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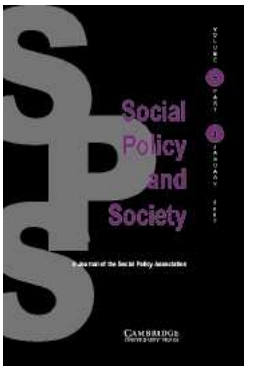

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'We have had nothing for so long that we don't know what to ask for': New Deal for Communities and the Regeneration of Socially Excluded Terrain

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This paper explores New Labour's desire to refurbish the physical and social fabric of excluded neighbourhoods through its New Deal for Communities (NDC) programme. It begins by examining three key concepts that embody and underpin this policy intervention – community, agency and exclusion and proceeds by contrasting these conceptual dimensions with a set of discordant, intra-neighbourhood processes of conflict, contestation and division, identified by recently conducted fieldwork in an NDC area. I argue that such processes produce a complex social terrain that is inhabited by social agents with a diverse range of needs, values and experiences, before discussing how this challenges and de-stabilises NDC's aspiration to 'promote' community, change individual behaviour and tackle exclusion effectively. The paper concludes by questioning whether New Labour's desire to implement a 'community' project, shaped by theoretical precepts, constrains NDC's ability to deliver lasting change to excluded areas.

Introduction

This paper argues that, at a conceptual level, New Deal for Communities (NDC), as an embodiment of New Labour thinking, misunderstands or misinterpretss the nature of individual agency and social relations in conditions of social exclusion. Consequently, this undermines New Labour's aspiration to 'build community' and tackle the social exclusion of NDC residents, whilst placing expectations on the community that are inappropriate or potentially damaging. The paper concludes by asking whether there is scope to reform NDC at a local level to circumvent its conceptual flaws.

The main thrust of the paper will be to draw contrasts between the objectives of NDC, rooted in three conceptual models of community, agency and exclusion, and 'on the ground' experiences of local residents and relations between those residents inhabiting a terrain defined by the UK government as 'socially excluded'. The paper draws on data generated during a period of fieldwork in a NDC-defined neighbourhood in Salford, Greater Manchester.[1] This research was conducted between October 2003 and July 2004 and mainly comprised individual and group interviews with residents of the NDC area. It also included attending and observing tenants' and residents' meetings and visiting local community centres to speak with residents informally. In addition, seven key informants who worked with specific groups in the community were interviewed, e.g. youth workers, local (paid) carers, a refugee support worker and community workers.

One important caveat worth mentioning is that the problematising of NDC models in this paper is based on one case study in one particular NDC area. It could be the case

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that these models are better suited to other NDC neighbourhoods, thereby challenging the findings presented here. Unfortunately, there is no scope here for a comparative discussion, as the focus of the article is on engaging with the conceptual assumptions and aspirations of NDC.

Policy context

As Morrison (2003: 144) has recently noted, in 1998 Tony Blair made this rather presumptuous statement in his introduction to the Social Exclusion Unit (SEU) report: 'Bringing People Together: A National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal': 'We all know the problems of our poorest neighbourhoods'. In case 'we' do not know the problems of these areas, he helpfully points us towards, 'decaying housing, unemployment, street crime and drugs . . . People who can, move out. Nightmare neighbours move in'.

The role of 'place' or 'space', whether that is community, neighbourhood or estate is central to the social exclusion discourse in UK policymaking. Often such spaces are described pejoratively in the media and often in academic debate as 'sink' or 'dump' estates, ghettoes, or 'problem' areas contaminated by an alleged 'dependency culture' and social disorder, manifested in what has become known as 'antisocial behaviour' (SEU, 2000).[2] The 'problem' of spatially concentrated deprivation has long been a concern for policy makers, from the Wilson-era Urban Programme and Community Development Projects (CDPs), via the Thatcherite Urban Development Corporations (UDCs), through to more contemporary examples such as City Challenge, Single Regeneration Budget (SRB) and New Deal for Communities (Lupton, 2003). More specifically, 'problematic' social housing estates first entered political discourse in the late 1930s and have received their own array of policy responses (e.g. Estate Action and Housing Action Trusts) since the late 1970s, corresponding with diagnostic trends (Lund, 1999).

The policy focus here – New Deal for Communities – is one of several New Labour policy responses to the perceived problems of such 'excluded' spaces, and reflects, according to Lupton, a specifically New Labour commitment to 'neighbourhood' as a 'key unit of policy delivery' (2005: 120). Moreover, it symbolises a shift to urban regeneration being 'reclaimed as a recognisable aspect of social policy' (Cochrane, 2000: 191) in contrast with a traditional policy focus on economic and physical regeneration driven by largely commercial concerns (Ginsburg, 1999). It also stresses partnership with residents and aims to put 'communities at its heart'. In Salford, £59 million has been allocated to regenerate the delineated zone and tackle social exclusion.

Unpacking New Deal for Communities

Arguably the NDC is underpinned by three main conceptual models that reflect its attempt to change both the behaviour of residents and regenerate their community environment. Let me take one model at a time:

Community

New Labour's enthusiasm for 'community' has been well documented and its communitarian progenitors consistently evoked (e.g. Driver and Martell, 1997; Levitas, 2000; Heron, 2001; Imrie and Raco, 2003; Prideaux, 2004). For example,

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> At the heart of my beliefs is the idea of community. I don't just mean the local villages, towns and cities in which we live. I mean that our fulfilment as individuals lies in a decent society of others. My argument . . . is that the renewal of community is the answer to the challenges of a changing world. (Blair cited in Levitas, 2000: 189)

New Deal for Communities is a clear expression of a belief in both the *existence* of communities as stable, spatial entities, inhabited by people and families with similar needs and values; as well as the positive benefits of *promoting* 'community' as a moral framework, which (it is alleged) engenders civic renewal, maintains social order and ameliorates social exclusion. For example, then Home Secretary Jack Straw pronounced in 2000:

> if you don't build strong and responsible communities then you end up with wastelands where there really is 'no such thing as society'. (cited in Heron, 2001: 71)[3]

Community is inscribed in the fabric of NDC. Specific focus was placed on 'choosing the right neighbourhood' that would have 'the greatest capacity to turn themselves around' in initial government guidelines for prospective partnerships. Furthermore, guidelines state that NDC areas should be 'recognisable communities (less than 4000 households) with a strong sense of identity and shared aspirations' (NRU, 2001: 8). Therefore, each NDC neighbourhood has been chosen *because* it is perceived to have the right ingredients for success (that is, the correct expression of consensual community). What this means for those areas of material disadvantage that are '*un*recognisable communities' is a moot point. However, we can see how both a conceptual blueprint *and* a pragmatic calculation to avoid disordered or ill-defined communities shape NDC. That is, the government selects areas, which, because of their consensus and shared aspirations, it believes will provide a positive return for its 'investment', since it is they who will have the 'social capital' (Putnam, 2000) necessary for long-term renewal, sustained social order and protection against further physical and social decline. 'Strong communities' are also believed to provide a context in which the government's normative prescription of citizenship can flourish. It is New Labour's key 'collective abstraction' of community (Levitas, 2000: 191) that will provide an effective collective context in which individual responsibilities will be performed and deviance will be policed and reformed.

The role of NDC is to facilitate the strong community identity by consulting residents about improvements and problems of that government-defined zone and through an array of signifiers such as meetings, newsletters and the physical erection of signs that delineate and reify that space. The objectives are to harness the community in pursuit of sustainable regeneration and certain behavioural expectations, plus to emphasise the belief in the inherently positive role of living in an active community.

Agency and participation

Closely related to this model of 'community', is the conception of individual agency underpinning NDC. There appear to be several dimensions to this model. Firstly, there is a belief that NDC neighbourhoods contain *a priori* individual social agents that are able and willing to fulfil their civic responsibilities (defined by government) within their 'community' (again, defined by government) by virtue of their 'strong sense of identity and shared aspirations' (NRU, 2001: 8). In the context of NDC, these responsibilities refer to an engagement with the ongoing practice of the programme by supplying analyses of

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local problems and solutions; attending NDC meetings and, ideally, participating in local decision making and /or devising and managing projects for the benefit of local residents. More generally, they refer to an emotional commitment on the part of residents to the 'community'. NDC's role is to create opportunities for residents who want to engage through effective methods of consultation and inclusive avenues of participation. This belief in the committed nature of local residents in NDC neighbourhoods underpins the flow of funding to these areas. That is, NDC 'communities' are selected because of the assumed characteristics of their inhabitants. Furthermore, this relates to concerns about 'investment', whereby New Labour has identified that regeneration programmes 'fail' if they lack substantial resident input (Taylor, 2000a). Therefore, the participation of local residents is key to 'building capacity' and achieving 'sustainability' (Cochrane, 2000) and providing a good 'return' on government spending. According to Dinham, New Labour's recipe for success derives from 'the theory and practice of community development where participation, empowerment and ownership are seen as necessary conditions for change' (2005: 302). Consequently, NDC has been given permission 'to do things differently' (Taylor, 2000a: 252) and demonstrate a belief in residents as partners, rather than just recipients of regeneration.

Secondly, there is a normative dimension to the model of agency with the role of NDC being to promote or instil certain forms of behaviour in local residents. This is where NDC becomes not just a facilitator, but also an animator of local residents to encourage involvement in 'community' meetings, standing for election to the NDC board, or organising and 'owning' local services.[4] Whilst New Labour believes that some residents will be dynamic local actors and provide security for their investment, it also propounds a moral belief in the positive effect of participation per se. They do consider its importance in achieving sustainable regeneration, but also contend that involvement in one's community is a key aspect of 'active citizenship' (Levitas, 2000) and requires no necessary instrumental justification. Therefore, one objective of NDC is to stimulate the involvement of those less inclined or able to perform their civic duties.

A final dimension to New Labour's model of agency, as manifested in its renewal of 'communities', is for residents to become moralising agents who make behavioural claims on other 'community' members. NDC's role is to be a mechanism through which the moralising voice is heard. For example, the consultation process of NDC encourages judgements and claims to be made by residents about the behaviour of fellow residents. That is, New Labour presupposes that there exists a minority of antisocial or badly behaved residents who 'need' community, alongside the 'responsible' majority who *are* the 'community', what Burney has described as ' "the decent people" vs perpetrators' (2005: 36). This moralising function is constructed as constitutive of an 'active community', which sustains social order and, if we consider the quote below, appease sceptical taxpayers by invoking a principle of conditionality (Dwyer, 1998) that makes spending on 'renovating' estates conditional on 'good' behaviour,

> We are not going to put taxpayers money into inner city redevelopment unless as a partnership which involves something for something … we are renovating estates but making clear that we will act when tenants behave unacceptably … we do not tolerate anti-social behaviour or lawlessness. (Blair, 2001)

Therefore, the expectations placed on residents derive from two main sources. First, a moral belief in the duty to participate in the life of one's 'community', including

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upholding 'decent' and respectful norms and values. Second, an attempt to augment the 'sustainability' of the regeneration project by emphasising the importance of and facilitating partnership with those residents.

Exclusion

The model of social exclusion that NDC seems to reflect contains three important dimensions. Firstly, that a cycle of disadvantage and a concomitant reduction in life chances can be perpetuated by living in a neighbourhood lacking good local services and opportunities (HM Treasury, 2001). That is, what have been described as 'area effects' can compound the social exclusion of individuals and families. (Atkinson and Kintrea, 2001). Secondly, that 'top–down' decision making and bureaucratic service delivery can be disempowering and contribute to a sense of lack of control over one's life (Blears, 2003). Finally, NDC reflects the notion that an absence of 'social capital' within 'communities' can exacerbate social exclusion because residents are without necessary networks of support and trust that can protect against dislocation and fragmentation.

In Salford, NDC is designed to remedy all of these contributors to the social exclusion of individuals, families and (what government conceives of as) the community as a whole. It proceeds by trying to enhance the educational and employment opportunities for residents, as well as improving the quality of their local services, be it healthcare provision, play facilities or housing. In addition, NDC, as noted above, is concerned with reforming structures of governance and involving residents in decision making where possible, in order to 'empower' and provide a greater sense of ownership of their 'community'. Thirdly, it tries to stimulate social capital by inculcating the 'community' within people, to build a sense of unity and togetherness. NDC also provides support for local groups and associations and has organised events such as children's fun days and an award ceremony for local activism.

A contested, heterogeneous policy terrain

In contrast to these models of community, agency and exclusion are intra-neighbourhood processes and experiences that I would argue render NDC's objectives problematic That is, the NDC 'community' on which this paper is based is actually inhabited by social agents with a range of needs who *do* community and *live* exclusion in varying and often conflicting ways against a backdrop of disadvantage and neglect that underpins a rather ambivalent and sometimes hostile relationship with NDC. It is these factors that ultimately de-stabilise New Labour's model of community as a functioning moral framework underpinning the attempts to 'activate' agency and socially *include*. I will address each model in turn.

Contested community

Several authors have emphasised the contested and diverse nature of spatial 'communities' (e.g. Brent, 1997; Foley and Martin, 2000; Dinham, 2004) and some have examined the implications for developing local networks of support and trust in heterogeneous localities (e.g. Taylor, 2000b). Similarly, in this case study, the NDC zone was found to be patterned by conflict and contestation between residents, encompassing a range of

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aspects, including conflicts over physical space and facilities, conflicts rooted in differing needs and values and an 'othering' of 'outsider' groups within the neighbourhood. Ultimately, this appears to de-stabilise the notion of a 'community' of shared identities and aspirations, on which the government thinks NDC should be predicated, and presents problems for 'empowering' the 'community' and for the desire to build social capital amongst residents. Here are some examples of contestation.

Around the issue of policing for the NDC zone, there was an obvious and perhaps unsurprising conflict between young residents and older people. Young people felt over policed:

> 'Enough of them (police) round 'ere'. (Teenage male resident)
>
> 'Community safety and security? What the fuck do we want that for? Got loads of them (police) round here'. (Teenage male resident)

This contrasted with older residents who felt local police were ineffectual, if not invisible. For example:

> 'Police? Who are they, aliens?' (Older male)
>
> 'I saw a policeman once and asked, "Can I ask you a question. Are you a mirage?"'. (Older female resident)

This different perception was confirmed by the local police officer (NDC sector sergeant):

> 'Yeah, because the elderly want to see high profile police for obviously the security feeling. The youths want us to get off their backs. They are, erm, always on the streets and we're always moving them on because of all the complaints'.

If this illustrates a conflict over needs and values, another dimension in the contestation of community is the struggle over the use of physical space within that space. This tended to happen either around regeneration plans (a conflict over how best to make use of physical space), or just general conflict around spaces within the neighbourhood. The most explicit example of this was the NDC plan to build youth shelters and a children's play area in the zone. Young people in the area were included in the bidding and designing processes, but other (older) local residents objected at the planning permission stage. Consequently, the shelters were not built. According to one youth worker, residents in the planned area feared the concentration of youths in one place and the related potential for trouble. One NDC worker expressed it more bluntly:

> 'Nimbyism pure and simple.[5] No one wanted it near them'.

The NDC sector sergeant commented on the difficulty with this nimbyism:

> 'Up until recently they were adamant that they didn't want any facilities in the area for children. So they say 'we're not having any facilities here, not in this area'. And if you say to them 'what should we do with them' 'just move them'. So ideally, a lot of them want all the youths to be in their own home every hour of the day and the night and not come out onto the streets – which would be ideal. But unfortunately that doesn't happen and they've lost sight that when they were young that's what they did, they hung about the streets'.

There were various other examples of physical space being contested, with young people's occupation of public space usually being at the centre of the conflict. The important point being that NDC, through its 'community ownership' rhetoric and agenda, in effect *sanctions* this form of resident objection. This raises two further issues. First, there appears

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to be a need to guard against influential groups capturing the decision-making process and making discriminatory decisions. Second, if a claim *is* made on a specific group, there is a need for such claims to be adjudicated and balanced against their effects on the target group. A decision has to be made that considers whether the blocking of youth shelters or other such moves reflect real problems and fears about the behaviour of a section of the community, or actually reveal the prejudices of the complainant group. There have to be routes out of such conflicts, and strategies for local stakeholders or NDC partnerships to resolve these potential tensions.

Another form of contestation was less about physical space and more about the presence of outsider groups in the community. These groups – students, asylum seekers, travellers and private sector housing tenants, all with a visible presence in the community – seemed to represent a threat to many residents. Of course, social closure is a well-documented phenomenon (e.g. Warwick and Littlejohn, 1992) and appears to be an almost dissonant *psychological* reaction, which is expressed through the construction of such groups as the 'problematic other'. 'Bad' private tenants were consistently contrasted with 'good' council estate tenants and, of course, owner-occupiers:

> 'They've had a policy if you ask me of putting people on here who are bad tenants . . . but down here it's been a high turnover and you find that most of tenants that they shove in here are not right. People with problems, or they've had problems on other estates, they've had 4 or 5 different houses, knock walls down then fuck off and go to another housing estate . . .' (Male resident)

A survey of residents by Salford NDC found that terraced housing residents are 'sick' of 'problem and nuisance people' in private rented houses, and blamed them for some people 'here since birth' being forced to move away. Similarly, one residents' meeting discussed these 'bad' residents, blaming the 'riff raff' for the lack of demand for houses in a specific estate and its consequent demolition. There were references in meetings elsewhere to a 'bad sort' and 'problem families'.

The purpose of this is not to deny that there may be issues or problems with transient housing tenants, but firstly to illustrate the difficulty for New Labour's eagerness to 'build community' in which spatial proximity is hoped to translate into emotional kinship, without consideration of the social, economic, cultural and historical cleavages that pattern neighbourhoods (cf. Taylor, 2000b). Secondly, as we have seen, the 'community' is not just a spatially defined phenomenon, but is supposed to operate (in the mind of communtarians like Etzioni (1997) and echoed by New Labour) as a moralising force by maintaining behavioural parameters. This raises questions about the 'othering' process described above and whether it fits with the view of community as a moral framework. It seems that the 'othering' of certain groups is reflective of a prejudicial process of social closure by which transient social groups are demonised and excluded to protect and sustain the dominance of certain community voices. When one group of residents affects closure on another, or blocks plans designed to help another, this would appear to undermine the notion that 'community' in an inclusive and unitary sense is present at all. In fact, it could be conveyed that the 'othering' of certain groups illustrates a complete *lack* of community, exemplified by prejudice, intolerance and a lack of empathy for fellow 'residents'. Again, there may be a need to mediate these kinds of processes (a role performed in Salford NDC area by 'community' workers and the local police service), and to make this an explicit part of the NDC project, rather than assuming that conflict

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can be minimised or avoided through strategic funding decisions. Cochrane has noted that a potential consequence of not managing such tensions and continuing to be shaped by conflict is 'communities' could be, 'written out of the promotional, marketing and branding discourses . . . the "ghetto" may simply be defined as being outside the scope of urban regeneration, to be policed, rather than nurtured' (2000: 202)

Active agents?

The community involvement ethos of NDC (and part of the 'activation' of agency) is predicated on the inhabitants of excluded spaces being willing and able to participate in consultation processes, attend meetings, manage local services and thereby responsibilise local governance (Hastings, 2003). This reflects a wider New Labour aim to democratise local service delivery and enhance participation in civil society (Rouse and Smith, 2002). The first point to make is that, in Salford, local people play very little part in the official NDC process.[6] This undermines the central ethos of the programme. For example, one community representative on the NDC board told me:

> 'It's about it [community inclusion], yeah. But it's not doing it. It's not achieving it. We've still got, we've got 6 focus groups: in Building Communities I am probably the only person who lives in the area who is involved with it. Children and young persons, I don't think there is anyone in the area involved in it; education employment and skills, you tend to get one person there. Crime you get a few; physical environment you get quite a few; but they're really the only ones'. (Male resident and community representative)

The picture of participation across NDC programmes as a whole appears rather mixed with some partnerships reporting higher levels of participation in NDC elections and others lower than expected (NRU, 2002). However, it is difficult to discern whether this meets the government aspiration for communities to be fully immersed in the organisation and direction of their regeneration and does not reveal anything substantive about who participates and in what form.

In Salford, there were various attempts to explain this culture of disengagement from official NDC business. Some NDC staff talked of a 'dependency culture' amongst local residents: an entrenched unwillingness to take responsibility for their area and services:

> 'I suppose more could be done, but what do you do more? You've got a newsletter that comes out, people are told where meetings are, time of meetings have been changed from afternoon to evenings back to afternoons. We've had various events where information is given out . . . I mean, like I say information is put out, information is produced. All the meetings are open, anybody can attend. I think it's just the way of the world unless it affects you, that little bit where you live, you don't actually get your bum into action do you?' (Female resident and NDC board member)

Other staff blamed the local authority and described a picture of local governance where 'old Labour paternalism' is 'rife', which nurtures this dependency (and apathetic) culture. Moreover, they argue that the local council actively tries to undermine the community involvement agenda of NDC, by retaining a stranglehold over resources and long-term planning decisions. Whatever the explanation, there was an obvious disconnect between residents and the NDC process. Perhaps this was because, as one community worker described it, NDC meetings are 'aloof' and 'full of suits'. Consequently, this research

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generates a definite sense from respondents and meetings of NDC and the community co-existing in the same space, but on parallel plains, rarely intersecting. According to Dinham (2005) this lack of engagement is because NDC's need for participation has not been complimented by the required development strategies to nurture effective and rewarding local engagement.

Further, there is also a question over who is participating and what interests they represent. There seems to be a vacuum between NDC partnerships and residents, a democratic deficit disguised by the presence of a small number of individuals who have disproportionate influence over decisions affecting the community.

That is not to say, however, that some networks of support do not exist amongst residents. They do, as illustrated by the number of resident and tenant associations in the area. What is problematic is NDC's attempts to formalise what are essentially *informal* bonds and its demand for an emotional commitment to a 'community' most residents do not recognise. Moreover, as Taylor (2000b) notes, attempts to absorb local associations into formal structures can damage the fabric of those initial organic networks, thereby undermining the relationships that underpin local systems of support.

The quote in the title of this paper suggests another problematic aspect to the burden placed on residents. To reiterate, this resident (an older female) informed me that:

> 'We have had nothing for so long that we don't know what to ask for'.

She was responding to an open-ended question about what she would like to see happen in the local area that would benefit her life. Her response expresses a key problem with NDC's role for local residents in that it does not take account of the backdrop of neglect and disadvantage that many people in that area have experienced over time. How realistic or appropriate is it to expect people who have been consistently disadvantaged to 'trust' government agencies and play a transformative role in the process of social change? Perhaps there is a failure to theorise fully the fragile nature of human agency and the 'impact of fear, envy and other emotions upon our capacities to imagine, challenge, resist or lead' (Hoggett, 2000: 12). Alternatively, perhaps there is simply an over-zealous assumption that residents want to 'get involved' in their own governance, as Marinetto has recently pondered, 'who wants to be an active citizen?' (2003: 103).

Heterogeneity of needs

I want to argue that social exclusion is a condition that is lived and experienced in differing and often conflicting ways by residents who inhabit the same physical space. The different 'exclusions' that residents experience derives from three sources. Firstly, the reality of the space in question was that it supported *'multiple publics'* (Amin, 2002: 972), which shaped a diverse and distinctive set of needs for the range of social groups within the one NDC zone. For example, young people wanted leisure facilities, older people wanted more shopping facilities and better transport links, wheelchair users wanted kerbs lowered and more opportunities to work locally. Some people wanted more police on the streets or CCTV cameras, and asylum seekers wanted better-quality accommodation. Secondly, poor quality facilities or services impact on different social groups in different ways. For example, poor public transport affects some older people more than those with cars or better mobility. A lack of good quality leisure facilities, whilst being an issue for

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many groups in the area, seemed to impact most on young people whose occupation of public space is continually scrutinised and policed through CCTV and complaints to the local police. Thirdly, needs can be configured by social relations. That is, experiences of social exclusion are mediated through territorialism (especially amongst young people), nimbyism and, for those affected, 'othering' processes. Young people who will not venture into certain areas are not going to benefit from a leisure centre being built outside 'their patch'. Similarly, adult residents blocking youth shelters says something about (lack of) 'community', but it also has a real impact on the exclusion experienced by the intended beneficiaries of those shelters who remain on the streets with 'nothing to do'.

In terms of NDC and its ability to tackle exclusion, there is a question mark about whether it can adequately respond to both the diversity of needs exhibited, or address the social divisions which reinforce the exclusion of some groups. Therefore, if NDC partnerships are to succeed in building inclusive communities and addressing exclusion in a holistic fashion, a better understanding of how communities (dis)function is imperative. Unfortunately, it would seem this responsibility would fall on local managers, development workers and residents to *mould* NDC at the local level and to counteract the tensions found in New Labour's conceptual framework for the NDC project.

Conclusion

This paper is not attempting to dismiss or downgrade some of the real achievements and improvements NDC (as part of a wider neighbourhood renewal agenda) appears to have made to some of the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods in the UK, even if in uneven ways (Lupton and Power, 2005). However, it has drawn on a case study of one NDC zone to problematise NDC's three key conceptual models and explore the implications for its ability to build inclusive communities and tackle the social exclusion of local residents. It has argued that despite attempts by policy makers to avoid disorder by only allocating NDC funding to consensual spaces, there are still processes 'on the ground' in NDC zones that undermine New Labour's aspiration to refurbish the physical and social fabric of excluded neighbourhoods.

To some extent, therefore, NDC is a flawed project because it operates in a context it does not fully understand, leading to a set of objectives that are problematic and damaging for its goals of social inclusion and community empowerment. For example, it does not take account of the heterogeneous and dynamic nature of spatial communities, nor how they are 'made' by local residents through a range of interactive processes. Moreover, NDC is inscribed with the need for resident participation and ownership, an objective that this paper has argued throws up a set of questions about ability and willingness to participate, especially when unsupported by sensitive development strategies. In particular, it is certainly questionable whether local residents, already living in conditions of social exclusion, should be responsible for legitimising NDC (through participation and ownership) and be conceived as key agents of social transformation and moral reconstruction.

Overall, these flaws in the conceptual framework of NDC present a range of problems for its effectiveness in regenerating communities. Additionally, some of these problems manifest in practice as an extra set of pressures on local agencies and stakeholders to *deliver* the NDC programme and develop strategies to manage the tensions policy makers thought they had largely avoided. This illustrates the diversity of the NDC project. Whilst

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one can criticise the theory of NDC, the totality of the programme is not reducible to this level. There are possibilities on the ground to offer opportunities to excluded communities over a relatively long time span, which perhaps require a subversion of the initial theoretical assumptions of central government. The challenge seems to be to shift the emphasis away from centrally defined outputs and models towards understanding and addressing the realities of local communities and those who work with them. It remains to be seen whether NDC is the best avenue for achieving this, or whether its misreading of the reality of community destines it to be no more than a partial solution.

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Notes

1 The decision to use Salford as a case study was driven by nothing more than its proximity to my research base. The interviewees were chosen according to a purposive sampling method, designed to be as diverse and representative as possible. Therefore, gender, age, ethnicity, locality and disability were all included in sampling decisions.

2 These seem to be contrasted with a vision of socially *included* 'respectable' places with, presumably, burgeoning house prices, 'good' schools and (economically) productive citizens.

3 The phrase 'no such thing as society' refers to a comment attributed to former UK Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and is often used to illustrate a particular neo-liberal, individualist social philosophy.

4 'Community animators' was the official title given to the local group responsible for ensuring adequate consultation and participation in Salford NDC's early stages.

5 Not-in-my-back-yard-ism.

6 There was poor attendance at the meetings I attended and, apart from a few notable exceptions, little evidence of residents involving themselves in devising or managing projects. Indeed, one community representative on the NDC board told me she felt like *'a one man band'* in trying to represent the estate where she lived.

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