

**Placing voluntary activism within neo-liberal welfare states:  
A cross-national comparison**

**Background paper on UK national and Manchester political contexts**

## **1. The national context**

### **Neoliberalisation and the urban regeneration agenda**

The view that the city is both the site of and a solution to various forms of crisis has been a key theme in British politics since the 1980s. The policy approach taken by the Conservative government under Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher (in office throughout the 80s) initiated a process of 'neoliberalisation' whereby cities became a laboratory in which to experiment with a range of neoliberal social and economic policies. Often called '*new localism*', this shift occurred in most countries of the developed west and was an attempt to restart flagging national economies from below by 'unleashing the latent innovative capacities of local economies' (Brenner and Theodore 2002, 342). In essence, this neoliberal approach to urban regeneration involves deregulation (i.e., loosening the rules which forced corporations to pay and treat their workers fairly under Fordist/Keynesian system) and a scaling back of the size and role of the state, particularly limiting its intervention in the economy through social welfare oriented policies.<sup>1</sup> In neoliberalism, a key way to accomplish the scaling back of the welfare state is to shift greater responsibility for social service development and delivery onto both the private (or corporate) sector and civil society. In cities, this has given rise to entrepreneurial approaches or '*urban entrepreneurialism*', which demand greater labour market flexibility and increased competitiveness between cities/regions (Brenner and Theodore 2002).

The election of the Labour party in 1997 did not disturb the process of neoliberalisation. In fact it has continued, and arguably has flourished, throughout Prime Minister Tony Blair's two (going on three) terms in office. Many of the programmes and policies that were initiated by the Conservatives in the 80s and 90s have been retained but altered slightly to emphasise such things as community

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<sup>1</sup> For a good overview of neo-liberalism or 'advanced liberalism' and the city see Rose 2000).

involvement, inter-organisational collaboration, and co-ordination of policies in specific areas (national, regional, and local). Under 'New Labour's'<sup>2</sup> modernisation agenda, the focus of urban policy has been issues such as unemployment, environmental sustainability, and community safety – cross-cutting problems which are believed to require greater 'horizontal collaboration' and 'joined-up' thinking among government, statutory, voluntary, and business organisations. Many ambitious urban policy strategies have been designed by various government departments, most of which are administered by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM). The ODPM is the government department responsible for neighbourhood renewal, housing and urban policy and includes within it the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit, the Regional Coordination Unit and the Social Exclusion Unit ([www.odpm.gov.uk](http://www.odpm.gov.uk)).<sup>3</sup>

There was a flurry of urban policy making in 2000-2001 and since then many of these plans have had five year reviews and progress reports based on a considerable amount of consultation with local authorities, private and public institutions, and citizens. In 2000, the Urban White Paper entitled *Our Towns and Cities* by the Department of Environment Transport and Regions (DETR)<sup>4</sup> was unveiled as the first statement of urban policy in 20 years. The White Paper, followed by the Local Government Act in December 2000, sets out a vision for an 'urban renaissance' central to which is greater public involvement and consultation and, with the introduction of Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs), greater coordination and '*partnership working*' among the statutory, private, and voluntary sectors than ever before.<sup>5</sup> The document calls for the development of 'community strategies' which are specific to the regeneration needs of local places:

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<sup>2</sup> The term 'New Labour' is part of the dramatic makeover of the Labour party's doctrine and ethos which started in the early 1980s under Neil Kinnock and has continued over the past decade under Tony Blair. Labour has all but rejected its collectivist, social democratic and trade unionist roots in favour of anti-statist neoliberalism – a so called 'third way' between left and right.

<sup>3</sup> As a result of the May 2006 Cabinet shuffle, the ODPM will no longer be responsible for these portfolios.

<sup>4</sup> The Department of Environment, Transport and Regions (DETR) was abolished in June 2001 and replaced by Department for Transport, Local Government and Regions (which itself was then replaced in May 2002 by the ODPM).

<sup>5</sup> Jones and Ward (2002, 488) argue that the 2000 White Paper is a regurgitation of the last urban White Paper published twenty years ago. Contrary to its claims, there is nothing new or revolutionary in the document; just the discourse is different.

Government is committed to working closely with [LSPs] in a new kind of relationship which recognizes that no two communities are the same, and that strategies must be shaped to suit local needs (*Our Towns and Cities* 2000, 9).

Central government has focused its regeneration efforts primarily on what are known as 'areas of multiple deprivation'.

In January 2001, the 'New Commitment to Neighbourhood Renewal: National Strategy Action Plan' was launched. It has the overarching principle that, within 10 to 20 years, no one should be seriously disadvantaged because of living where they live. Another key example of an initiative which targets these deprived areas is the 'New Deal for Communities'. New Deal is a 10 year programme launched in 2001 which aims to regenerate 39 of the poorest areas in England (see [www.neighbourhood.gov.uk](http://www.neighbourhood.gov.uk) ). Partnerships formed as part of New Deal are meant to concentrate on 5 key themes: poor job prospects; high levels of crime; educational under-achievement; poor health; and problems with housing and the physical environment. A further example of this approach is *Towns and Cities - Partners in Urban Renaissance* (sometimes called the Working with Towns and Cities Initiative; see [www.urban.odpm.gov.uk/whitepaper/towncity](http://www.urban.odpm.gov.uk/whitepaper/towncity) ), a scheme organised by the ODPM's Urban Policy Unit and URBED which involves 24 partner towns in England. It aims to identify ways to bring about positive change in deprived inner city areas.

Alongside this vision of greater partnership and co-ordination, the most significant aspect of New Labour's urban regeneration agenda is the increased role of business in urban politics and governance. Central government has sought to bring the private sector in as a key operative in their strategy to address the problems in those cities most in need of regeneration. Partnerships between government and the private sector come in a variety of forms such as urban regeneration companies (Urban Development Corporations were first imposed under Thatcher [see While, Jonas and Gibb 2004, 555]), the Department of Trade and Industry, and the Strategy Board. Urban regeneration companies are not-for-profit companies which together bring local authorities, regional statutory agencies, and businesses into partnership with the aim of promoting economic and land use development in deprived areas of English cities (Manchester has had one of these companies, as noted below).

Despite decades of urban regeneration efforts stretching back to the Thatcher government, Britain's cities remain in a state of decay and crisis (Jones and Ward 2002). There are high rates of poverty, crime, racism, physical dereliction, and low rates of economic growth. On the whole, neoliberal approaches to addressing the urban crisis have not been successful in Britain. Rather, as Jones and Ward (2002, 475) observe: 'the British neoliberal urban condition is an actually-existing example of the crisis of crisis-management'.

### **'Partnership working' and local governance**

There have been dramatic changes in the way local government works since the election of New Labour in 1997. For example, the 2000 Local Government Act served to strengthen local executive leadership which in turn has resulted in strong individual leaders taking on the role of brokering deals between local and central governments and lessening the role played by political parties. In some cities mayors were directly elected by local electors for the first time in 2002. The idea behind the introduction of directly elected mayors (with cabinets) in larger cities is to increase the transparency and accountability of decision-making and to raise the profile of local politics through charismatic local leaders. The central government has touted this as a regeneration of local democracy, but voter turn-out at the local level is low and getting lower (as low as ten percent in some cities' mayoral elections) (Leach and Wilson 2004) and some have argued that it has resulted in a consolidation of local elites around a more powerful mayor.<sup>6</sup>

With this change in the structure of local government has come a change in emphasis from *public service provision* (the traditional role of local authorities) to broader leadership with *strategic policy direction* on so-called 'community issues'. As Leach and Wilson (2004, 143) note, in 'urban England, running a good housing service has typically been a higher and more tangible priority than dealing with social exclusion'. Now, however, wider, cross-cutting issues like community safety and environmental sustainability have become the focus of urban policy at local level.

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<sup>6</sup> Many local authorities are unhappy with the shift away from the traditional approach (i.e., the leader and cabinet model) where parties played a larger role and leaders could be dismissed by the party for poor performance. A party leader is easier to control than an elected mayor who has a fixed term of 4 years.

In conjunction with this change in role and policy priorities of local government, *partnership* and *partnership working* have become popular buzzwords in the urban political context. Citywide partnerships were developed in late 1990s to establish overall strategic responsibility for key issues of urban regeneration (Apostolakis 2004, 106). There is a clear expectation on the part of the central government that local priorities will place greater emphasis on community leadership, partnerships, and networking in a way that resembles a southern European *governance* style rather than a traditionally British style of government (Leach and Wilson 2004). 'Partnership working' has become a prerequisite for the implementation of policies at the local level, not only because it has been imposed from central government down to local authorities, but also because of the large number of organisations involved in shaping and delivering public policy -- and the complexity of the issues with which local governments must deal. There are many examples of New Labour partnership programmes; the following England-specific partnerships are most relevant to subject of the present research:

- **Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs)** – established under the Local Government Act 2000. These are the overarching partnerships of 'stakeholders' (i.e., local authorities and statutory agencies, businesses, voluntary/community sector, local residents) being set up in 88 of the most deprived local authority areas in England. They are intended to deliver the neighbourhood renewal agenda by improving services and developing new ways to involve local people in shaping the ways in which services are delivered. ([www.neighbourhood.gov.uk/page.asp?id=531](http://www.neighbourhood.gov.uk/page.asp?id=531)).
- **Crime Reduction Partnerships** – These are statutory partnerships formed as a consequence of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998. They require the Police, local authorities and other relevant organisations to work together to tackle crime and disorder within a local authority area ([www.crimereduction.gov.uk](http://www.crimereduction.gov.uk).)
- **Health Action Zones** - These are partnerships between the National Health Service (NHS), local authorities, the voluntary and private sectors, and local communities which represent a new approach to public health, linking health,

regeneration, employment, education, housing and anti-poverty initiatives to respond to the needs of vulnerable groups and deprived communities ([www.haznet.org.uk](http://www.haznet.org.uk)).

It is common to hear this move towards partnership working described as a shift 'from government to governance', to a more participatory and democratic system in which citizens and communities have a greater role to play in matters of common concern. This stems from the normative view that the state is merely one partner in governance among many, and one which ought to facilitate and enable people to govern themselves, or to take on the responsibilities previously shouldered by the state (Rose 2000). But the concept of 'governance' might also be seen through less-than-rosy glasses as a shift that has given a greater role to elites at the local level. Jones and Ward (2002) suggest, for example, that partnerships are in reality a centralising move aimed at giving the reins of crisis-management back to central government (see also Leach and Wilson 2004). Indeed, local authorities are engaging in ever more partnership arrangements, but these are mandated, framed, and overseen by central government -- the ODPM, to be precise.

### **Increasing demands on the voluntary and community sector**

The language of 'governance' has been used to put a positive spin on the gradual shifting of the onus for dealing with social inequalities in cities from governments to civil society, to voluntary organisations and to individual citizens. Kendall (2003) observes that there has been a marked movement of the voluntary sector 'out of the shadows' and into the spot light since New Labour came to power in the UK. According to the central government Strategy Unit (2002), there are currently about 600,000 organisations in the voluntary sector and they are being asked to do more today than perhaps at any time in the nation's past.

The Blair government has from the beginning sought to give a greater role to the voluntary sector, both in terms of delivering services and 'strengthening communities' and by providing frontline diagnoses and solutions to social problems. The so-called 'third sector' is seen as a central part of the Giddens/Blair 'third way' (Kendall, 2003, 2). The sector has been courted as a partner and has been 'mainstreamed' as a key policy actor in urban regeneration. It is interesting to note that this is a new approach for the Labour party which traditionally (i.e., as Old

Labour) has been ideologically opposed to charities and other kinds of philanthropic work because they are seen as contributing to class divisions (see Kendall and Knapp 1996, Kendall 2003). However, as part of its embrace of civil society, the Blair government has produced and commissioned numerous reports and policies which both affect the working of the voluntary sector and support the government's agenda for third way partnerships. The most important of these include:

- **The Deakin Commission Report on the Future of the Voluntary Sector** (1996) which recommended greater partnership working between Government and voluntary sector. While not commissioned by New Labour, this report has been influential in setting the policy direction for the present government.
- **The Compact** produced in late 1998, which sets out a 'framework for partnership working' between the government and voluntary/community sector organisations. It also sets out codes of good practice for partnership working and designs a compact structure for national and local level compacts. Kendall (2003, 46) calls this particular policy unprecedented, 'an unparalleled step change in the positioning of the voluntary sector in public policy'. (<http://www.thecomcompact.org.uk/>). It is the only one of its kind in the world. (NB: 'Compact Plus' is streamlined and 'improved' Compact, released in 2005 after a lengthy consultation exercise. See *Strengthening Partnerships: Next Steps for Compact*.)
- **Private Action, Public Benefit: A Review of Charities and the Wider Not-for-Profit Sector**, Cabinet Office Strategy Unit 2002. This is a comprehensive report on the government's strategy for making the most of the voluntary sector and for bringing charities and other non-governmental organisations (NGOs) into partnerships at the local level. It includes, among other things, a review of the law on charitable status and consideration of the independence of the voluntary sector. It sets out the following broad aims:

'The Government's strategy towards charities and the wider not-for-profit sector aims to: help organisations play a bigger role in revitalising communities and empowering citizens; encourage public support; help the sector to become more effective and efficient; and enable the sector to become a more active partner with Government in shaping policy and

delivery.'

<http://www.strategy.gov.uk/downloads/su/voluntary/report/02.htm>).

As of May 2006, the Cabinet Office has responsibility for the voluntary and community sector. It brings together the different parts of Whitehall that deal with sector issues, including the Active Communities Directorate at the Home Office and social enterprises at the Department of Trade and Industry. Hilary Armstrong has overall responsibility for the Cabinet Office. Ed Milliband is the Minister with responsibility for the voluntary and community sector - a new office for the sector in the Cabinet Office. It aims to bring greater coherence to the Government's approach to the sector.

The National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) ([www.ncvo-vol.org.uk/](http://www.ncvo-vol.org.uk/)), the umbrella organisation which represents and researches the voluntary and community sector (VCS) in England (4,500 members), has its own take on the current context of governance and partnership-working. While welcoming the government's recognition of the sector and its contribution to the economy, the NCVO has expressed concern that the government spends more time setting targets for and downloading responsibility for service provision to the voluntary sector than it does on developing the conditions under which the voluntary sector can be effective and efficient in its working (i.e., reviewing funding, contracts, and the terms of engagement). It has been vocal in reminding its membership and the government that the VCS has more to contribute than public service delivery and has published a 'terms of engagement' for the VCS which stresses the importance of independence, participation in the overall reform agenda, and the need for fairness, equity, sustainability, and accountability in funding arrangements (see [www.ncvo-vol.org.uk/policy/index.asp?id=1429](http://www.ncvo-vol.org.uk/policy/index.asp?id=1429)). It has also lobbied for a number of structural and systemic changes including the creation of a ministerial position for the voluntary sector (which has recently been achieved). In March 2006 the Chancellor announced the establishment of a Third Sector Office in the Treasury.



## **2. The Manchester context**

### **Deindustrialisation and urban regeneration**

Manchester was a thriving industrial centre from the industrial revolution in the 1800s until the 1960s. By the 1970s its good fortunes ran out with the start of a long and painful process of deindustrialization. Deindustrialisation brought about a decline in the demand for manufacturing and resulted in a major increase in the level of unemployment and led ultimately to a recession in the early 1990s. Changes in Manchester's workforce have been dramatic: In late 1950s, over half the workforce was in industrial employment. From 1971 to 1997, more than a quarter of all jobs were lost in the city (Peck and Ward 2002, 16). Today less than one fifth of workers are employed in factories and the rest of the workforce is employed in service sector (some financial, but mostly low paid clerical and other administrative and retail services).

So in a relatively short time period, Manchester has gone from a booming economy with predominantly masculine factory worker culture to an underachieving economy with feminized service sector and a culture of under-employment. Indeed, deindustrialization has brought significant changes in the economy and hence in the culture of the city. But as Jamie Peck and Kevin Ward (2002, xvi) claim, whilst the political, economic and social changes that have taken place in Manchester over the past decade run parallel the changes occurring in other British cities, it 'can never be "just another case study" because in a sense it has always been a city on the cusp of change and – let's be frank – it has never had a reputation for modesty'.

Manchester has a tradition of oppositional politics and a long history of labour movement activism. The Labour government led by Graham Stringer in the 1980s established Manchester as bastion of municipal socialism. Under Stringer's leadership the city council actively opposed central government policies and promoted radical initiatives around local economic development, nuclear disarmament, and gender equality (Tickell and Peck 1996, 606). Possibly because of its radicalism and refusal to toe the government line, the Greater Manchester Council was abolished by Thatcher in the mid 1980s. Local government was then devolved to the 10 boroughs (Bolton, Bury, Oldham, Rochdale, Salford, Stockport, Tameside, Trafford, Wigan, and Manchester City) each of which now has its own independent local authority. The Association of Greater Manchester Authorities

(AGMA) was set up to coordinate those areas of service which are GMA-wide, namely the GM Police Authority, GM Fire and Civil Defence Authority, GM Waste Disposal Authority, and the GM Passenger Transportation Executive. There is also GM Probation Authority and a GM Strategic Health Authority. Some argue that this decentralisation has not been good for anyone: it has intensified competition between the boroughs for investment and prevents coordination that might maximise efficiency and strategic policy options (While, Jonas and Gibb 2004).

After years of resisting the central government agenda, Stringer eventually changed his approach and became 'an enthusiastic advocate' of his 'vision of Manchester as a prosperous Europeanised post-industrial city' (While, Jonas and Gill 2004, 555). In the early 1990s Stringer and his council embraced pragmatism and privatism more readily and rapidly than most local authorities in the UK. Their approach can be described as interventionist neoliberalism ('talking up, making over, and trickling down' [Peck and Ward 2002, 12]). Stringer left municipal politics to become a Labour MP in 1997, prompting commentators to remark on his 'conversion' from old to new Labour (see Quilley 2002, 77).

Manchester is a postindustrial city that is paradigmatic of the shift in Britain to "a new urban politics in the 1990s insofar as [its] governance structures and policies internalized many of the features of interurban competition and the active promotion of growth..." (While, Jonas and Gibbs 2004, 551). Many others have made the observation that it typifies the UK-style urban entrepreneurialism that emerged in the 80s and 90s (cf. Peck and Ward 2002; Williams 2000; Quilley 2000; While, Jonas & Gibbs 2004). Thanks to Stinger and subsequent local leaders, Manchester became the epitome of local state entrepreneurialism which has city centre regeneration as a 'narrow obsession' (Peck and Ward, 2002:3). The highly successful city centre face-lift was accomplished due to the strength of Manchester's 'ruling elite'. Partnerships between the local state and the local business community were vigorously pursued as a principal means of policy formation and service delivery. 'Partnershipspeak' was a 'conspicuous feature of the 'new' Manchester (Peck & Ward 2002, xvi). Importantly, this is a male-dominated elite network, a self proclaimed Manchester Mafia, which is 'lubricated by business relationships, personal friendships, and other "informal" links' (Tickell and Peck 1996, 597).

The work of Manchester's ruling elite, or growth coalition as it is termed in the urban politics literature, has concentrated on waterfront development and city centre

regeneration. The aim was to make 'Glamchester' a place where businesses want to be situated and where the middle classes want to live. There was a 'high octane' (Williams 2000) economic development strategy which involved bids in the late 1990s for the Olympic Games (which failed twice) and the Commonwealth Games which was successful. Mobilized around these bid processes, the aim of the partnerships was to produce and to market the city's international image as an entrepreneurial, 'can-do' city (Peck and Ward 2002, 7; While, Jonas and Gibbs 2004). Sport has played an important role in the redevelopment of Manchester, possibly because it fits well with the local culture and so it is a strategic means of selling development plans to the local citizenry (cf Ward 2003). The process of rebuilding after the 1996 IRA bombing was also seen by the 'Manchester Mafia' as a good business opportunity (Peck and Ward 2002, 14)

From the late 90s onwards, Manchester city politics have grown increasingly elite and centralised, with the concentration of power in the hands of a few. Governing processes have grown more opaque and the institutional role of city government has changed slightly (from traditional to cabinet style) but retains its 'heavy hand of central control' (Robson 2002, 47). City Council has 'loosened its patriarchal hold on its local fiefdom partly at the behest of national legislation, but also as part of the new civic entrepreneurialism' (Robson 2002, 47). By 1999 the Blair Government considered the Manchester local authority to be one of the best in Britain and so it was the beneficiary of most of the discretionary initiatives set up by the government (e.g., Health Action Zones, Single Regeneration Budgets, etc.). Manchester is also one of seventeen pilot bodies for the New Deal for Communities (Robson 2002, 34).

### **Partnerships in Manchester**

If there is a partnership tradition in Manchester, it is clearly a tradition of public-private (i.e., corporate) partnerships for urban regeneration. The privileging of a role for business goes back to the mid 1980s when urban development corporations were imposed on Labour-run local authorities like Manchester. One of the first of these partnerships was the Central Manchester Development Corporation (CMDC), essentially an economic partnership involving local government and businesses to develop an economic strategy and a vision for regeneration. Later, the City Pride process (mid 90s, under Thatcher) forged new partnerships and crystallized a vision

for the new Manchester which included: repopulating the core, having sporting and sports-based development as key themes, boosting high and low culture/arts to create a consumer base; encourage high tech developments and investment, and emphasizing the role of the airport in attracting international investment (and development on lands near the airport). There were great efforts to 'market Manchester' (known as 'place-marketing' in the literature) to wider international audience and to engage in 'civic boosterism' to persuade citizens of Manchester to buy in to the agenda. Here again, sport was a key driving theme (Cochrane, Peck and Tickell 1996).

Manchester's public-private regeneration partnership approach is seen as a model for other cities, led as it was (and perhaps still is) by an arms-length, semi-autonomous executive drawn from senior politicians and relevant council departments and key players in the private sector. The so-called 'Manchester mafia' is known for being very fast in making things happen. One example is the rapid rebuilding of core after 1996 IRA bomb. A hallmark of the approach is to 'roll out' regeneration from one area of the city to the next.

But while the economic and regeneration agendas have dominated, the growing social problems in Manchester have demanded more and more attention. In 1997 the City Pride agenda began for the first time to address social dimensions of regeneration, prompted in part by election of New Labour in 1997. Manchester City Council wanted to show itself to be on the same page as New Labour, so it began to adopt a more community leadership/neighbourhood social renewal approach. The City Pride agenda therefore included a social strategy forum which was novel in identifying cross-cutting social issues. Arguably it can be seen as a precursor to the central government's Social Exclusion Unit which also now identifies social issues as requiring joined up working across government departments (cf Robson 2002, 49). Manchester City Council has shed a third of its workforce since the late 1980s and so has a diminished ability to provide services or to initiate and implement projects (Peck and Ward 2002, 11). Also important, therefore, was to begin to invite the voluntary and community sector into the fold and to develop tripartite partnerships for city-wide renewal and service delivery.

There are several key partnerships now in place in Manchester.

- **'The Manchester Partnership'** is the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP)<sup>7</sup> for Manchester which brings together people working in health, policing, education, jobs training, transport, community, voluntary and other agencies. It was created in 2000/1

There are seven **Thematic Partnerships** within the Manchester Partnership, based on one of the themes of the Manchester Community Strategy<sup>8</sup>, the overarching framework for improving the wellbeing of the city. Each is responsible for making change and partnership working at neighbourhood level, but they are seen as interrelated themes. These thematic partnerships have action plans and targets that are evaluated annually. The seven themes are:

Economy and Local Employment

Children and young people

Sustainable neighbourhoods

Crime and disorder

Health inequalities

Transport

See <http://www.manchester.gov.uk/regen/lsp/focus.htm> and <http://www.manchester.gov.uk/regen/lsp/thematic.htm>

- **Working Together: A Compact for Manchester** – launched in September 2003 in response to a 1998 central government requirement for local authorities to put compacts in place by 2005. It is a statement of intent which

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<sup>7</sup> Local Strategic Partnership (LSPs) are overarching partnerships of stakeholders including local people who come together to shape the future of their neighbourhood in how services are provided. The aim of LSPs, according to the ODPM, 'is to improve the quality of life of residents.'

<sup>8</sup> A 'Community Strategy' is the plan which local authorities are required by central government to prepare for improving the economic, environmental and social wellbeing of local areas and by which the councils are expected to co-ordinate the actions of the public, private, voluntary and community organisations that operate locally.

expresses the local council's commitment to developing good working relationships between statutory and voluntary sectors. It has codes of practice, shared values, and so on.

(see <http://www.manchester.gov.uk/voluntary/compact/index.htm#Intro>)

### **Continuing social problems despite regeneration efforts**

In spite of these progressive-sounding programmes and partnerships, Manchester is still a city characterized by extreme social polarization, localized deprivation, and a vast range of problems resulting from unemployment and underemployment, low waged jobs, and a lack of robust public infrastructure to deal effectively with these problems. It is the third most deprived local authority in England and is reported to be one of the most violent places in the England (i.e., the area has more reported crime than anywhere else in the country outside London). Over 12 percent of the population said in 2001 census that their health was not good (national average is 9 percent) and the MINI score for Manchester indicates 19 percent higher than average need for mental health care than in the UK as a whole. The suicide rate in Manchester is 60 percent higher than national figure. There remains a high level of political alienation in spite of efforts to improve governance and community leadership.

Regeneration efforts have not addressed these problems, but rather have tended to displace them from the city centre to more peripheral areas (Peck and Ward 2002, 5). There has been very little improvement in poverty levels and the incidence of 'social exclusion' throughout the 1990s – in fact many of the social problems have actually become worse. The emphasis in Manchester has been on 'playing the regeneration game' (the rules of which are set in London and Brussels rather than by the local people), a game which is all about competing for investment rather than improving the material conditions in which the citizens of Manchester live (Peck and Ward 2002, 7). 'Trickle down' benefits that have been promised have not been experienced. Manchester is growing more and more similar to an American 'doughnut-shaped' city with white and affluent people living in the gentrified core and poor suburbs with large non-white and new immigrant populations. Social problems have been exacerbated by this polarization: 'The poor are being edged out of the public spaces on which they had come to depend ...while in labour-market terms many young men in particular are falling into the widening chasm between welfare

and work; excluded from both, too many are fashioning an existence in the cash-and-crime economy' (Peck and Ward 2002, 12). So there remains a large and growing demand on public policy and social services to address these problems but whether the motivation to address them is for economic or social reasons is an open question (cf. Robson 2002). Clearly there is a growing role the community and voluntary sector, but the possibilities of this role within partnerships that are already dominated by the statutory and private sectors is also an open question.

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