family members, usually taking into account their expectations and reactions. These exchanges tend to follow social conventions, whilst also reflecting local or personal circumstances. Some people are more influential in our lives than others. We tend to be most sensitive to the views and actions of those with whom we have a strong emotional bond or who have some power over us. This has both positive and negative effects; it can be empowering and oppressive.

Our networks reflect our preferences, our prejudices and our priorities. It is not possible to maintain an infinite set of connections and relationships, so we prioritise those that are most useful, most enjoyable or simply most convenient. This changes according to what is going on in our lives - our needs and interests, fears and desires. The processes of networking are idiosyncratic, but not random. The interactions and exchanges that occur between individuals or between organisations settle down over time into familiar and fairly stable patterns. Some of our connections become more structured. We set up or join groups, organisations and committees which support and guide collective strategies for achieving our goals or simply surviving difficult times. Voluntary associations emerge in response to shared concerns and these develop according to whether they attract sufficient members, resources or attention. Human intuition and ingenuity are constantly throwing up imaginative combinations and possibilities. Those that 'fit' the current environment survive. Those that don't find their 'niche' or are threatened by other organisations competing for the same resources dissolve back into the web of relationships or merge.

Self-organisation

The probability of successful forms of collective organisation developing is increased if members and potential participants are 'well-connected'. By this I mean that there are strong, positive relationships within the organisation and also that the relevant network has good links with more powerful institutions. These provide access to resources, expertise and influence which may help the group achieve its goals. Studies of different types of organisations indicate that network-forms are most suitable in 'turbulent'

environments where there is rapid and unpredictable change. Networks are flexible and can adapt easily to shifts in their operating conditions. They are able to take in and process information from a variety of sources. Indeed this diversity of input and experience is an advantage in helping the organisation to anticipate changes and to experiment with novel responses.

My argument suggests that what we mean by the term 'community' is a complex human system operating at the 'edge of chaos'. Members of a 'well-connected' community are able to communicate easily and openly with one another, tolerate and learn from different perspectives, and do not attempt to impose a rigid, often artificial consensus. 'Community' in these (post-)modern times of globalisation and social fragmentation is not necessarily about promoting unity, social inclusion or consensus Instead 'community' can be conceptualised as a set of overlapping and interacting networks which allow people to share diverse experience, ideas and resources. It is a kind of non-directive integrating mechanism that enables people to work together to develop collective solutions to common problems.

Professional interventions

'Community' represents the process, the context and the outcome of networking between individuals and formal inter-organisational liaison. In this model, the purpose of 'community development' reverts to its natural meaning as the development of 'community'. In other words, the task of professionals engaged in community development practice is primarily to create and foster opportunities for people to meet, exchange and learn from one another through dialogue and collective reflection (Jaworski, 1996). Good community development will nurture interactions which are both challenging and supportive, enabling people to discover and compare new insights into their world and to develop their ability to work across the various social divisions, organisational boundaries and power differentials that they will inevitably encounter

Many community development workers currently see their role as a combination of outreach, organising, training, advice and information, management and consultation Government policies emphasise the provision of services, support for self-help initiatives and the encouragement of active citizenship. Community development approaches are being enthusiastically adopted by health workers, environmentalists, crime prevention officers and the like. This is to be welcomed. However, genuine, sustainable community development offers far more than 'quick-fix' projects, techniques for 'delivering' local participation or the means of reaching the 'socially excluded'. It requires long-term investment in generic community work posts which are core-funded and provide secure and satisfying employment.

Connecting and communicating

I have argued that community is 'achieved' when a human system attains the 'edge of chaos'. This will occur when a given population (whether defined by locality, identity or interest) has developed (and is able to manage for itself) optimal levels of connectivity and sufficient socio-diversity to generate and maintain its own forms of collective organisation and communal activities. In plain English, this means that people in a community are able to contact one another relatively easily, that they have access to a range of contrasting and complementary skills and knowledge, and that they understand and respect different cultures and lifestyles. The quality and extent of the relationships between individuals will make a major contribution to the way in which people experience and value their 'sense of community'. This is not to imply that everyone will necessary like and agree with one another, nor that disputes and antagonisms will miraculously disappear. Rather that people (individually and

collectively) will have developed the capacity to articulate and resolve tensions, to manage shared resources and to advocate effectively for their own interests.

A community at the 'edge of chaos' is creative, resilient, vibrant, adaptive and sustainable. It does not need external interventions or centralised regulations. It is well-integrated and uses its connections to co-ordinate individual and collective responses to changes in the environment. Much of this is through informal networking - people using their links to find the information, the emotional support and the practical assistance they need. Sometimes these networks crystallise into more formal organisations - working parties, residents associations, clubs, playschemes, coalitions, campaigning groups or whatever. Like snowflakes they adopt familiar shapes and develop structures which are appropriate to the local context (its culture, funding priorities, the presence of other similar bodies). Their exact membership and specific functioning is unpredictable, often depending on chance conversations and happenstance encounters.

The significance of serendipity

Many of the things that actually happen in communities are serendipitous. Chaos scientists call this the 'butterfly effect', when an apparently insignificant event triggers sweeping changes within the whole system. An example from community work might be bumping into somebody and discovering through your conversation a really useful contact or possibility for collaboration. Most people will have experienced the way in which a casual remark sparks off a discussion (often after a meeting has officially ended) which cascades into a stream of 'crazy ideas' until 'suddenly' a vision or the perfect solution emerges and can be developed into a realistic plan of action.

The complexity of the system of interactions makes it impossible to predict specific outcomes. Everyday life throws up hundreds of possibilities, only some of which are feasible. However, the more that people interact with others and the greater the diversity of experiences that are brought to these interactions, the higher is the probability of a 'critical mass' of collaborators emerging to produce innovative and successful projects (Marwell and Oliver, 1993). Serendipity plays its part in making the most of fortuitous events. It operates to best effect in an environment which supports relationships which reach across traditional boundaries to make connections which are diverse and unexpected - the 'well-connected community' operating at the 'edge of chaos'.

Interactions and integration

Community development workers assist these processes of mutual influence and self-organisation by creating and managing spaces which encourage networking, and also provide it with some structure. It is important that these opportunities are neither too stagnant nor too chaotic. They might be special events (such as International Women's Day celebrations or a conference), regular activities (monthly lunch clubs, keep-fit classes), quasi-public spaces (drop-in centres, village halls), communication systems (community newsletters, websites) or organisations which allow different views and experiences to be exchanges (neighbourhood councils, race equality forums).

Community development core principles assert that all the above should be organised to ensure access, choice and equality for participants. Complexity theory explains that these aspirations are not about abstract (and contestable) moral or political values, nor about rigid 'political correctness'. Rather they are about enabling community networks to function effectively at the 'edge of chaos'. There are very practical reasons for anti-oppressive strategies to be embedded in community development practice. They are needed to ensure that relationships in the 'well-connected community' are based on

trust, respect and reciprocity. The emotional aspects of these links are often overlooked, and yet they are a vital force in people's motivation and commitment when participating in collective activities (Klandermans, 1997).

Meta-networking

If the development of 'community' is fundamentally about the quality of the connections that sustain life at the 'edge of chaos', then the funding and management of community development must afford greater recognition to the skills and strategies that workers use to support networking, especially in contexts where people find it difficult to form connections (e.g. due to poverty, segregation, oppression or mutual suspicion). Capacity building is not about enhancing the skills and confidence of individual local 'leaders'. Nor is it about setting up the organisational mechanisms for community involvement in regeneration partnerships. As a professional intervention, community development should be concerned with helping people to establish and nurture connections and communication for and amongst themselves. I have invented the term 'meta-networking' to describe what I think is the primary purpose of developing the 'edge of chaos' community.

Effective meta-networking involves skills, strategy, support, spaces and structures. The aims of the work are simply to create circumstances and conditions which people can use to connect and communicate around a whole range of issues and ideas. Working programmes and evaluation criteria need to be flexible, capable of accommodating experimentation and the unexpected. Managers and policy officers responsible for community development strategies need to acknowledge that it may not be possible (or even desirable) to work towards pre-determined targets or performance criteria. The complexity model of 'community' outlined here allows only for forecasts, rather than predictions. A community which is sufficiently connected and diverse provides the optimal context in which appropriate and effective collective action will evolve to meet demands and opportunities in the environment.

The capacity of a community is held in its networks. It is the 'macro-property' which emerges from the 'micro-interactions'. Some might call this 'community spirit'. Others prefer the term 'social capital'. Community development can make a tremendous contribution to re-weaving the tattered fabric of society. Strengthening and extending the web takes time, trust and tolerance, but is vital in achieving the 'edge of chaos' community and allowing for the appearance of both 'snowflakes' and serendipity.

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Appendix X

Feedback on the articles from researchers and practitioners around the world

"I found it stimulating...I like your stress on CD as enhancing people's capacity to network as individuals and through collective organisations...I was just really excited...this is the value of unpacking the CD model, identifying the core practices of the work so that it's relevant to radical practice" - community work trainer, Plymouth

"I can't tell you how much I appreciated reading about your research and your approach to networking in community development...Unfortunately there isn't a vision at the top of our hierarchy that our contribution to community development could be as 'connectors and catalysts' as you so aptly put it...I've continued to see that our community is suffering greatly from a lack of networking...I despair because like you I think almost the only chance many of these groups have of survival is to share, network, co-operate and collaborate...I wanted so badly to connect with you to express my gratitude for your paper, your work and your point of view. It certainly has encouraged me in my own position. Your work is very convincing in proposing networking as a very fundamental and valuable tool in community development...It has been a delight being able to write to you" – community development officer in Alberta, Canada

"I am doing my Ph.D. on informal learning in the community, and have and am finding exactly what you have reported in your article. The notion of the well-connected community sits very well" - vice-president of the Australian chapter of Community Development Society

"A colleague of mine gave me your paper about community networks and it is the best thing that happened to me last week. I am currently working as a researcher in the Netherlands for very problematic neighbourhoods. Many of the concepts you use seem very familiar to me. Although I have read about chaos theory and was aware that the conceptual system was very useful, I had never worked out the idea. So I am very happy to find out that you did. I just wanted to thank you for that" – community researcher, Netherlands

"Thank you so much for mailing me your [IACD] conference presentation. I am sharing it with two American volunteers who are active in community development ...I hope this is OK. I re-read your paper and I think your concepts are very exciting" – civil society organiser, Slovakia

"Thank you for the copy of your article "Living at the edge of chaos". I found it very interesting and even translated it into Hebrew for my friends. Indeed our work is largely devoted to constructing the social fabric" – director of Department for Community Development, Israel Association of Community Centres

The Canadian Community Health Promotion Network re-published the Connectors and Catalysts article in their Newsletter.

The Australian Community Development Society carried a version of the IACD conference paper in its magazine.

There has also been lots of informal feedback when I meet people at conferences or am asked to run workshop sessions.