

Children and Community Regeneration

Creating better neighbourhoods

Hugh Matthews



Save the Children

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Preface

Imagine a country where children are consulted, listened to and taken seriously; where opportunities prevail for children to be involved in decision-making and the democratic process; where children, as a matter of course, are able to make positive contributions to the well-being of their communities and neighbourhoods; where children's participation stemming from political and social imperatives is regarded as just and normal; and where children need no convincing that democracy works for them. This book is written with this ideal in mind. It is based on an assumption that children, as full members of a society, have the human right to participate in its activities, according to their levels of ability, understanding and maturity (see box opposite). A central premise is that children are not just the citizens of tomorrow; they are also the citizens of today. Yet, despite the UK Government's ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) in 1991, children remain a large and uniquely uninfluential sector of the population. A culture of non-participation by young people is endemic in the UK, especially in the context of decisions surrounding their social, economic and environmental futures. For the most part, young people are seemingly invisible in decision-making processes, and are seldom given opportunities to express their preferences. This book will draw upon evidence to show that, if given the opportunity, children have the capability, skill and motivation to become keenly involved in community action of various kinds.

The focus of the book is on all young people under 18 years old. However, it is suggested that there is no such thing as "the child", nor a

Participation involves much more than consultation; it assumes an ability to influence and change. It provides children with the opportunity to think for themselves, to express their views, and to expect that these ideas will be listened to and taken seriously. It entails working effectively with others, and interacting in a positive way. Above all, it is an inclusive process that encourages the active engagement of all children, regardless of background or identity.

uniform social category of "children". In any discussion on children's participation, care should be taken to recognise this. It may be convenient to think of children and young people as one distinct social group, but such a notion bears little resemblance to the experiences and engagement of children with their communities. Children come in all shapes and sizes, and may be distinguished according to their gender, race, ethnicity, ability, health, and age. Such differences have important bearings on their propensity and opportunity to participate, and should not be overlooked in any discussion. It is important to recognise the importance of "multiple childhoods", and the sterility of the concept of the "universal child". "Who" the child is (as with class, gender, and even personality), and "where" they come from (in both place and time), are important in understanding the complex and multiple realities of children's lives. However, there is a danger that, in emphasising the diversity of children's everyday experiences, we underplay the commonality of generation-based exclusion. Socio-spatial marginalisation is an emphatic feature of growing-up in Western societies, for all children,

although its forms may differ, and some children may experience it more than others. For example, children living in areas of high social disadvantage commonly face extreme conditions of exclusion and isolation. Children's voices have been consistently silenced and to redress this requires a political solution involving the widest possible constituency. Only when children's right to participate becomes a matter of principle *and* practice, will it be possible to hear the great diversity of children's voices.

Central to the discussion is the concept of children as *social actors*, with particular "ways of seeing", and of encountering the world, that are mostly beyond the reach of adults. "Because adults have different outlooks and are pursuing different interests, they are often unable to see, much less understand, the child's point of view" (Matthews, 1995, p 462). There is a great deal of difference between adults' recollections of rich and memorable experiences of childhood, and children's real encounters with everyday spaces. Because children and adults often differ in how they feel about and react to a place, their views on environmental planning are unlikely to coincide. So it is important to involve children as active agents, and to recognise their ability to make positive and distinctive contributions to their communities.

In exploring the concept of children's active participation, this book focuses on children's involvement in regeneration decision-making. The term "regeneration" is used to signify the

process of positive community action. It can take many forms – ranging across social, economic and environmental programmes – and can occur within many settings, including the neighbourhood; the school; the playground; the club; and the street. On some occasions it may involve children as a generic group; on others it may involve targeted action by particular groups of young people, depending on the socio-cultural mix of a community.

An important aspect of regeneration in all of these contexts is sustainability – that is, the extent to which enduring participatory structures that reach out and engage young people from different backgrounds have been put in place, particularly for those who are experiencing profound disadvantage and social exclusion. Other issues are also important. For example: Why are some young people more likely to get involved than others? Will young people's views be taken seriously in the future – within their communities, and by local decision-makers? What barriers to participation and change are evident, and what can be done to encourage further participation and change? When young people do engage, how can that involvement be maintained for a reasonable period of time before they move? When a project is completed, what will be left behind for the benefit of other young people? What evidence is there to suggest that the broader community is benefiting from such activity? Is the project challenging adult preconceptions about the competence, capability and motivation of young people?



This book is organised into six chapters.

Chapter 1 examines the case for children's participation in community decision-making, including those who are traditionally the hardest to reach, many of whom are living in areas currently receiving regeneration funding. Consideration is given to the changing status of children in society, and how these differing social constructions affect perceptions of children's roles and competencies. This is followed by discussion on the relationship between citizenship and children – a debate that questions the range and nature of entitlements that children should expect. Lastly, it examines the moral, political and social case for children's participation.

Chapter 2 explores children's relationships with their communities and their dependence on public space. It draws upon a substantive body of new empirical evidence, to show that the ways

in which children and adults encounter, think about and value their local neighbourhoods are very different. An average young person's day is different in rhythm, scale and content from an adult's. Accordingly, their *ways of seeing* rarely coincide. Just because all adults have been children once, does not mean that they retain an irrefutable insight into children's lives. Discussion is based around a set of seven observations that attempt to summarise the major ways in which children experience and see neighbourhood spaces. Understanding how children regard their local environments, and how their perceptions are likely to differ from those of adults, is fundamental to the case for children's involvement in community regeneration.

Chapter 3 looks at three different aspects of public policy – urban and regeneration strategies, the current emphasis on youth councils and

control of children in their neighbourhoods. Discussion highlights the specific problems faced by children growing up in poor neighbourhoods; the nature of neighbourhood regeneration strategies since the late 1960s, what has been learned from the experiences so far; and how some recent developments may have the obverse effect of marginalising, rather than integrating, young people within their communities.

Chapter 4 considers the multiplicity of ways in which children have been drawn into neighbourhood action and regeneration programmes. It focuses upon the unfolding landscapes of voluntarism; where and in what ways children are particularly active; what motivates local participation, and how this might be reproduced for the empowerment of young people and communities in general. Consideration is given to how these new configurations of local governance – characterised by a developing relationship between actors from the statutory, business and voluntary sectors and the local community – provide examples of good practice for the betterment of other neighbourhood spaces.

Chapter 5 focuses on a series of issues relevant to individuals and organisations when working *with* children. As momentum towards giving young people a voice gathers pace, there is a need to

highlight good practice in relation to ethical and methodological considerations that are important when working *with* children, and to highlight those barriers that inhibit many young people from taking part. Attention is drawn to recent literature that helps to establish important guidelines that enable effective consultation and participation.

Chapter 6 offers a set of recommendations that, if taken up, will provide an agenda to strengthen the active participation of young people. These recommendations are based on the assumption that participation delivers “a way out of the problem of the ‘problematism’ of young people”, and sets in place a strategy that shifts attention towards their potential. The proposed agenda depends upon the interplay of government departments, public authorities, local communities, and children themselves, brokered through the mediation of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) with substantial experience of working *with* children. Only through an alliance of this kind will children be repositioned within society.

For quick reference, the main points of discussion are summarised at the beginning of each chapter.

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I Why involve children?

Summary of Chapter I

- Childhood is a social construction. The status and position of children in society depends on how a society engages with, values and empowers its children.
- In many Western societies, children have been relegated to an unnatural state of incompetence, such that their capacities, skills and powers remain, for the most part, unrealised.
- Participatory citizenship is the cornerstone of democracy. Yet, within the UK, children are commonly perceived as apprentice or incomplete citizens. For this reason, a condition of non-participation is endemic.
- Our society remains intransigent on children's involvement. This stance is founded on (mis)conceptions about the reality of children's lives.
- There are strong moral, political and social reasons for enabling children to take part. Participation by children – including those who are disadvantaged – is a decisive factor in ensuring social cohesion and in upholding democracy and the values of a multicultural society; moreover, participation is a basic entitlement of every member of society.
- A nation is democratic to the extent that its citizens are involved, particularly at the community level. The confidence and competence to be involved must be acquired gradually, through practice.
- Beyond the UK, there is substantial evidence for the wider development of children's participation, and of practices where their participation has been taken more seriously.
- A clear agenda suggests new opportunities and directions for engaging children, and for establishing practices that ensure their widespread participation.



Introduction

As we enter the new millennium, there are 13 million young people aged under 18 in the UK. Children form about one-quarter of the entire population, and in some cases a much larger proportion of the community. Yet, for the most part, young people are seemingly invisible on the physical and social landscape, and are seldom given opportunities to express their views and preferences (Matthews and Limb, 1998; Matthews *et al*, 1999). For example, local councils, health and education authorities, and government departments, make routine and regular proposals for development and planning. These cover a broad range of issues – from transport, housing and the management of waste, to leisure, environmental design and landscape conservation. Planning decisions of this sort affect everyone, including children. However, as many commentators point out (Adams and Ingham, 1998; Henderson, 1995), young people do not feature prominently in these proposals, and the ways in which they are included in the practices of consultation vary considerably. Children's priorities are secondary, and their absence on many local government committees, planning groups and advisory forums means that their viewpoints and rights are often ignored in the policy-making process.

In structure planning, for example, there is a general lack of involvement of young people in local and community affairs. Each county, metropolitan and unitary authority is required to produce a structure plan that will provide a framework for development, provision, amenity and access. These plans are intended to be

comprehensive, and responsive to the disparate needs of local populations. During the 1990s, every London borough began to prepare a unitary development plan (UDP) along these lines. In 1994, a comprehensive review of the policies contained in the UDPs of each of the 33 London boroughs was carried out (Planning Aid for London, 1994), with a view to determining whether or not young people had been consulted or involved in this process, and the extent to which local policies were targeted at their needs. The report concluded that few UDPs considered young people's issues seriously, and that there was little practice of consultation.

There is little evidence to suggest that London differs from other places in the UK with regard to the participation of young people in local planning. For example, few children are asked about what matters to them locally; what they think about recreational opportunities; what changes they would like to see within their neighbourhoods to improve safety, and to lessen danger from traffic; how street lighting could be improved; how public transport could be made more accessible; what social facilities are needed in order for them to meet up with friends; and, more generally, how their local quality of life could be enhanced. For these sorts of reasons, the Children's Rights Office (Lansdown, 1995) declares that the UK's children constitute a disenfranchised group of "nearly" citizens, with no public voice.

However, there is increasing evidence that where children have been consulted, and have become involved, there have been very positive outcomes. As will be shown in Chapter 4, there are many

good examples of public, private and voluntary agencies taking active steps to use the perceptions, skills and energy of young people, for the benefit of the whole community. However, projects that promote the involvement of children are frequently heralded as innovative. There is often a feeling that what is being undertaken is beyond the orthodox – a challenge, and experimental. The media clamour that often surrounds these events reinforces a sense of the extraordinary. Indeed, this book would not be necessary if such events and activities were seen as normal practice – something to which every child is accustomed as part of growing up. There is still a long way to go before children are seen as “younger citizens in the machinery and everyday affairs of local government” (Willow, 1997, p. 1).

Unlike other marginalised groups, children in most Western societies are not in a position to enter into a dialogue with adults about their community needs and environmental concerns. In this sense, children occupy a special position of exclusion. It is mostly beyond their grasp to challenge, from within, the conventions of dominant ideology, together with the practices and processes that lead to their socio-spatial marginalisation. Children, as “outsiders”, need allies, and so this book contributes to a growing body of opinion that considers children’s disconnection from mainstream policy-making at a local level as unacceptable in a modern democratic state.

The rest of this chapter is organised into three parts. First, consideration is given to the changing status of children in society, and how these differing social constructions affect perceptions of

children’s roles and competencies. This is followed by discussion on the relationship between citizenship and children – a debate that questions the range and nature of entitlements that children should expect. Finally, the moral, political and social case for children’s participation is examined.

Children and society

Throughout history, there have been moral shifts in the ways in which children and childhood have been regarded. Cox (1996, p. 5) suggests that “we can attempt to understand our current preoccupations, ambiguities and anxieties about childhood by seeing them as part of a legacy from the past, a past which seems to exert a hold upon us whether or not we would wish to be free of it”. Valentine draws attention to how “the age at which childhood begins and ends has, like the meanings ascribed to it, changed over space and time” (1996, p 582). James et al. (1998, p. 2) stress the importance of recognising childhood as a social invention. They contend that “the biological facts of infancy are but the raw material upon which cultures work to fashion a particular version of ‘being a child’” (see Box 1.1).

The kinds of prejudices and exclusionary premises that have relegated children to a state of “adults-in-waiting” are not new. Indeed, a considerable history of anti-children assumptions can be traced back, at least to the sixteenth century. Modern conceptions of childhood that stress the innocence, vulnerability and frailty of children, and that “forcefully ejected children from the worlds of work, sexuality and politics and

Box 1.1: Childhood as a social construction

Since Aries' (1962) revolutionary thesis on the history of childhood, the notion that childhood is a social construction rather than a biological state has dominated social discourse. Although subsequently criticised for its generalisation and a presentism that appeared to lock childhood into the realm of modernity, the strength of this work is that it both relativised the concept of childhood and freed it from naturalistic reductionism (Sommerville, 1982). Despite the spawning of an academic tradition that debunks the conceptualisation of children as empty vessels, with little to say that could not be said better by adults, within society as a whole adult-centric assumptions continue to disempower children and mute their voices. The empowerment of children will only be achieved through the deconstruction of these power-based premises.

designated the classroom as the major focus of children's lives" (Franklin, 1995, p. 7), date from this period. Childhood became codified as a period of training and discipline in preparation for adult life, where a lack of autonomy was seen as natural, and children were constructed as human beings in-the-making (Cox, 1996). Successful socialisation depended on regimes of control and regulation of the child's body and mind, whereby teachers and parents were ascribed the duties of providing the foundation for the future. Qvortrup et al. (1994) argue that, with time, the institutional structures of society moved to normalise the mythology of a golden age. Children became progressively and systematically

separated from adults and, through this process, were disenfranchised, forced into a state of dependency, and obliged to be "seen but not heard":

"[T]he most important feature of the way in which the modern age conceives of children is as meriting separation from the world of adults. The particular nature of children is separate; it clearly and distinctly sets them apart from adults. Children neither work nor play alongside adults; they do not participate in the adult world of law and politics."
(Archard, 1993, p. 29)

Qvortrup (1995) regards the removal of children from the public sphere as one of the paradoxes of contemporary childhood. While it is frequently argued that it is good for children and parents to be together, and to share the experiences of growing up, they are increasingly living their everyday lives apart. Spatiality of this kind enforces the infantilisation of childhood, whereby children live in a condition of "less-than-adult", with few entitlements, other than those bestowed through the generosity of "enlightened" individuals. This conception of a separate childhood, whereby children occupy "an extended stage before and below adulthood" (Archard, 1993, p. 31), has become so ingrained in the socio-spatial landscape that it is not surprising that barriers to children's participation are difficult to dismantle (see Box 1.2). For, as Ennew (1994, p. 125) suggests:

"modern society constructs children out of society, mutes their voices, denies their personhood, limits their potential."

Box 1.2: Modern (mis)conceptions of western childhood

- The child is a radically separate being from the adult.
- Childhood is a stage of incompetence relative to adulthood.
- Adults are rational, physically independent, autonomous, with a strong sense of identity and consciousness. Thus, they are able to make informed and sensible choices for which they can be held personally responsible. It is because children lack these adult competencies that they may not participate in the adult world.
- Children do have virtues – for example, innocence. But an innocent cannot belong to an adult world.
- To be a child is to be not yet an adult. Adulthood is something that is gained.

Source: based on Archard (1993).

Archard (1993), however, challenges these assumptions. He questions the entire premise that children have a different nature to that of adults. Archard surmises that if children do have a distinct nature that separates them from adults, then they cannot be in a state of training for adult life. For him, it is children's enforced removal from the adult world that explains their separateness. Society has relegated children into an unnatural state of incompetence, such that their capacities, skills and powers remain, for the most part, unrealised. Just as women's subordination to men is not natural, so children's powerlessness and exemption from community affairs is a socially defined condition, not something that is normal and pre-ordained. Indeed, beyond Western society there are many examples of children being encouraged to participate in their community's subsistence. Hart (1997), for example, draws attention to how children in many societies of the "South" are expected to carry out simple jobs from an early age – such as looking after siblings; fetching and carrying; and tending animals.

Children and citizenship

The concept of citizenship relates to the relationship between individuals and the State (see Box 1.3). It raises issues about political, social and civil entitlements, and the conditions required for social participation. Also, citizenship is wrapped up in moral questions about “who is accepted as a worthy, valuable and responsible member of an everyday community of living and working” (Painter and Philo, 1995, p. 115). It addresses those formal and informal processes that determine people’s inclusion in and exclusion from a variety of symbolic and material spaces and resources. The concept can be used analytically, to expose differences in the *de jure*

and *de facto* rights of different groups within society, or normatively, to provide the basis of ideas about what a society that is sensitive to individual rights as well as to social justice should look like (Johnston et al., 2000). When the concept is applied to children’s rights, there is considerable debate. In the UK, for example, children are mostly perceived as apprentice or incomplete citizens. They are afforded the rights of protection and provision, but are in the company of lunatics and criminals in being denied political rights. Rather than being an entitlement, the right to participate is regarded more as a privilege, available only to the fortunate.

Box 1.3: Citizenship

Marshall (1950; 1977; 1981) provides the most influential theory of modern citizenship. He recognises citizenship in terms of a series of rights – political, civil and social – which have been accumulated over the past three centuries. These statutory entitlements include “the right to share to the full in the social heritage and to live the life of a civilised being according to the standards prevailing in the society” (1950, p. 11); they formalise the conditions needed for full participation in a community.

According to Smith (1989, p. 147), “the setting of individuals into a structured relationship with the State – a relationship which is specified theoretically (in terms of the *de jure* entitlements of the public) but which can be interrogated empirically (to monitor whether, and to whom, such rights are effectively available) – is the platform on which the revitalized concept of citizenship in social democratic theory lays its intellectual credentials”. For children, as for all other members of a society, this raises issues of how citizenship is constructed, and how it is interpreted in relation to equality of opportunity and social justice.

From an analytical perspective, Table 1.1 draws attention to what is and what is not happening within UK law, planning, policy and practice about the involvement of young people. In effect,

children under the age of 18 years lack full autonomy: their citizenship rights are vested with their parents or other adults, who have the authority to act in their best interests.

Table 1.1 The right to say: young people's involvement in policy and practice in the UK

Policy area	Positive involvement	Limited or no involvement
Central government	<p>In July 2000, Children and Young People's Unit set up within Department for Education and Employment (DfEE), backed by cross-governmental committee. The Unit will co-ordinate policies on children and young people; aim to prevent poverty and disadvantage in children and young people, and manage the new £450m Children's Fund. It supports a new Cabinet Committee on Children and Young People's Services, chaired by the Chancellor of the Exchequer.</p> <p>A Minister for Young People has been appointed, with the day-to-day responsibility for the Unit, and the co-ordination of the Government's strategy on vulnerable children and young people.</p> <p>In Wales, a Commissioner for Children has been appointed, whilst in Scotland and Northern Ireland commissioners are likely to be established in the near future.</p>	<p>No vote until the age of 18; not allowed to stand as MP until 21 years old. No statutory obligation on central government to consult children about anything.</p> <p>No independent children's ombudsman, or commissioner for children planned for England (unlike many European countries).</p>

Table 1.1 *continued*

Policy area	Positive involvement	Limited or no involvement
Local government	<p>New guidance on planning for children's services encourages providers to find out what children think, and to take these opinions into account in the planning process.</p> <p>Agenda 21 guidelines encourage consultation with young people on environmental issues.</p> <p>The Children Act (1989) for England and Wales requires local authorities (and courts) to consider the wishes and feelings of children when making decisions concerning their welfare.</p> <p>Some local authorities have appointed children's rights officers.</p> <p>In some Scottish authorities, 16-year-olds can stand and vote in elections for community councils.</p>	<p>Little consultation with children about local planning; housing; transport policy; leisure services; crime prevention, or local environmental policies.</p> <p>Not allowed to be a local councillor until the age of 21.</p> <p>There has been no consistent response, and many local authorities have not put in place appropriate structures.</p> <p>The scope of the Children Act (1989) for England is very limited. The obligation to take account of children's wishes and feelings has application only when conflict arises within a family leading to divorce, or when the local authority has responsibility for the child's care.</p> <p>There is no general presumption in the Act that children have a right to participate in decision-making, or that they should be encouraged to articulate their views.</p>
Health Services	<p>The "Gillick" case (1986) established the principle of the competent child. It recognised that children have the right to consent to medical and dental treatment, once they are judged to have "sufficient understanding". This principle has been included only in Scottish law – The Children (Scotland) Act 1995.</p> <p>Department of Health guidelines on children in hospital and child health in the community promote the intentions of the UNCRC.</p> <p>In Northern Ireland, since 1998, Area Children and Young People's Committees are a mandatory requirement of Health and Social Services Boards when planning children's services.</p>	<p>The "Gillick" principle has not been incorporated into primary legislation in England and Wales. Other, more recent cases have undermined the ruling. In 1992, the Appeal Court ruled that until the age of 18, if a child refused to give consent, the parent could intervene and give consent on their behalf, irrespective of the competence of the child. The notion of the competent child has been largely ignored.</p>

Table 1.1 *continued*

Policy area	Positive involvement	Limited or no involvement
Education	<p>Some schools – mostly secondary schools – have school councils, but their powers are usually very limited.</p> <p>Code of Practice on special educational needs encourages respect for children's views.</p> <p>DfEE "advice" suggests that matters such as school choice, curricula, and behaviour policies of schools should be discussed with pupils.</p>	<p>The right of under-18-year-olds to be school governors removed by the Education Act (1986).</p> <p>Children have no formal right to participate in matters concerning their education. It is parents, not children, who are defined as the "consumers" of education. Children are seen as the "product".</p> <p>Children do not have the right to participate in matters such as school choice; curricula; appeals over exclusions; school policy or administration. No requirement to involve children in decisions on, for example, school uniforms; arrangements for school meals; supervision in the playground; tackling bullying; or discipline. Schools are not required to introduce complaints procedures. Parents can take their children out of religious education and sex education without the need to consult children.</p>
Children in care	<p>Since 1975, care authorities have had a legal duty to consult children and take their views seriously.</p> <p>Local authorities are required to establish complaints procedures for children in need.</p> <p>Under the new Care Standards Act, England will have a Children's Rights Director with a portfolio that focuses on the 200,000 children living away from home, including those in residential care and boarding schools.</p>	<p>A number of recent inquiries into children's homes report that there was a failure to consider the views of children, and that there was a general predisposition not to believe children.</p> <p>This Act means that the other 11m children aged under 18 and living in England will remain without an equivalent representative voice.</p>
Family	<p>In Scotland, parents must consult children about all major decisions (Children (Scotland) Act, 1995).</p> <p>When parents divorce or separate, courts must consider the views of children.</p> <p>Through the Family Law Act (1996), children can apply for a non-molestation order when faced with domestic violence.</p>	<p>In England and Wales and Northern Ireland, there is no obligation on parents to consult with children; there are no governmental guidelines encouraging parents to take children's views seriously.</p> <p>If parents agree about the arrangements to be made for children following divorce or separation, there is no opportunity for the child's view to be considered. Unlike parents and other family members, children have no right to apply to court for an order about such matters as where they should live, and to whom they should have access.</p>

Source: based on Article 12 Network (1996); Lansdown (1995); *Second Report to the UNCRC by the UK* (Department of Health, 1999).

From a normative perspective, three factors contribute to this culture of non-participation. First, there remain discourses within UK society that question the appropriateness of children's political involvement. Second, there are those who doubt the capability of children to participate. Third, even among those who believe in the principle of children's right to say, there are uncertainties about the form that participation should take, and the outcomes which might result. Each of these factors is evaluated in turn and addressed in the context of children's rights to democratic participation.

In spite of a growing lobby in favour of children's rights to participate, there remains an intransigence in some quarters about whether such political involvement is appropriate. Lansdown (1995, p. 20) identifies four reasons why some adults are reluctant for children to take part in decision-making that will impact on their own life and the lives of others:

- 1 Giving children the right to say threatens the harmony and stability of family life by calling into question parents' "natural" authority to decide what is in the best interests of a child. Yet, as Qvortrup et al. (1994) suggest, in order to sustain such an argument, it must be beyond reasonable doubt that adults behave with children's best interests in mind. In practice, this is not always the case.
- 2 Imposing responsibilities on children detracts from their right to childhood – a period in life that is supposed to be characterised by freedom from concern. Such a perspective ignores the fact that many children's lives are full of legitimate concerns that are the products of the same social and economic forces as those that affect adults. For example, a survey on *Young People's Social Attitudes* (Barnardo's, 1996) showed that 12–19-year-olds share anxieties that range across such issues as crime and safety; racism; drugs; the environment; and poverty. Also, children, like adults, are affected by, and have to cope with, divorce and separation; illness; poor housing; and declining neighbourhoods. For, as Willow (1997, p. 12) suggests: "persisting with the belief that childhood is (or should be) a happy care-free period can also mean that the real needs of children and young people are hidden or ignored".
- 3 Children cannot have rights until they are capable of taking responsibility. This view is based on an idealised view of childhood, yet few children live without responsibilities. Alanen (1994) points out that children's labour and duties within the home are often underestimated; for example, some children have significant responsibilities within families as carers, which involve looking after siblings and parents, and may extend to running the home. Equally, the reality of schoolwork and its associated responsibilities are rendered invisible by the label "education".
- 4 There is a widely held belief that children already have too many rights, which they execute with little sense of responsibility. This view is often accompanied by a negative perception of children, who are defined as a social problem. Matthews et al. (1998) suggest that this perspective represents a basic misunderstanding of what rights entail, confusing licence with basic entitlements. Also, through the process of children's participation, adults will gain a more positive understanding of what children can offer.

A second, though related, argument against children's participation is based on a conviction that children are incapable of reasonable and rational decision-making – an incompetence confounded by their lack of experience, and a likelihood that they will make mistakes. Furthermore, if children are left to the freedom of their own inabilities, the results are likely to be harmful (Scarre, 1989). Franklin and Franklin (1996) draw attention to a range of libertarian criticisms of these two viewpoints. They argue that children are constantly making rational decisions that affect many parts of their daily lives (some trivial, some less so), without which their lives would have little meaning, order or purpose. In addition, adults are often not good decision-makers – history bears this out. Indeed, this observation provides an incentive to allow children to make decisions, so that they may learn from their mistakes and develop good decision-making skills. More radically, it has been argued that the probability of making mistakes should not debar children from involvement, as such an assumption “confuses the right to do something with doing the right thing” (p. 101). Critics also draw attention to the existing allocation of rights according to age, which is flawed by arbitrariness and inconsistency. For example, in the UK, young people are criminally responsible at the age of 10 in England; sexually competent at the age of 16; but not politically responsible until the age of 18, when suddenly – without training or rehearsal – they enjoy the right to suffrage. Lastly, denying rights of participation to everyone under the age of 18 years assumes homogeneity of emotional and intellectual needs, skills and competencies. Furthermore, both positions are imbued with an adultist assumption that children are not social

actors in their own right, but are adults-in-waiting or “human becomings”. Denigrating children in this way not only fails to acknowledge that children are the citizens of today (not tomorrow), but also undervalues their true potential within society, and obfuscates many issues that challenge and threaten children in their “here and now” (Matthews and Limb, 1999).

The debate about children's right to participate is compounded by a divergence of views on the nature, purpose and form that participation should take. For some (Hart, 1992; 1997; Lansdown, 1995), democratic responsibility does not suddenly arise in adulthood, but is a condition that must be nurtured and experienced at different stages along a transition, and so should be a feature of all democratic education. “It is unrealistic to expect them [children] to become responsible, participating adults at the age of 16, 18 or 21 without prior exposure to the skills and responsibilities involved” (Hart, 1992, p. 5). In addition, there is ample evidence to suggest that the involvement of children in local decision-making acts as a catalyst for participation among the community as a whole (Hart, 1997). However, others (Council of Europe, 1993; Storrie, 1997) argue that education of this kind is disempowering, in that it is designed primarily to integrate young people into existing social and institutional structures, on which they are unable to exert any real influence. Instead, if participation is to be truly effective, it should be carried out in such a way that the material influence of young people becomes progressively enlarged. According to this view, participation is more broadly conceived to be the right to influence, in a democratic manner, processes

bearing upon one's own life and the development of local youth policy. This debate relates closely to notions of education versus empowerment, and training versus emancipation (de Winter, 1997).

Children and participation

Active citizenship implies processes of involvement; shared responsibility, and engagement in decisions that affect the quality of life. This section considers three cases for children's fuller participation in society, and in their communities.

I The moral case for participation

In 1991 the UK, like almost every country in the world (except Somalia and the USA), ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). In its 54 Articles, the Convention provides a comprehensive framework of human rights for all people under the age of 18 years. In essence, children have the right to life – which is universal, and not contingent on any corresponding responsibilities of their own (Lansdown, 1995). All responsibility rests with adults – either parents or the State – who should ensure that all children are offered the basic rights of protection, provision *and participation* (see Table 1.2). The Convention establishes an international framework, which in many parts challenges the traditional assumptions of the status of children and the meaning of childhood (James et al., 1998).

Article 12 is of particular importance to the participation debate, because it requires the Government to:

- enable all children to express their views freely, about all matters that affect them;
- ensure that children's views are given due weight, in keeping with their age and maturity;
- give children the opportunity to be heard in any administrative or legal proceeding that affects them.

In effect, Article 12 is “a powerful assertion of children's right to be actors in their own lives and not merely passive recipients of adult decision-making” (Lansdown, 1995, p. 2). It establishes a fundamental moral right for under-18s to be involved in decisions about provision and protection of all kinds, and ratification is seen to be a commitment to the principle of participation.

Some people fear that rights of this kind result in a further loss of control over children who have too much freedom already. But as Hart (1997, p. 16) points out, this is a misreading of the intent and purpose of the Convention. The UNCRC neither calls for a collapse of moral values in the teaching and discipline of children, nor seeks to remove the rights of parents and adults to make the final decision. Instead, it advocates “a transparency of action and an openness to listen to and communicate with children according to their maximum capacity”. However, it does morally commit all instruments of the State, both centrally and locally, to uphold the spirit and purpose of the Convention, and to deliver according to the premise of each Article. At a community level, this means that all agencies

whose decision-making impacts on the lives of children – directly or indirectly – and all organisations that provide services to children, have a moral responsibility to ensure that their activities are consistent with the Convention.

However, the UNCRC has no status in UK law. Children have no legally enforceable right to be

consulted in relation to education; recreation; planning; or other community matters. Despite many sympathetic attempts that encourage the participation of children, the lack of such an obligatory framework means that the dominant political ideology of the UK, which is based upon assumptions that children are “not-yet-adult”, remains largely unchallenged.

Table 1.2 UNCRC: summary of provisions

Participation rights	Provision rights	Protection rights
<p>Children have the right to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • non-discrimination (Article 2) • a name and nationality (Article 7) • express an opinion, and have that opinion taken into account in any matter affecting them (Article 12) • freedom of expression (Article 13) • freedom of thought, conscience and religion (Article 14) • freedom of association and assembly (Article 15) • privacy (Article 16) • access to appropriate information (Article 17) • education for responsible citizenship (Article 29) • enjoy their culture and religion, and use their own language (Article 30) 	<p>Children have the right to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • special care, education and training if they are disabled, to ensure their full integration into society (Article 23) • health and health services (Article 24) • social security (Article 26) • an adequate standard of living (Article 27) • education (Articles 28 and 29) • leisure, recreation and cultural activities (Article 31) • rehabilitative care if they have been subjected to torture, neglect, maltreatment or exploitation (Article 39) 	<p>Children have the right to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • their best interest being taken into account in all actions concerning them (Article 3) • survival and development (Article 6), and preservation of identity (Article 8) • live with their parents (Article 9) • protection from abuse and neglect (Article 19) • special protection if deprived of their family environment (Articles 20 and 21) • special protection if they are refugees (Article 22) • periodic review of their care if they live away from home (Article 25) • school discipline that respects their dignity (Article 28) • protection from economic exploitation (Article 32), drug misuse (Article 33), and sexual abuse (Article 34) • protection from sale, trafficking and abduction (Article 35), torture and deprivation of liberty (Article 37), and other exploitation (Article 36) • protection and care at times of armed conflict (Article 38) • respect for their human rights in the administration of juvenile justice (Article 40)

The slow recognition of the moral responsibilities laid down in the UNCRC, and the uneven manner in which children's participatory rights have been implemented within the UK, have been noted by many observers, and are a matter of ongoing concern (Children's Rights Development Unit, 1994; Lansdown, 1995; Hodgkin and Newell, 1996). Indeed, at its meeting in January 1995, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child – the international body set up to monitor the implementation of the UNCRC – expressed disappointment at the lack of progress made by the UK Government in complying with its principles and standards. In particular, attention was drawn to the insufficiency of measures relating to the practice of Article 12. The Committee recommended that:

“greater priority be given to... Article 12, concerning the child's right to make their views known and to have those views given due weight, in the legislative and administrative measures and in policies undertaken to implement the rights of the child.”

It went on to suggest that:

“the State party consider the possibility of establishing further mechanisms to facilitate the participation of children in decisions affecting them, including within the family and the community” (United Nations, 1995, p. 15).

Almost five years later, despite positive attempts to tackle issues of child welfare, there was still a strong sense that the UK had failed to implement children's rights comprehensively. In the

Government's *Second Report to the UN Committee* (1999), which covers the period 1994–99, little explicit reference is made to children's participation rights. Instead, statements such as Departments “need to identify and take proper account of the interests of children when developing policy” (p. 6), and “local authorities must assess the need for children's services in their area, consult various bodies in planning how that need will be met, and publish results” (p. 9), suggest that vicarious practice, whereby informed adults act on behalf of children, is the preferred option. Madeleine Tearse – Policy Adviser for Save the Children (UK) – argued at the time that the report exposed a range of weaknesses:

“For too long children have been treated as the ‘not yet’ generation but they have rights as the citizens of today. All too often children are not involved in the decisions that affect them, which the Government's report fails to address adequately.

“The Government still lacks a clear vision for making a reality of children's rights, despite some piecemeal improvements in consulting children about policies that affect them. Save the Children is determined to help create a world in which children are seen and heard.” (Tearse, 1999)

It must be said, however, that some progress is now being made at governmental level to develop consultation with young people on policy issues – for example, in initiatives taken by the devolved administrations of Scotland and Wales, and by the new Children and Young People's Unit in England.

The fact that the UNCRC is not embedded in UK society is further demonstrated by a recent survey of 2,272 pupils aged 7–17 years, drawn from 49 schools in Britain and Northern Ireland (Alderson, 1999). Over 75 per cent said that they had not heard of it; almost all of the rest had heard only “a bit about it”; and less than 5 per cent claimed some knowledge of it.

In summary, the UNCRC has established a strong moral right for children to be consulted about decisions that affect them. If fully implemented, the Articles of the Convention require a new way of looking at children: “they move from being passive recipients of services to citizens with opinions and feelings about their lives, their community and the environment at large” (Willow, 1997, p. 9). Although some local authorities have recognised the value of using the UNCRC as a guide to the planning and delivery of services, the lack of a binding legal framework means that actions that encourage participation are generally piecemeal, arbitrary and limited in scope.

2 The political case for participation

On the face of it, the lack of participation by young people in many aspects of UK society would seem an outcome of their own actions. For example, when young people’s participation rates in formal political processes are considered, there is considerable evidence for low levels of interest and involvement (Bynner and Ashford, 1994; Park, 1995; Furlong and Cartmel, 1997). People under 25 years old are more likely than any other group not to be registered to vote, with only 43 per cent voting in the 1992 general election. Explanations for political apathy of this

kind hinge on two competing interpretations (Park, 1995). On the one hand, there is a view that non-involvement has always been a universal characteristic of young people, and that political interest develops with age and growing responsibilities. For example, a recent survey in the UK (Bynner and Ashford, 1994) showed that the majority of 15–16-year-olds (72 per cent) are not at all interested in politics. This attitude was confirmed in parts of Europe, the USA, Canada and Australia (Wilkinson and Mulgan, 1995), and is in stark contrast to overall turnout rates in national elections.

On the other hand, another view is that disillusionment and apathy is a recent phenomenon, and symptomatic of a trend that will become more apparent as the present “new” electorate grows older. Evidence in support of this view includes the declining figures of party membership by young people across the whole political spectrum (Cole, 1997). The plummeting of Young Conservative membership from 50,000 in 1970 to 10,000 by the early 1990s is typical of this trend. Also, in a report produced by the Industrial Society (1997) prior to the general election of 1997, only 5 per cent of 12–25-year-olds claimed interest in national politics of any sort, and a substantial majority – 80 per cent – of 16–25-year-olds felt that they were not part of any political party. Possible reasons for this growing sense of “political disconnection” are that young people are now too “busy”, given the developing range of leisure opportunities; or that they are more “satisfied”, due to increased material affluence, compared with their parents and grandparents. Another suggestion is that political disaffection is strongly associated with

a growing cynicism about politics, grounded in accusations of sleaze and corruption that do nothing to inspire the interest of young people (Bynner and Ashford, 1994).

Yet there is ample evidence to suggest that if young people are given more responsibilities, and more chance to participate in the running of society, then they will be more willing to engage in the processes of democracy (Hodgkin and Newell, 1996). For example, in single-issue organisations, where young people are encouraged to take part, membership statistics confirm a growing participation rate. Membership of Amnesty International's youth section increased from 1,300 in 1988 to 15,000 in 1995; Greenpeace's youth membership rose from 80,000 in 1987 to 420,000 in 1995; and Friends of the Earth reports a growth of 125,000 new young members over the same period (British Youth Council, 1996). Hodgkin and Newell (1996: 38) powerfully assert that:

“Our society is in some danger of infantilising children, of assuming an incapacity long past the date when they are more capable. It is a matter of common sense, and the instinctive good practice of many parents living with children and many professionals working with children, to listen to children and to encourage them to take responsibility for decisions wherever possible. The outcomes are usually better and, even if things go wrong, learning from mistakes is an essential part of development.”

The case for young people's closer representation and involvement in formal political processes –

especially at a national level – has been taken up by a number of campaigning organisations, and first moves pre-date the UNCRC. In 1975, the National Council for Civil Liberties (now Liberty) proposed a Children's Rights Commissioner to act as a national advocate for children, but the proposal did not advance beyond the parliamentary committee stage (Rodgers, 1979). Recently, the aim of establishing a national Commissioner has gained renewed impetus. Critical to this momentum was the publication of *Taking Children Seriously: A Proposal for a Children's Rights Commissioner* (Rosenbaum and Newell, 1991; recently revised as Newell, 2000). The authors of this detailed study make a forceful case for reform. They suggest that it is necessary to set up the office of Commissioner, because of children's vulnerability to mistreatment; the lack of co-ordination in provision for children across government departments; children's complete lack of political rights; and the need to ensure long-term government compliance with the UNCRC (Franklin and Franklin, 1996). Among the Commissioner's roles would be that of involving young people as closely as possible in decision-making at various levels. This would involve the organisation of local and national forums for young people; the establishment of advisory groups to consider policy and practice; and the widescale canvassing of young people for their views and opinions.

As a consequence of this publication, the campaign for a statutory, independent office of Children's Rights Commissioner was launched in the same year. The proposal is supported strongly by all major child welfare and child protection agencies; four Royal Colleges of Health; local

authority associations, and many professional children's organisations (Children's Rights Office, 1997). The establishment of the Children's Rights Office in 1995, and its designation of a full-time officer to campaign for a Children's Commissioner, gave added weight to the cause. In an attempt to move the campaign forward, the Gulbenkian Foundation set up an inquiry about participatory structures, which consulted widely in the UK and overseas. Their report (Hodgkin and Newell, 1996) highlighted the modest extent of inter-ministerial and inter-departmental co-ordination of children's affairs, and the *ad hoc* nature of the allocation of some responsibilities, due to there being no lead Department for children.

Other campaigning organisations have also taken up the cause. The "2020 Vision Programme" is being organised by the Industrial Society, because of their concern that young people's voices are rarely heard in political, economic and social debates. One of their goals is to increase the visibility of young people in decision-making (Industrial Society, 1997).

Recently, there has been some headway. Encouraging developments are the designations of a Minister for Children in Wales, and a Minister for Education, Europe and External Affairs (formerly Minister for Children's Issues) in Scotland,¹ with the tasks of improving

effectiveness of policy co-ordination on children's issues and promoting a coherent structure of children's services (Department of Health, Second Report to UNCRC, 1999). Also, in July 2000 the Prime Minister established a new Cabinet Committee on Children and Young People's Services. Its roles are to co-ordinate policies to prevent poverty and under-achievement among children and young people; to co-ordinate and monitor the effectiveness of service delivery; and to work with the voluntary sector to build a new alliance for children. The committee is supported by a new cross-cutting Children and Young People's Unit within the DfEE, and a new Minister for Young People, whose role encompasses the day-to-day responsibility for the Unit, and the co-ordination of the Government's strategy on vulnerable children and young people (also see Chapter 6). These developments begin to fulfil earlier manifesto pledges, but it is too early to judge whether or not they will lead to significant changes to all children's lives, including the most disadvantaged. However, what is clear is that children within the UK still lack an independent and wide-ranging statutory office to promote their rights and interests without political strings.

Beyond the UK there is substantial evidence for the wider development of children's participation (Ruxton, 1998). The rest of this section examines: first, a Europe-wide initiative to promote young

¹ The Scottish Executive has stated that it is sympathetic to a Children's Commissioner and has asked the Education, Culture and Sport Committee of the Scottish Parliament to consider possible roles and functions. Already, within the Scottish Executive there is a Children's and Young People's Group in the

Department of Education which has the remit 'to promote effective co-ordination and integration of policies and resources affecting children and young people'. Also, a recent Child Strategy statement for use across government in Scotland highlights the importance of consulting children and young people.

people's participation in general; second, examples of political structures that engage young people in decision-making at a national level; and third, the growth of community-based participatory organisations in selected countries. This review suggests that within many parts of mainland Europe, children's political participation has been taken more seriously.

In 1992, the Council of Europe (CE), through the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe, launched the "European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Municipal and Regional Life". This Charter was an affirmation of the CE Youth Directorate's commitment to the social and political inclusion of all children. It advocated that local authorities and regions in Europe implement policies to develop young people's participation in community life, including: leisure and socio-cultural activities; employment; housing and urban affairs; education and training; social and health prevention; equal opportunities; culture; environment; and information-sharing. In addition, structures should be developed to assist the processes of representation, co-management, and consultation. Five years on, a survey designed to assess the impact of the Charter (Roy, 1997) noted its widespread recognition throughout Europe. Only in Greece, Georgia and Lithuania was the Charter unknown. Perceived benefits included greater consistency; improved planning; and more coherent structures for young people's participation. Interestingly, within the UK, all local authorities were sent a copy of the questionnaire, and of the 38 replies only 14 claimed any awareness of the Charter.

At the national level, this commitment to young people's participation and representation is manifest in many ways. Table 1.3 highlights a range of working structures and mechanisms evident within many European countries.

Of particular significance is a developing network of ombudsmen. Following the lead of Norway – which in 1981 became the first country in the world to appoint an Ombudsman for Children (Flekkoy, 1991) – there are now posts in Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Spain and Sweden; and propositions for creating posts in the Czech Republic, France, Germany, Hungary and the Ukraine (Urban Childhood Conference, 1997). In 1997, the European Network of Ombudsmen for Children was formed.¹ The functions of these ombudsmen vary, from general advocacy of children's rights, to concern for specific issues (Box 1.4).

¹ In other European countries, including Ireland, Luxembourg, Latvia and Poland, proposals for an independent office for children are under consideration. In 5 out of the 89 regions of the Russian Federation, city regions – *oblasts* – have appointed ombudsmen or commissioners for children's rights.

Table 1.3 The right to say: organisational structures for children's participation and representation

Country	Youth organisation	Main government department	NGOs/Ombudsman
Austria	Regional youth councils	Department of Children's Rights in the Federal Ministry for Environment, Youth & the Family	Federal Children's Youth Ombudsman, since 1991. Network of nine ombudsmen in each province
Belgium	Local youth councils	No lead department	Commissioner of Children's Rights in French community, since 1991; Ombudsman for children under six in Flemish community, since 1992; Flemish youth council
Denmark	Municipal youth councils	Ministry of Social Affairs	National Council for Children's Rights, since 1994
Finland	Local youth councils	No lead department	Children's Ombudsman, since 1981, provided by the Mannerheim League for Child Welfare
France	Children's and youth town councils	Ministry of State for the Family	Council of Association for the Rights of the Child: National Association for Children & Young People's Councils
Germany	Regional and local youth councils	Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women & Youth	Commission for Children's Concerns; several NGOs have proposed a Federal Commissioner for Children
Hungary	Children's and youth municipal councils	Secretariat of the Co-ordinating Council for Youth & Children's Affairs, based in the Prime Minister's Office	General Ombudsman is consulting on need for children's ombudsman; Association of Support to Children's & Youth Municipal Councils
Italy	Local children's and adolescents' councils	Ministry for Social Solidarity	National Association of Children's Councils (<i>Democrazia in Erba</i>)
Netherlands	Municipal youth councils	Directorate for Youth Policy, in the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport	NGO initiatives studying the possibility of ombudsmen for children at national and regional level
Norway	Local youth councils	Department of Child & Youth Policy, in the Ministry of Children & Family Affairs	Ombudsman for Children, since 1981
Romania	Children and youth district councils	Ministry for Youth & Sport	Federation of Children & Youth Councils
Spain	National Assembly and regional councils	Inter-ministerial Commission for Youth & Childhood	Spanish Youth Council; Ombudsman for Children in Madrid, since 1996
Sweden	Local youth councils	Ministry of Health & Social Affairs	Children's Ombudsman, since 1993
Switzerland	Municipal and canton youth parliaments	Federal Cultural Office	Children's Ombudsman since 1993; Association of Swiss Youth Parliaments

Source: Hodgkin and Newell, 1996; Council of Europe, 1997; Roy, 1997

Box 1.4: Guiding Principles of the Norwegian Ombudsman

- The Ombudsman must act as a voice for children in order to provide a channel of communication to all policy-makers.
- The Office must be independent of both political organisation and political administration, in order to ensure integrity and honesty in all matters.
- The Office must be accessible and inclusive to all young people.
- The Office must be close to all decision-making bodies that have an impact on children.
- The Office must link to both national and local state networks, and to NGOs.
- The Office must be credible in all its activities.

Source: Flekkoy (1995).

In 1993, the Norwegian Parliament began an evaluation of the role of its Ombudsman. The final report (Ministry of Children and Family Affairs, 1996) not only affirms the need for such an officer, but highlights the many positive outcomes that have been achieved. The principal findings included:

- Young people were keenly aware of the Ombudsman and the functions of the Office (in a random survey of over 15-year-olds, three-quarters of respondents knew about the person and the Office, and of these, 83 per cent felt the function was useful).

- The Office had put children on the political agenda, and had brought about significant legislative change (eg, legislation prohibiting physical punishment; the establishment of national guidelines to incorporate the needs of children into all urban and rural planning; improved building regulations for safety and accident prevention in the home; raising the age by which young people can be tried by adult courts).
- The Ombudsman had acted as a significant agent in the dissemination of information about children's rights, and was an important communication conduit to local and national organisations.
- The Office had helped to place children on an international agenda, and had provided a practical model of good practice for other countries.

At the local level, too, there are many examples throughout Europe of successful participatory structures involving young people – especially the organisation of youth councils. These have arisen largely in an attempt to link young people more effectively to their communities, and to local environmental decision-making. Unlike the UK, where there is a nascent structure of youth councils (see Chapters 3 and 4), the development, organisation and support of these bodies is mostly co-ordinated by a national agency.

For example, in Spain, this role has been taken up since 1984 by the Spanish Youth Council (Spanish Youth Council, 1997). Currently, the Council co-ordinates the activities of 70 organisations, including 17 Regional Youth Councils. A National Assembly is held annually,

and this acts as a major forum for young people's views. In Switzerland, the Association of Youth Parliaments supports 40 organisations spread across the 26 cantons, and has an annual budget of 500,000 francs (£50,000), provided by the Federal Cultural Office and the Swiss Association of Youth Organisations. One of its roles is to be proactive in establishing new assemblies, and since its inception in 1993, 25 Youth Parliaments have been established (Ludescher, 1997). In Italy, the National Association of Children's Councils – through its *Democrazia in Erba* programme – is active in supporting and promoting the work of over 110 local youth forums. Its Child and Adolescent Council Charter sets out a framework by which each organisation will operate. Guidelines are provided on membership; elections and representation; funding and financial management; and the purpose and functions of the assembly (Castellani, 1997). In Hungary, The Association of Support to Children and Youth Municipal Councils (GYIOT) was established in 1992, to oversee and promote the work of youth councils. At present there are 25 organisations, and in 1996 GYIOT encouraged these to come together to form a legally recognised Federation. This was a significant development, because until this time, councils without members aged over 18 years had no official status. By being part of a Federation, all councils are incorporated into the legal structure of the state (Varzegi, 1997).

One of the most successful, and longest-standing networks of youth councils, is co-ordinated by the *Association Nationale des Conseils d'Enfants et de Jeunes* (ANACEJ), which is responsible for

Children and Youth Town Councils across France (Jodry, 1997). The growth of these town councils has been rapid and widespread. The first was set up in 1979, in response to the International Year of the Child, and today there are 940 – of which 413 subscribe to ANACEJ. The town councils vary in their age composition, but most fall into one of three categories: 9–13 years; 10–15 years; and 14–18 years. Generally, the young councillors are elected for two years, and the only conditions for nomination are that candidates must attend the local school, or live in the locality. ANACEJ recommends 30 delegates for a city with a population of around 25,000. The principal goals of these councils are: to provide a place for the expression of young people's values; a place where young people are listened to; and a place where young people may acquire the skills of citizenship. As part of its mission, ANACEJ has been able to define an implementation strategy, which includes plans of action, monitoring, training, networking, and dissemination. A culture of participation is developing, in which young people's involvement, from an early age, is seen as normal and responsible.

Beyond continental Europe, there are many examples – on all continents – of special arrangements that either seek to broaden the political engagement of young people, or have been adopted to make the government more sensitive to the needs of children, and to assist the implementation of the Convention (Hodgkin and Newell, 1996). For example, in Brazil and Nicaragua – two countries that have very high youth populations – the voting age has recently been reduced to 16 years (Freeman, 1996).

In Angola, Bangladesh, Belize, Ethiopia and Malawi, there are ministries with special responsibilities for children's affairs. Among those countries with national councils to ensure the implementation of the Convention are Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Burkina Faso, Cambodia, Cameroon, Chile, Egypt, Fiji, Guatemala, Mongolia and Thailand (Hodgkin and Newell, 1996).

In summary, there is a growing recognition that in the UK, young people are not given the respect or listened to with the seriousness that they deserve (Lansdown, 1995). The prevarication of successive governments in not setting up either an independent Commissioner for Children, or a Minister for Children, and the lack of a coherent national framework for young people's participation confirms this view. This is not the case in many parts of mainland Europe, where there is ample evidence of effective ombudswork; national frameworks for the co-ordination of young people's affairs; and well-established participatory structures operating at a grass-roots level. Internationally, growing numbers of young people are realising their rights under the UNCRC. The UK has much to learn from these experiences, and that until it does so, and puts participatory structures into place, young people will remain largely invisible in public policy-making at all levels.

3 The social case for participation

Social arguments for children's participation recognise the benefits accrued by children themselves and by society in general. Getting children to take part not only gives a sense of worth and of

social inclusion, but also develops skills that are taken on into adulthood. By the same token, poor participatory mechanisms are very effective in encouraging young people to be non-participants now and in later life. If children know that no one is listening, and that their views do not count, their interest is thwarted, and they enter adulthood with low expectations of getting involved.

The social case for involving children is based upon social pragmatism, and changing social expectations, reinforced by recent policy shifts. Each of these perspectives is considered in turn.

There is considerable empirical support for the view that young people are competent social actors, and capable of taking part in decision-making that affects their everyday lives (Matthews and Limb, 1999). For example, both Matthews (1992; 1995) and Hart (1997) have shown that children, from the age of six years, have the capacity, ingenuity and motivation to become keenly involved in determining the development and management of local places. Initially, children's horizons are set within a domestic context of care (eg, care of animals and plants, gardening at home). As they become older, so their interests and involvement can be broadened and diversified – from taking part in local environmental management schemes (eg, recycling; weather and wildlife surveys; waste audits), through to a growing range of community-based projects (eg, school councils; youth club committees; young people's forums). As a result of their involvement, children will be drawn into increasingly complex social and

political milieux, where they gain a heightened sense of moral responsibility. Participation of this kind engenders feelings of belonging and rootedness, which are important dimensions of citizenship (Matthews et al., 1999) (Box 1.5).

A number of national organisations have taken a lead in attempting to integrate young people into community planning of this kind. In 1996, the Council for Environmental Education (CEE) – an umbrella body for a broad range of environmental and educational organisations – secured funding from the DfEE to establish the National Young People's Environment Network (NYPEN). Targeted at 13 to 19-year-olds, and organised into six regional groups, NYPEN aims to raise awareness of environmental issues, and to encourage action for local environmental improvement (CEE, 1996). For some time, the Tidy Britain Group has encouraged young people to take an interest in their local environments. As part of their "Going for Green"

programme, the Eco-Schools Award Scheme aims to increase environmental awareness, and to involve young people in decision-making and action, in order to improve their school environs. The World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF UK) has a wide-ranging educational programme designed to encourage change in young people's attitudes and behaviour with regard to their environmental lifestyles, and to promote their involvement in local planning. The Countryside Commission, English Nature and English Heritage have worked to encourage young people to become involved in their communities, and have set in place various opportunities to facilitate participation. Organisations such as the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers, and the Groundwork Federation (GF) work in partnership with all sections of the community to create opportunities for young people to engage in community affairs. GF reports that it has developed more than 4,000 regeneration schemes in 120 towns and cities, involving over 46,000 volunteers and 117,000 school children. Chapter 4 presents more detailed case studies, which further demonstrate the capabilities, competencies and skills that children bring to community regeneration schemes.

Box 1.5: The practice of participation

"A nation is democratic to the extent that its citizens are involved, particularly at the community level. The confidence and competence to be involved must gradually be acquired through practice. It is for this reason that there should be gradually increasing opportunities for children to participate. Regrettably, while participation by children and youth does occur in different degrees... it is often exploitative or frivolous." (Hart, 1992, p. 3)

A word of caution, however. Although young people from all social backgrounds, and every kind of geographical locale – from decaying inner city to leafy suburb – have been involved in participatory programmes, at present most projects depend upon special funding arrangements and the positive and deliberate intervention of agencies or charismatic adults. There is no sense that participation by young

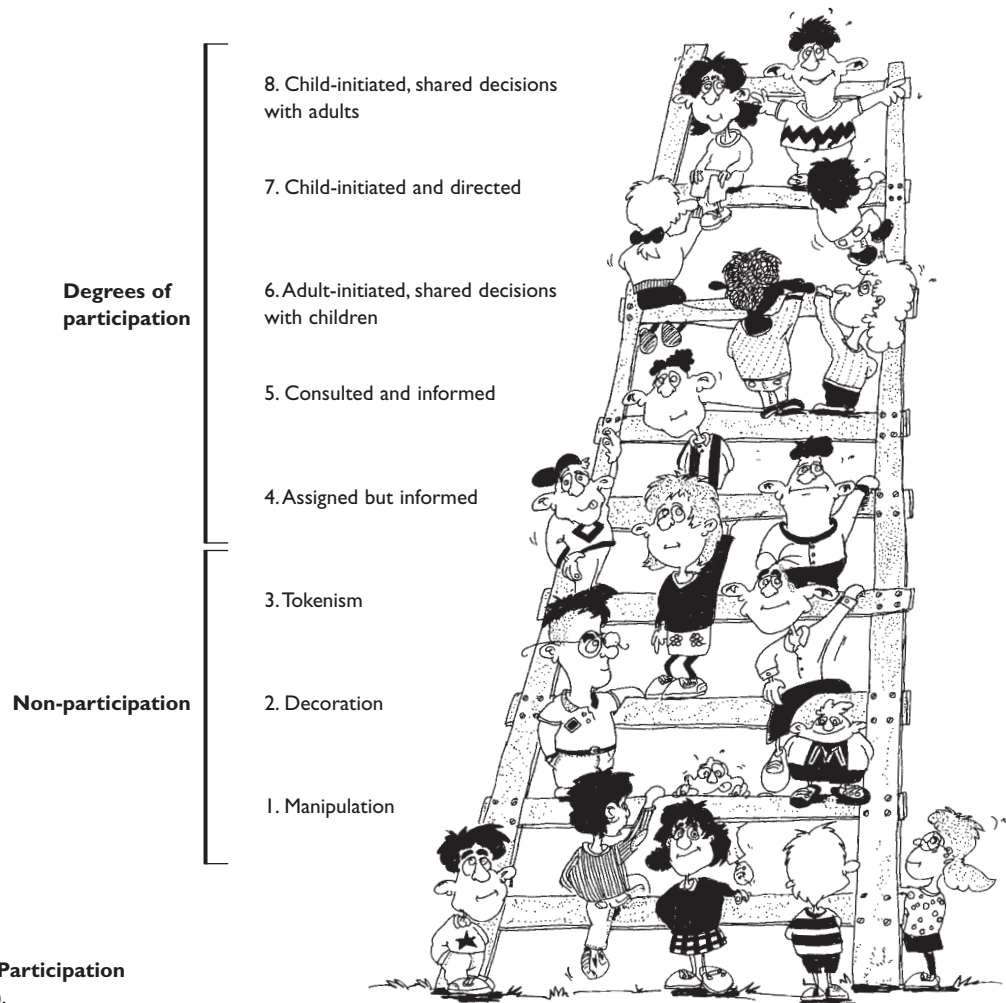


Figure 1.1 The Ladder of Participation
Source: based on Hart (1992).

people is seen as either normal or commonplace. There is also a danger that, in the face of societal assumptions that relegate children to a state of apprenticeship, they act as little more than a volunteer labour force, with little chance to develop their own ideas (Box 1.5).

Hart (1992) recognises that, if the practice and purpose of participation is not carefully considered, it may serve to restrict children's involvement. In essence, the concept of

participation needs to be differentiated.

For this purpose, Hart devised a ladder of participation as a metaphor to show the different degrees of involvement that children may have when working with adults. The model recognises eight steps towards full participation (Figure 1.1). The first three steps are examples of non-participation, and summarise the majority of situations that confront children. The next five steps are examples of progressive participation.

There are a number of important requirements for a project to be truly participatory:

- Children must understand the intentions of the project.
- Children must know who made the decisions for their involvement, and why.
- Children must have a real, not a decorative role.
- Children must volunteer for the project, after the project is made clear to them.
- Involvement should not be associated with condescension.

Children should participate as equal partners in setting agendas, and making decisions about their environmental futures, rather than responding to the interpretation of so-called experts. While the upper rungs of the ladder illustrate increasing levels of initiation and participation by children, the model is not meant to suggest that children should always be trying to fulfil their maximum level of competence. Rather, the intention is to raise awareness among adults about a range of options; to encourage children to work at the level they prefer; and to avoid the development of strategies that keep children on the bottom three rungs (Table 1.4).

Societal expectation about the nature of childhood is in a constant state of flux. Earlier discussion (see pp.23–24) has considered how age-related criteria provide significant, but ambiguous parameters. For example, in the last century childhood has been both lengthened – in relation to expectations about schooling, sex and working – and shortened – in the context of voting and marrying. There is no particular logic to this chronology, but society normalises these

age-related privileges, so that distinctions of this kind become accepted and go unchallenged. For example, the *Young People's Social Attitudes Survey* (Barnardo's, 1996) investigated what young people themselves think about a range of these age-related milestones (Table 1.5). The results confirm that an overwhelming proportion of those interviewed accept the notion of age-related rights, and recognise a hierarchy of rites of passage to adulthood.

Table 1.5 Age-related milestones

At what age do you think people should be allowed to:	
get a part-time job?	14 years
leave school?	16 years
have sex?	16 years
leave home?	16 years
drive a car?	17 years
buy alcohol?	18 years
marry?	18 years
vote in a general election?	18 years

Source: Barnardo's (1996)

However, there are signs that the role of children in society is beginning to be re-evaluated. Three waves of change appear significant. First, there is growing theoretical and empirical evidence – particularly from the fields of environmental psychology (Spencer et al., 1989), geography (Matthews, 1992; Matthews and Limb, 1998) and sociology (James et al., 1998) – that starkly challenges those constructions which deem children to be incompetent. Second, the campaigning activities of children's rights organisations (de Winter, 1997) have heightened awareness about the unacceptable *silence* of

Table 1.4 The Ladder of Participation

Steps of non-participation	
Step 1: Manipulation	Children are involved in projects devised by adults in the interests of children, but in which the children have no understanding of the issues. For example, toddlers carrying placards for a safer playground, or being used in a campaign for improved family allowances.
Step 2: Decoration	Children are used by adults to adorn a presentation, or to embellish an adult occasion, such as through dance or song. Adults are not pretending that the outcomes will be in children's interests; they are simply using children to progress their own purposes.
Step 3: Tokenism	Children are given a voice, but have no control of the agenda, audience or situation. For example, children are invited on to a conference panel or committee to express their views, but with little preparation and no consultation with their peers, whose views they are purporting to represent.
Steps of participation	
Step 4: Assigned, but informed	Children are recruited by adults to take part in a project. They agree to participate only when they know why they have been invited, and the goals and objectives are clear. For example, a community programme is launched, and volunteers are needed to upgrade and maintain a riverside path. Children are invited to get involved, and through their participation and work with adults they develop a keener appreciation of their local environment.
Step 5: Consulted and informed	Children are consulted by adults on a project designed and run by adults. For example, funding has become available to carry out an environmental regeneration project. Children are informed about the programme, and then routinely engaged in the consultation process, so that their views are heard, and they are given feedback.
Step 6: Adult-initiated decisions shared with children	Children get involved in projects that are kick-started by adults, but where their involvement leads to tangible benefits for themselves and the whole community. For example, an estate regeneration programme, where groups of young people are encouraged to take actions that lead to social and environmental change that not only improves the quality of their lives, but also redefines their position as full and accepted members of the community.
Step 7: Child-initiated and directed	Children think of, organise and carry out a project, without adult interference. For example, a group of young people decide to open a cyber café in their local town, or to set up and run a website that acts as a local youth information and newsletter service. There are fewer projects of this kind, although new funding – for example, through the Prince's Trust and the Millennium Awards Scheme – is beginning to open up opportunities.
Step 8: Child-initiated, shared decisions with adults	Children conceive of a project and draw adults into their work, for mutual benefit. For example, a range of peer-mediation projects targeted at bullying, drug and substance abuse, and teenage pregnancy. Children identify the issue, and those who are willing get involved. Adults provide the training and support to move the work forward.

Source: based on Hart (1992).

children in debates about citizenship. Third – and in a different vein – there is growing concern about the apathy, ignorance and cynicism about public life that is shared by many young people across the UK. Exclusion of this kind is perceived to breed discontent and resentment that threaten the moral fabric of society (Wellard, 1997).

The Government has responded with a series of reports and strategies designed to draw young people into consultative, evaluative and service-delivery roles, and “into broader empowering experiences for achieving social change” (Davies and Marken, 2000). These range across schemes that target inclusion; raising aspirations; partnership; meeting need; community involvement; and neighbourhood renewal (DfEE, 2000). Chapter 3 examines these strategies in more detail. Of particular interest in the context of social change is the development of an extended social education programme in schools, focusing on the issue of citizenship. Following a report by a cross-party working group on *Education for Citizenship and the Teaching of Democracy in Schools* (1998), it was recommended that at least one hour a week of the National Curriculum for Schools in England and Wales¹ should be devoted to a programme covering social and moral responsibilities; community involvement; and political education. The new lessons would begin in primary school, with discussions on moral concepts, moving on to develop an understanding of community relationships, and to more sophisticated debate on economic and political systems in secondary schools.

¹ In Scotland there is no compulsory national curriculum and there are no immediate plans to make citizenship curriculum-based.

The adoption of citizenship as a compulsory subject comes into effect in September 2002 and proposals to extend the programme to post-16 education have been accepted by the Education Secretary. Citizenship is set to become an explicit part of any graduation certificate for education and training.

This new educational agenda goes some way towards repositioning children within society; yet there is still no guaranteed commitment to engage young people in a full range of community projects. While children should be better equipped to understand the abstractions of citizenship, they will be no nearer to being able to translate these ideas into practice. And there are few signs to suggest that children will have an enlarged role in shaping school policy (Table 1.1.), or in the running of their schools (eg, decisions about uniforms, arrangements about school meals, etc). From this perspective, lessons in citizenship may have a countervailing effect: instead of making young people better citizens, they may increase their levels of frustration at not being able to take part. For as Hart (1997) suggested, some years before these recommendations, an understanding of democratic participation, and the confidence to participate, can only be acquired gradually through practice:

“it cannot be taught as an abstraction. Many western nations think of themselves as having achieved democracy fully, though they teach the principles of democracy in a pedantic way in classrooms, which are themselves models of autocracy. This is not acceptable.”
(Hart, 1992, p. 3)

The social case for participation also raises questions as to what constitutes participation; how the modern ideal of citizenship may be attained; and the goals that will be achieved. De Winter (1997, p. 42) summarises three different ways in which these issues are commonly viewed and addressed, at both a national and a community level. He sees participation as a way of:

- integrating young people into a community, without disturbing those adult structures that are already in place (*fitting-in*);
- strengthening the social influence and power of young people (*empowerment*);
- giving young people a chance to develop into competent, independent and responsible fellow citizens (*active citizenship*).

In the UK, the first of these scenarios represents the traditional and most common practice. However, this book argues that *fitting-in* is not an active form of participation; nor does it advance or advantage a society and its young people. At best, fitting-in simply perpetuates the *status quo* and, in the UK, the structures and mechanisms that encourage disempowerment and generational-based exclusion. The validity of *empowerment*, too, is not unquestionable. Participation of this kind is often carried out with the best interests of children in mind, but unless its practice is widespread, the empowerment of a few may be at the expense of the majority. Also, there is a danger that empowerment of this kind is seen as too one-sided, and so becomes threatening to adults. *Active citizenship* implies an inclusive process that liberates young people to be citizens in the “here and now” (Matthews and Limb, 1999) (Box 1.6). This involves

Box 1.6: The here and now of childhood

Caputo (1995) draws attention to the “now” of childhood. She argues that within the socio-cultural context of democratic welfare states, children are treated as little more than adults-in-waiting. However, children’s diverse and multifaceted everyday life has its own richness and intrinsic value that is often not obvious to adults. A parallel may be drawn with children’s environmental experiences that can be conceptualised as the “here” of childhood.

Matthews and Limb (1999) suggest that children’s “here and now” is an exclusive landscape – a *terra incognita* – that is largely unmapped and poorly understood. By working with young people, rather than making decisions without consultation, adults gain a better understanding of the immediacy and nature of children’s worlds, and become better positioned to understand the uncertainties and issues of their “here and now”.

strengthening their power; listening to their views; taking these views seriously; and respecting their qualities. De Winter (1997, p. 43) suggests that participation of this kind has a dual benefit: children learn that “we count, we are taken seriously, our ideas are appreciated, our environment evidently belongs to us and therefore is worth making an effort for”; adults learn that by enlarging the influence of the young within their own situations and environments, their commitment to the community is both fortified and invigorated for the benefit of all.

In summary, young people who participate within their communities gain from that experience by learning more about themselves and others. Their involvement ensures that they gradually acquire skills and competencies that will stay with them into adulthood. Good participation ensures good citizens, now and in the future; local communities benefit from the insights and perspectives that children can provide (Wellard, 1997). The challenge is to develop a shared agenda for action, that establishes a meaningful and sustainable partnership between young people and their communities.

Conclusion

Rather than starting with a view that children are ill-informed incompetents, unable to act responsibly within their communities, I suggest that a more positive stance would be to assume that children “can do it”, and that they can make decisions, unless proven otherwise. All adult participation depends upon this assumption. Society does not, for example, debar the elderly from involvement because a small minority is not competent to take part. In the UK, we have an all-party commitment to the principles of the UNCRC, but we still do not have a culture of listening to children. Young people’s lack of participation is both a product of their

Table 1.6 An action agenda: recommendations for improving children’s right to participation

Establishing a social framework	Establishing a legal framework
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that all guidance provided by Government departments on services for children reflects the principles of respect for the incorporation of the child’s points of view, and commitment to the child’s right to participate in decision-making, in accordance with age and maturity. • Promote the provision of public education campaigns, in order to raise general awareness about the principles of the UNCRC – especially the need to listen to children and to take their views seriously. • Establish the provision of parent education, in order to fulfil the principles of children’s rights to protection, provision and participation. • Guarantee that the training of all professionals working with children is founded on the principles of the UNCRC, including the skills of communicating with children. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Amend family law in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland (bringing the law into line with that in Scotland), to require that in reaching any major decision relating to a child, all those with parental responsibility, and those caring for and in control of children, must show regard for the views of the child, and give them due consideration according to the child’s age and maturity. • Incorporate the “Gillick” principle (that is, once a child has “sufficient understanding”, they should be able to make decisions for themselves) into all primary law relating to jurisdiction, unless there are specific legal restrictions (e.g., recognition that the age of sexual consent for girls and boys is 16). • Provide new legislation that will require schools and local education authorities to: put in place structures, such as school councils, designed to ensure that all children are given opportunities to express their views on matters that concern them about school administration, and that these views are listened to and taken seriously; and establish procedures for determining and giving due weight to the views of individual children on matters affecting them, such as choice of school, and needs assessment.

Source: based on Children’s Rights Office (Lansdown, 1995).

marginalisation from local decision-making when growing-up, and an outcome of a strong sense of disenfranchisement and powerlessness during childhood. Up until the age of 18, young people have little opportunity to take part, and little chance to make their views heard. They are downgraded to little more than “citizens-in-waiting”, with little recognition afforded to their developing skills and competencies.

Because of these shortcomings, the Children’s Rights Office argued that immediate and radical action is needed by the UK Government if the culture of non-participation is to be broken down in the first decade of the millennium. This should

involve action both to promote greater social awareness of children’s right to participation, and to create the necessary framework for participation. An action agenda is proposed in Table 1.6.

Further criticism of the UK, with regard to the status and position afforded to its young people, was made at the “Habitat 2” seminar held in New York in 1996. The focus of this world meeting, organised by UNICEF, was on the links between children, participation and the environment. One outcome of the seminar was a set of recommendations that unequivocally placed young people on local environmental planning agendas (Table 1.7). In essence, these

Table 1.7 Habitat 2: Recommendations for young people’s involvement in planning

Establishing an environmental framework	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognising that democratic behaviour in civil society must be learned through experience, children should be given a voice in their communities, according to their abilities. This will prepare them for full participation in civil society as adults, and will better meet their needs as children. • Basic education for children should include investigations and dialogue on local development and the local environment, in order to facilitate participation for sustainable development. • Recognising the marginalisation of women in decision-making, attention should be given to preparing girls as well as boys with the confidence and skills to be involved as equal participants with their peers. • Children should be involved, according to their capacities, in the design of environments intended explicitly for them – such as play places, schools and children’s hospitals. • Formal democratic mechanisms should be established for giving all citizens, including children, according to their capacities, a voice at the community and municipal level – both as a way of preparing for participation in civil society, and as a way of improving the appropriateness and effectiveness of decision-making. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children’s participation works best in a society that also encourages adult participation; the participation of adults and children must be complementary and mutually reinforcing. • Local authorities should initiate the establishment of innovative partnerships between children, parents, schools, private-sector and community-based organisations and NGOs, to optimise the effectiveness of the existing structures by involving children in local community services provision. This will strengthen children’s awareness and sense of belonging in the community. • Children should participate, according to their abilities, in the management of all institutions and facilities that they use, including schools, recreation facilities, children’s organisations and community organisations. • Local government authorities should involve children, according to their capabilities, in local governance processes.

Source: based on UNICEF (1996).

recommendations provide an environmental framework that can be added to the action agenda articulated in Table 1.6. It was felt that the UK rarely matched up to these standards, and that in general there was insufficient dialogue between adults and young people in local decision-making.

Until co-ordinated strategies are put in place, that truly empower young people, and are sensitive to the significant contributions they can make, the majority of children in UK society will continue to remain largely invisible on the social, economic and environmental landscapes of the new millennium (Table 1.7).

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2 Children in their communities

Summary of Chapter 2

- Local communities provide important physical and social resources for children and their families.
- In post-war urban planning, children's needs and expectations within their communities have been mostly thwarted or obscured. Urban places are generally child-forgotten neighbourhoods.
- A common (mis)apprehension is that children cannot take part in community planning, because they have neither enough information nor understanding of their local environments to make informed decisions; nor the motivation or capability to get involved.
- Substantive new empirical evidence shows that the ways in which children and adults encounter, think about and value their local neighbourhoods are very different. Effective community regeneration involves recognising the needs of all community members.
- Children and childhood are social constructions. Assumptions are made by adults about what it means to be a child, and about what environments children need. But adults fail to recognise that children differ from them in terms of their *ways of seeing*. What goes on during the day of an average young person is different in rhythm, scale and content from what goes on in the day of an adult. An understanding of these differences needs to be rooted in the world of children.
- The free range of children, and the environments they enter, are often more restricted than those of adults. In some respects, young people have much in common with other "outsider" groups in society – such as disabled people and the elderly – in that their behaviour is often constrained by care-taking conventions; physical ineptitude; limited access to transportation; lack of money; and roles that separate them from a larger and more diverse daily round.
- The land uses and facilities that involve children are frequently different from those of adults and, even when shared, are largely used for different purposes. Collisions resulting from different patterns of usage are almost inevitable.
- In the course of their environmental transactions, children commonly encounter threats that often go unnoticed by adults. Many childhood hazards are not dangers in later life.



- Even when the same environment affects children and adults, their interpretation and evaluation of these places are not likely to be the same. Young people and adults often differ in how they see, feel about and react to a landscape, and their views on environmental planning are unlikely to coincide.
- Children are unable to influence the decision-making and management that typically determine the structure of environments in general, and land uses in particular. The environments that have the greatest significance for young people are decided for them by adults, and reflect values that pay scant regard to their needs, aspirations and behaviour.
- Democratic responsibility is acquired only through practice and involvement. It does not arise suddenly in adulthood. Involving children in the design and management of their environments is a valued end in itself, as well as an important step in developing competent, participating citizens.

Introduction

Local places provide important physical resources (eg, the built environment, including housing, streets, parks and land use) and social resources (eg, the informal relationships among residents, and the formal links they may have with the providers of local goods and services) for children and their families. Where community resources are well developed, they afford personal identity through attachment; personal development through their effective use; and civic and social belongingness through participation. Where these resources are absent, weakly developed, or poorly used, they encourage exclusion, isolation and alienation. For some time, observers (Ward, 1977; Matthews, 1992; 1995) have noted that children often have very little part to play in the configuration and development of local places. De Winter (1997) notes that in post-war urban planning, children's needs and expectations have mostly been thwarted and obscured. The visions of environmental planners and architects commonly reflect the dominant perceptions of a society, such that groups already at the edge become further marginalised by policy-making (Matthews, 1995). Children are seemingly invisible on the landscape. At best, they are provided with some sort of token space – commonly a playground – but otherwise they are required to fit into the alien environments of the adult world. Thus, high-rise flats constrain children's ability to explore; respectable new housing estates offer bland, sterile play spaces; and in older urban areas the lack of separation between traffic and pedestrians creates hostile and treacherous living environments. Almost

30 years ago, Colin Ward (1977) bemoaned the way in which many urban places represented child-forgotten neighbourhoods – spaces where children lived, but rarely belonged. His solution was not to ghettoise children into safe, protected compounds, where adults could control and regulate their lives, but to encourage their full integration into community affairs, so that adults and children alike lived compatibly in a shared city.

Ward's ideas are challenged by those who argue that children cannot take part in community planning because they have neither enough information nor understanding of their local environments to make informed decisions; nor motivation or capability to get involved. With these assumptions in mind, adults make decisions about what it means to be a child, and what environments children need. The social message in all these cases is that children do not count, and that anonymous local bureaucrats are best placed to act in their interests. In fact, the non-involvement of children, according to their maturing levels of interest and skill, creates citizens with little competence, who have learned since childhood that society comprises those who have responsibility, and those who do not (de Winter, 1997).

This chapter draws upon a substantive body of new empirical evidence to show that the ways in which children and adults encounter, think about and value their local neighbourhoods are very different. What goes on during the day of an average young person, and that of an adult, is different in rhythm, scale and content.

Box 2.1: Ways of seeing

The cultural turn, a recent intellectual shift which has brought questions of culture to the forefront of contemporary debates, draws attention to the importance of difference and diversity, and to the various ways in which social groups cohere and collude around shared subjectivities, or common *ways of seeing*. There is acknowledgement, too, that different social groups occupy unequal positions of power and autonomy. Those groups that align themselves most closely with dominant ideologies are most likely to experience positions of monopolisation and inclusion; whereas those closer to the edge become victims of marginalisation and exclusion. From this perspective, landscapes are documents of power. This manifests itself in two ways. On the one hand, strong groups exert maximum preference, taking control of the best locations, with weaker groups relegated to less desirable environs, in places that represent minimum

choice. On the other hand, the values of the stronger groups are imposed upon, and so become written into, the landscape, through processes by which physical and built environments are designed and managed. A priority is to expose the hegemonic values that underpin these differential positionings, and to raise awareness that within Western societies many aspects of life are the outcomes of adult, white, ableist, male, middle-class decision-making (Sibley, 1995). Within this context, the study of children as a generational group has been largely missing. Only recently are studies beginning to conceptualise children as a largely powerless social grouping, undergoing various forms of socio-spatial marginalisation (Matthews and Limb, 1999). Until children's voices are heard, listened to, and valued, children are likely to remain as outsiders.

Accordingly, their *ways of seeing* rarely coincide (Box 2.1). Just because all adults have been children once, does not mean that they retain an irrefutable insight into children's lives. Discussion is based around a set of seven observations that attempt to summarise the major ways in which children see and experience neighbourhood spaces. Understanding how children regard their local environments, and how their perceptions are likely to differ to those of adults, is fundamental to the case for children's involvement in community regeneration.

The empirical data is drawn from a large-scale study carried out as part of the "Children 5–16: Growing into the 21st Century" programme, funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) (Matthews and Limb, 2000).¹

¹ An end-of-grant report, and further details of the project "Exploring the Fourth Environment: young people's use of place and views on their environment" is available from the author at the Centre for Children and Youth, University College Northampton, Park Campus Northampton, NN2 7AH, email: hugh.matthews@northampton.ac.uk.

The work was undertaken in Northamptonshire with 9–16-year-olds drawn from three contrasting locations: inner city, edge-of-town council estates, and rural villages. A variety of quantitative and qualitative methodologies were employed, including: a doorstep questionnaire survey with 1,087 respondents; semi-structured interviews with young people hanging around on the street; and school-based, in-depth discussion groups.

The importance of the “street” to children

There is a growing postmodern assumption that local “streets”¹ and neighbourhoods are of declining importance for young people’s identities and lifestyles (Featherstone, 1991; Valentine, 1996). Two popular views of the street prevail (Davis and Bourhill, 1997). The first is that many outdoor places are dangerous and unsafe, and that younger children are under threat. This view projects children as potential victims, under attack from unruly gangs; prone to the ravages of strangers; and threatened by the excesses of environmental dangers, such as traffic. The alternative view redefines the problem as being children themselves – particularly older children – and sees their presence in public spaces as undesirable and threatening. When “read” together, these negative discourses supposedly

account for a profound feature of contemporary life – that is, a progressive retreat from the street by urban children. Whether “angel” or “devil”, many young people are portrayed as having withdrawn into the haven of their homes, further lured by the excitement of computer games and the safety of cyberspace (Valentine and Holloway, 1999). Qvortrup et al. (1994) suggest that, in effect, young people are being increasingly confined by adults to acceptable “islands”, and so are being spatially outlawed from society. It follows, therefore, that if the premise of withdrawal is accepted, children have little part to play in community regeneration, for their lives and activities are being conducted elsewhere.

Although there is evidence for a retreat from the street by some children, for a substantial number the street remains an important part of their everyday lives. Less than one-third reported that they never used the street as a social venue. During the summer months (school holidays), more than one-third of the sample used local streets on a daily basis to hang around with friends. Even in the winter, some two-fifths regularly met up with each other after school in these public places. Street use becomes more important with age, with more than 40 per cent of those aged 14 years and over meeting friends there on at least five days a week. For many under-tens, too, the street is an important meeting place (Table 2.1 and Box 2.2).

Contrary to media imagery, too, the street provides an important social venue for many young girls, and their use of public outdoor spaces

¹ The term “street” is used as a metaphor for a range of public outdoor places, including alleyways, cul-de-sacs, shopping parades, car-parks, vacant plots and derelict sites.

Table 2.1 The street as a social arena

	Under-10s (%)	Sample as a whole (%)
Meet friends daily on the street during summer	31	37
Meet friends daily on the street during winter	23	26
Meet friends regularly on the street during summer (more than 2 days per week)	40	52
Meet friends regularly on the street during winter (more than 2 days per week)	34	40
Never use the street as a place to meet friends during the summer	36	30
Boys as daily street-users in the summer	33	40
Girls as daily street-users in the summer	31	33
Never or rarely have friends visit at home	49	54
Outdoor person	71	73
Outdoors as favourite place to be alone	47	75

Source: Matthews and Limb (2000).

often rivals that of boys. One-third of the girls regularly used the street as a place to meet up with friends – a proportion only slightly exceeded by the boys.

“It is like our territory ’cause we’re always here... this is where we live.” (13-year-old boy)

“It’s where everybody comes... to meet. It’s where everybody hangs out, sits on walls, smokes cigarettes, chats. It’s... a place where you’re likely to meet up with lots of other people... Where you meet your mates... try to figure out what our next move is going to be.” (16-year-old boy)

“It’s somewhere we can talk... See what’s going on... we are just here talking.” (15-year-old girl)

“You can have a laugh round here. You can just relax. Everyone’s down to earth... You don’t have to be better than everyone and you get to sit down and talk and... you’re not pathetic if you’ve got a different point of view to everyone else. Everyone’s just equal down here.” (14-year-old girl)

These findings suggest that parents hold a more complex and contradictory view of gender, and the upbringing of their siblings, than was

previously thought to be the case. In her early studies, Valentine (1992) found that women's fear of sexual abduction in public spaces was transferred to children of both sexes up until the age of 11 years. On reaching puberty, restrictions on boys' mobility was eased, whereas the free range of girls became even more restricted. Her later work (Valentine, 1997a; 1997b) shows that expectations about sex-typed behaviours have been redefined, both within and outside the home. Parents had moved towards less gender-differentiated child-rearing. In particular, the common perception that children of both sexes were vulnerable to abduction and attack in public places meant that many parents reconsidered their values about children's uses and experiences of the outdoors. Although, statistically, children are more at risk in private spaces and from people they know, the moral panic about "stranger-danger" led parents to encourage children of both sexes to spend most of their free time either at home with friends, or taking part in activities organised by adults.

The results of the present survey reveal a much more tangled and complicated pattern of street use. The street no longer appears as a universally gendered space – a place reserved for boys to explore their masculinity. Instead, it is a key domain for many young girls. Rather than being insignificant occupants of public space, girls use the outdoors in a variety of ways. For some, the street is their principal meeting place, where they can hang around with friends, chat, and wait for things to happen. These are girls are not "out of control", nor are they stepping out with the sole intent of challenging adult values. Rather, they

represent a group who – through their own volition, and with a certain amount of parental sanction – have (re)defined the street as a "their" space.

However, McRobbie (1991) notes the continuing "invisibility" of girls in debates about public space, as if their presence there were morally reprehensible. Griffin (1993, p. 128), too, laments "the patronizing complacency of traditional *malestream* youth research", and the tendency to "romanticize the 'macho' sexism and racism of the lads". In their recent review of feminist contributions to and critiques of youth studies, Valentine et al. (1998, p. 17) suggest that, in the late 1990s, some change was under way, "and that there is now a much broader consideration of what young women do and what constitutes the 'distinctive elements' of their culture". Nevertheless, there is still work to be done, in order to render the position of young girls more visible upon the urban landscape, and to include their voices in local decision-making.

In summary, for all young people, outdoor places are perceived to be important in their lives. When asked to categorise themselves as either an indoor or outdoor person, nearly 75 per cent claimed to be an outdoor person. In addition, over 80 per cent claimed that they preferred being out and about to staying in. Public spaces not only provide social settings, but also offer chances for solitude and reflection. In terms of favourite places to be alone, 75 per cent of the sample, and a significant proportion of under-tens, named outdoor places.

Children's environmental range

The physical boundaries of children's outdoor worlds are not universally consistent, but outcomes of age-related capabilities and various

care-taking conventions, all set within a context of social, cultural and environmental contingencies. Box 2.2 considers how children's range behaviour develops with age.

Box 2.2: Children's developing range

Among the reasons why children are thought to be incapable of participating in environmental planning and community regeneration is that they are thought to lack understanding of their immediate environment. However, considerable empirical evidence suggests that many children have considerable first-hand experience of their local neighbourhoods, and that they have much to offer in suggesting ways that places might be changed for the better (Matthews, 1992; Bartlett et al., 1999).

Many studies have shown that the limits of children's free range increase with age (Matthews, 1992). The routine world of a six-year-old is no more than a "spatial bubble" within the world of a young teenager. However, the experience of growing up is not universal, and is layered, both by such contingencies as place (eg, social and environmental opportunities within the neighbourhood and the home); parental care-taking practices (eg, notions of what makes a "good parent", peer group pressure); and the socio-personal characteristics of parent and child (eg, age, sex, social class, ethnicity, educational background, income, ill health, disability); and by the "agency" of children themselves (eg, personality, lifestyle, choice).

An attempt to conceptualise some of the principal features of children's developing range behaviour is shown in Figure 2.1 (Matthews, 1992, p. 52).

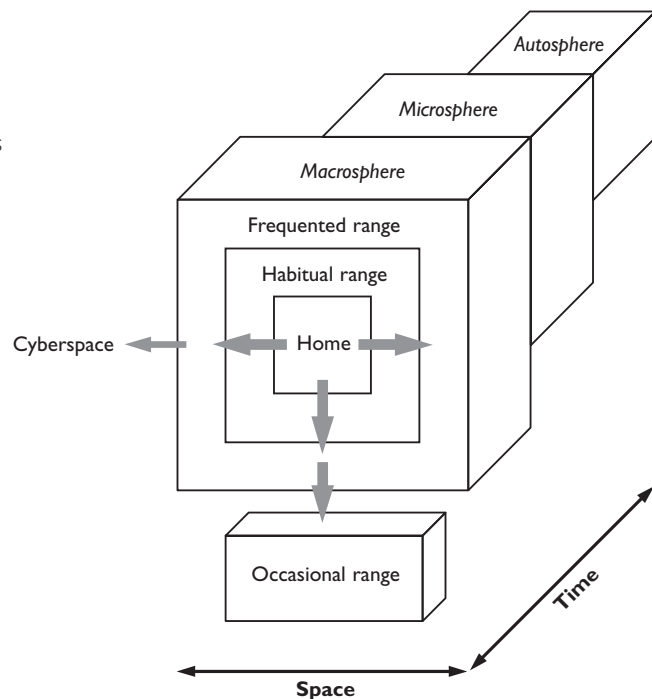


Figure 2.1 A time-space model of children's developing environmental range

continued overleaf

Box 2.2 *continued*

This time-space framework draws upon the developmental ideas of Erikson (1977), and the ecological perspectives of Moore (1986). The relevance of this framework depends upon its contextualisation within the world of the child, and the recognition of social and environmental contingencies. For example, a child may have multiple ranges at any one time, set around each parent's separate home.

Erikson postulates that environmental mastery comes about through a continuing relationship between the child and three successive scales of environmental contact: the *autosphere*, the *microsphere* and the *macrosphere*. The *autosphere* is the child's first environment. It begins with and centres on one's own body. Initial play is simple, repetitious and sensual. The exploration that follows is the child's "first geography" (Erikson, 1977: 11). These ideas about the infant's relationship with its own body and bodily products, and the way in which spatial boundaries become defined between (it)self, other and the world, are at the heart of recent psychoanalytical debates, and give rise to the notion of "crib geography" (Aitken and Herman, 1997). With time, the child's map of the world extends to incorporate familiar objects and people; their competence depends on the comfort and refuge these provide. The *microsphere* is the small world of manageable toys. Children's performance in this environment can have a direct bearing on subsequent development. If frightened or disappointed, they may regress to the *autosphere*; success and proper guidance will encourage further mastery and exploration. The *macrosphere* is the world shared with

others. At this level, children begin to encounter spaces beyond the immediate settings of their home. Exploration leads them further afield but, as in the other realms, they have to learn what sort of transaction can be safely executed there.

At this point, the framework recognises children's broadening spatial range. Moore (1986) proposes a socio-spatial model that attempts to summarise the development of children's territorial range. Every child has a number of overlapping ranges that reflect various personal, environmental and cultural constraints. He suggests a threefold typology of range, which evolves "with age, from the coaction of children's personalities, parents, cultural circumstances, and the play opportunities and access barriers of the physical environment" (Moore, 1986, p. 17). *Habitual range* is more or less contiguous space that extends around the child's home. This area is highly accessible for daily use, and is bounded by temporal rather than distance and age constraints. For example, the use of surrounding streets as play spaces is often "wedged between homework and supertime" (Moore, 1986, p. 18). *Frequented range* comprises less accessible extensions of *habitual range*, and is bounded by physical constraints – particularly busy roads and parental prohibitions. This expands with age, and depends upon a combination of social and environmental dimensions, including gender-related expectations. These places are more likely to be used at weekends and holidays, especially during the summer. *Occasional range* consists of highly variable extensions of *frequented range*, made on foot,

by bicycle or public transport. These places are visited once in a while, perhaps as part of a special outing. Occasional range defines children's ultimate territorial frontier. As the child grows older, and moves around more easily, former *occasional* places become frequented, and some become absorbed into everyday habitual range.

Such a framework, although helpful in drawing broad dimensions of children's spatial range, reflects a particular view of what it is to be a child, and so may undervalue the diversity of children's experiences. For example, recent studies draw attention to the ways in which the range of some children – especially those from better-off families – has increased enormously, largely through the potential offered by electronic media. The advent of the home computer, and linkage to the internet, provides access to the limitless expanses of cyberspace. Range of this kind becomes a “virtual” phenomenon, and a commodity for purchase (Valentine and Holloway, 1999). The framework also has limited relevance for groups such as homeless young people, whose experiences of place are often highly transitory and fragmented (Aitken and Wingate, 1993).

In addition to age-related capabilities, the balance between “separation and connection reflects a negotiated geography between parent and child” (Matthews, 1995a, p. 459). Each social actor takes into account different criteria: for the parent, environmental and social dangers exert strong centripetal pulls; for the child, growing environmental competencies, the lust for autonomy, and the pull of rival environmental attractions provide irresistible centrifugal impulses. Valentine (1997a, p. 38) suggests that to be a “good parent” is “to walk a tightrope between protecting children from public dangers by restricting their independence, whilst simultaneously allowing them [children] the freedom and autonomy to develop streetwise skills and to become competent at negotiating public space alone” (Box 2.3).

With respect to age, there is a general increase of range as children mature (Table 2.2). In nearly every instance, too, boys wander more widely through their neighbourhoods than do girls – although within edge-of-town council estates, exceptions are to be found. Here, by the age of 15, girls are travelling further in order to reach social opportunities. In general, children from the inner city have the most restricted range. Explanation may include children's and parents' perceptions of threats and dangers, as well as a higher density of environmental opportunities closer at hand. In contrast, the relative blandness and uniformity of edge-of-town council estates encourages children to roam more widely within their neighbourhoods. For rural children, however, the contingency of place appears highly significant. Whereas younger children play and

Table 2.2 Children's free range: furthest permitted distance allowed from home (in km)

Age	Inner city		Edge-of-town		Rural	
	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females
9–10	0.6	0.3	0.5	0.6	0.5	0.3
11–12	0.5	0.5	2.2	0.7	1.1	0.9
13–14	2.4	1.0	4.4	2.9	2.3	1.1
15–16	2.0	1.2	4.6	5.4	4.0	2.9

Source: Matthews and Limb (2000).

Box 2.3: The importance of parental style upon children's range behaviour

Baumrind (1971) proposes two major dimensions of parental style that underlie parent–child relationships: “parental acceptance” and “parental control”. These dimensions provide a fourfold typology of practice (authoritarian, authoritative, passive, neglectful), which are useful when considering how children may encounter places (Figure 2.2). This framework,

although set within a Western context of child-rearing, incorporates the agency of the child (centrifugal impulses), while retaining the constraints of varying care-taking conventions (centripetal pulls). The authoritarian style is associated with rigidly enforced rules; narrow territorial limits, and low levels of acceptance. In this sense, place behaviour is dictated. The authoritative style combines reasoned and firm control with a clear definition of rules, roles and territorial margins. For these children, place behaviour is an outcome of mediation, and a certain amount of give-and-take. In both of these cases, parents draw their children towards the home, with greater or lesser stringency. In contrast, the permissive style provides a high level of tolerance, with a weak definition of territory. Parents are supportive and approving, but there is considerable leniency in terms of place limits. The neglectful style reflects lax and poor parenting, with imprecise guidance. Children's place behaviour is often ignored, and they are left to get on with their own lives, defining their own spatial margins. Although these two styles differ sharply with respect to love and acceptance, both are associated with care-taking

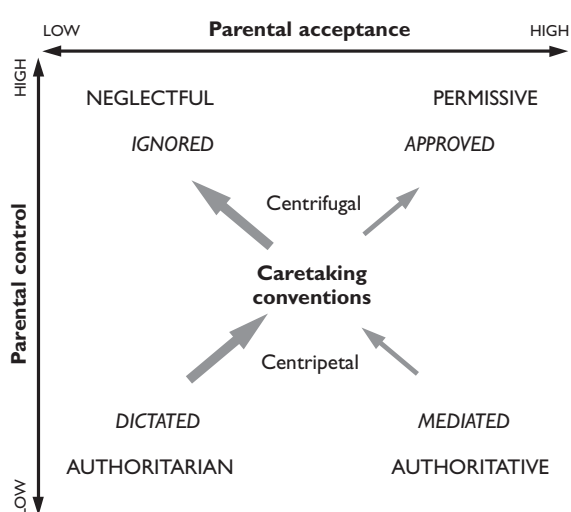


Figure 2.2 Parental style and the environmental behaviour of children

socialise at distances close to their homes – an outcome of the physical configuration of villages – older children seek opportunities further afield.

In summary, the survey results show that children's encounters with place are riddled by diversity and difference; although, in general, children's free range, and the kinds of environmental setting they enter, are often more

conventions that are susceptible to the centrifugal impulses of children, but again to varying extents. The model suggests that centripetal pulls and centrifugal impulses are strongest in relation to authoritarian and neglectful parenting styles, respectively. Noller and Callan (1991) suggest that children raised within the authoritative style are likely to be the most autonomous and content, but that their autonomy does not lead them to challenge their parents' values. Children of permissive and neglectful parents lack an understanding of autonomy, and are frequently put at risk from pressures by children older than themselves. Those children with authoritarian parenting are the most defiant, and likely to challenge the limits of their parents' practice.

Although the model is useful in recognising that children will encounter their neighbourhoods in different ways, it does not take into account the centripetal effects of fear and attachment that many children will experience, nor the centrifugal impulses of parents whose lifestyles are not domicentred.

restricted than adults'. A complex, negotiated geography is apparent through varying parental care-taking practices. In some respects, young people have much in common with other "outsider" groups in society – such as disabled and elderly people – in that their behaviour is often constrained by societal conventions, and by physical ineptitude, compounded by limited access to transportation, lack of money, and roles that separate them from a larger and more diverse daily round. Effective community planning depends on recognising the variety of children's worlds.

Children's use of place

The ways in which children and adults use streets vary considerably. For many young people, the street is the only place where they can meet up with friends. Lieberg (1995) points out that children have little access to "backstage space". Unlike adults, who can withdraw to different places connected with work, or to club, pub and residence, many young people have no opportunity, access or obvious right to other places. In this sense, streets act as marginal spaces for young people. They are environments they occupy by default, as they lack the power to control other settings. Often the home does not provide a suitable venue for young people to socialise with friends. Homes are adult spaces, in which children may be denied privacy, and boundary disputes are common. More than half of the young people questioned rarely or never had friends visit them at home – a feature more pronounced for boys than for girls.

Conversely, less than one-fifth were allowed to have friends at home on a daily basis:

“My mum moves me on from my house”
(13-year-old girl).

“Yeah, I get moved on from my house.”
(14-year-old boy)

“Yeah, I do” ... “So do I.” (13-year-old girl and boy)

“I get chucked out of the house about seven.”
(*So your Mum doesn't like you staying in, in the evenings?*) “No... 'cause I don't know what to do and I just annoy everyone.” (14-year-old boy)

“Yeah, same here... I annoy my Mum and then she starts screaming and then I get chucked out of the house... I just get in the way, get out and play.” (14-year-old girl)

“My parents send me out because I don't do anything.” (13-year-old girl)

For an overwhelming majority of young people, the outdoors comprises a set of places where they can get on with the ordinary, and do what they want to do. These young people are not out and about looking for trouble. Rule-breaking acts are not normal when “hanging out”. The outdoors simply provides opportunities for special things to happen.

Local neighbourhoods are places of both social inclusion and social exclusion. On the one hand, streets are arenas where young people can get

together to share and enjoy a range of informal activities, unhindered by the adult gaze. Girls and boys often use the street in different ways. The main activity reported by girls was talking and chatting with friends; boys were more likely to see the street as a venue for informal sports, such as football, skateboarding and rollerblading. For both boys and girls, there is a strong sense of theatre and of being on display when out and about.

On the other hand, streets are places of social exclusion – not only because they are places without adults, but also because they provide geographies of social belonging, through gang membership. In his seminal study of working-class youth in Sunderland, Corrigan (1979) highlights how street activity was always carried out in a group. About one-third of the boys and girls interviewed for the present study claimed to be members of a local gang. They use evocative names to distinguish one group from another, and each gang's “patch” is marked out on the mental landscape:

“We're just a posse really. Just a load of friends... We always stick together... This is our territory... no townies allowed... no Southbrook... It's so exciting here.”
(14-year-old girl, in mixed group of three boys and two girls, aged 13 and 14, outside a pub)

“We don't have group fights. I mean if one person in this group has an argument, we always try to sort it out... All the groups that sit round, they usually by the end of the night escalate down this end... they always come over

to us 'cause we're mates with the group over there and over there." (13-year-old girl, in mixed group of five girls and three boys, aged 13 and 14, on edge of green, open space)

"You get like different areas... you have a Westies crew and a Pleasure crew at Pleasure Park, and a North Park crew. The Pleasure Park crew, they normally meet on a Friday night... we just have a laugh there. ... there's a lot like us." (*So the different crews from different places don't mix with each other?*) "Sometimes, it depends whether they have a fall out." (*What sort of age-group is this?*) "They go from about 12 to 18, and some people who's like losers come down until about 21." (*Is this mixed groups?*) "Yeah." (13-year-old girl)

Although hanging around on the street confers a certain social credibility, there is a strong sense among young people that the major reason for being there is that they have nowhere else to go, and nothing much else to do. Less than one-third felt that they had plenty of things to do locally, and two-thirds claimed to be bored in their spare time. For less affluent children, the street offers the main social forum, especially as a large proportion cannot afford to participate in other leisure and recreational opportunities, or they choose not to do so. Only one-fifth of young people interviewed belonged to a sports club, and just over one-third belonged to a youth club. Other recent reports highlight the strikingly narrow range of leisure activities – particularly organised ones – in which young people take part (Demos, 1999; Roberts and Sachdev, 1996). Katz (1998, p. 135) acknowledges that increasingly young people are faced with

lessening choice and fewer opportunities of where they can go, without adult interference. She describes an eroding ecology of youth and childhood – an outcome of the "pernicious effects created by the decay and outright elimination of public environments for outdoor play or 'hanging out'."

(*What do you normally do around here?*) "Sit outside the shops. Have a laugh." (*Why here?*) "Because there's nothing else to do. There's not much places else to go. There's nowhere else out... Yeah, other places you go you get moved by the police all the time." (14-year-old boy)

"There's nowhere else to go... There's only the base [youth club] on a Friday, and there's nowhere else to go." (13-year-old boy)

"There's the chip shop... and the pub... We would be allowed in the pool room there... sit with our drinks, non-alcoholic, but there's a woman in there who chucks everybody out... You got to be over 16." (14-year-old boy)

"There's nothing to do in Daventry... play football, that's it... Nothing really." (*Why do you hang around here?*) "Nothing else to do [chorus of voices]. Nowhere else to go... It's where all the action is." (Mixed group of six girls and three boys, aged between 13 and 17)

"Can't meet in parents' houses... Some of our parents don't really like it and there's a lot of us as well." "Youth club will ruin your street cred... Ruin your whole style... It's just not cool." (Two 13-year-old girls)

These results emphasise the importance of outdoor places in the lives of young people, and how the street provides an important cultural space. Here young people hang out, develop some of their closest connections, and construct their social identities. From this perspective, the street affords venues where young people can stand apart – not necessarily in gestures of resistance, but simply to assert their independence and to get away from the adult gaze.

Children's feelings for place

Children have a very strong sense of their everyday world – which often contrasts sharply to that of adults. The results of the research suggest that children value a wide variety of places, for many different reasons. There is some consistency in preferences for social places, where children go to be with friends; activity places, which are favoured for sports, leisure and recreational pursuits; personal places, which are valued for a sense of ownership, belonging and identity; and solitary places, where children go to be alone (Table 2.3).

Table 2.3 Children's favourite places

	Male (%)	Female (%)	Total (%)
Social places	13	15	28
Activity places	20	13	33
Personal places	13	9	22
Solitary places	8	5	13
Don't know	2	2	4

Source: Matthews and Limb (2000).

These place types are neither mutually nor functionally exclusive. For example, we identified a group of teenagers who used a local shopping parade as a social venue to meet friends; as a place that provided them with a sense of belonging – particularly demonstrated by their labelling themselves as the “Spar posse” (from the name of a local shop); and as a setting for excitement and activity, where they could hang around in the evening, smoke cigarettes, show off their latest fashion, and wait for things to happen:

(Can you please describe where you are now?)

Boy aged 16 (B): “Centre of village. Outside the Spar (a chainstore). Dead in the centre of Deanshanger basically. Outside the Spar shop car-park.” *(Why do you come here?)* “It’s where everybody comes like.” Girl aged 13 (G): “To meet.” B: “It’s where everyone hangs out, sits on the walls, smokes cigarettes, chats... where you meet your mates.” *(Interviewer: What were you doing before I came?)* B: “Munching. Trying to figure out what our next move was going to be.” G: “Sitting here alright... Yeah, this is the best place to meet up with your friends.” (Mixed group of two girls, aged 13, and four boys, aged 16 and 17)

When Owens (1994) returned to Sunshine – a suburb of Melbourne – to replicate a study carried out 20 years earlier on teenagers’ place preferences, she found little had changed. Children, then and now, value the same sorts of places: they used recreational areas; commercial areas, and streets as places to be with others. Yet, in these outdoor settings, few teenagers felt that they had a voice in decision-making, and in

consequence their social and psychological needs were inadequately met.

According to Gibson (1979), environments are experienced not only as configurational settings, but also as places that afford different kinds of opportunities. Places are remembered not for what they are, but for what they afford the child. The ways in which children and adults assess the prospect of a place are likely to be very different. For example, in our survey (Matthews et al., 1999), young people frequently adapted the environment to meet their needs: green spaces became football pitches; steps and handrails provided exciting opportunities for skateboarding; multi-level car-parks provided tracks for rollerblading; back-plots, places behind garages or municipal buildings, offered spaces for wall art and graffiti; and, in one case, the backyard of a public house, where all the rubbish was dumped, provided a cosy, secure meeting place because of the heating ducts that vented warm air there during cold winter nights. In this sense, the natural and physical world perceived from the perspective of the child affords a multiplicity of opportunities, which adults seldom understand.

“When it’s really cold we all come here... there’s those pipes that let out warm air. It’s filthy round here, rats and that, but it’s warm... and we get no hassle.” (13-year-old boy)

(Interviewer (I): *Where are we?*) (Boy A) “Hanging about outside of the library.” (I: *Do you spend a lot of time hanging round here?*) “Yeah. Here and down by the building site.” (Boy B) “There’s about nine of us that

meet down there. They’re building loads of houses... then soon we’ll get more people coming and we can play with them.” (I: *Where else do you play?*) (A) “Just down there, down the bottom by the school where there’s lots of flat surfaces (for skateboarding) and down Rock Hill and outside the Co-op, on the ramps.” (Two boys, aged 9 and 11)

Places afford opportunities in keeping with the physical attributes of children. It is axiomatic that the physical attributes of children and adults often differ in their size, shape, strength and energy. Accordingly, engagements and encounters with place are intricately bound up with bodily abilities and attributes, and become a function of what children are (Pile, 1996). For example, many of the dens and hideaways that children construct are often pocketed away in places that adults ignore, are unaware of, or dismiss as unimportant. We observed a group of children playing together in the debris and bushes on a piece of derelict land. Here they had gathered together old bricks, rusty sheets of corrugated metal, and pieces of tattered carpet to construct a simple retreat where they could shelter, unseen by passers-by. They showed us how the place could only be accessed on hands and knees and, in so doing, they brought to light a site that was completely invisible to us as adult observers:

(Boy A) “It’s really cool here... we come here most evenings, when we can.” (Boy B) “Have a smoke and that... no-one knows we’re here most of the time.” (Boy C). “I’ve told me mum like, but she’s not been here... Andy’s says he’s going to get some plastic to sit on... once we had a little fire... but that’s too

dodgy... Me mum had a right go at me once, and so I came here. Cool.” (three boys, aged 12 and 13)

In their play and recreational pursuits, children frequently come into contact with places in ways not imagined by adults. During our research, children repeatedly complained of the withdrawal of places from their physical worlds by planning activities that were insensitive to their needs. For example, new building development on the edge of a village was seen to rob children of favourite haunts; the unsympathetic regeneration of urban derelict land denied children access to an exciting setting where they would otherwise explore, learn and acquire competence in the outdoors. Clearly, environmental planning without recourse to children’s views encourages alienation and complaints about a lost domain:

“We had a rope swing with a tyre on the end over there... we used to bring our bikes and there was a track with bumps and that... in the woods... we used to pile broken bits of trees into a heap and then jump over it... but it’s all gone... the bulldozers came first and flattened it... Mr B lives in one of them houses now... well posh.” (11-year-old boy)

Particularly significant for children is their strong affinity with nature. There is a considerable literature that suggests that children – especially those under 10 years old – value natural spaces as places to play and meet friends (Moore, 1986; Matthews, 1992; 1995; Ward, 1990; Percy-Smith, 1999). Wals (1994) categorises eight types of environmental relationship that are commonly experienced or afforded. These are nature as: an

entertainment; a challenging place; a reflection of the past; a threatening place; a background for activities; a place for learning; a place to reflect; and a threatened place. Denying children a chance to encounter nature – no matter how small – “robs them of the very essence of life” (Engwicht, 1992, p. 6).

Although contingency plays a part in affording natural settings, a rural childhood is likely to be rich in opportunities of this kind. However, in our survey, few young people living in the countryside reported playing – either on their own or with friends – in woods and fields (3 per cent), or near to rivers, lakes and ponds (4 per cent) – all aspects of the countryside highly prized by adults (Valentine, 1997b). We found little evidence of young people running freely across fields and exploring distant forests and hills (Aitken, 1994), largely because these spaces had been “fenced off” by adults as private land. Davis and Ridge (1997) note that in many rural areas there is very little land that is not in private ownership – either farmland or, with an increasing number of affluent incomers and early retirees – personal property. “Paradoxically, without access to farmland, villages are likely to possess very little public land and what little there is can be fiercely defended by adults” (Box 2.4).

“I know where I used to go when I was little, the clay pit... it’s down by the brook. It’s at the park and then you go over a stile and then there’s a little brook and there’s a bridge. It’s been fenced off now.” (*Do children still play there?*) “I don’t think they do as much now, ’cause the barbed wire has been put there since we used to go there.” (16-year-old girl)

“We can’t go across the fields, because the farmer’s ploughed them all up. It’s a cow field too, too dangerous and dirty.” (13-year-old girl)

“We’ve got this little thin road and it’s a really good access point to our football pitch. All you have to do from my house is just go straight down the road, along the path and you’re practically there. The other way you have to go round again and then round again, before coming back down... it’s ten times quicker down the path. I’ve had a farmer threaten to hit me with a cane when I’ve gone down there [the path], ’cause I think he owns the road or something... he tries to cut off the little path. He just doesn’t let you down there.” (10-year-old boy)

In essence, by not consulting with children, adults frequently misconstrue children’s needs and wants. Even when the same environment affects children and adults, their interpretation and evaluation of places are likely to be different; so their views on environmental planning are unlikely to coincide. We have observed, for example, how children are very creative in using the affordances of adult-designed environments for purposes quite other than those for which they were intended. By ignoring children’s views, adults are in danger of imposing environmental change that further dislocates children from their world.

Box 2.4: Challenging the rural idyll

Children living in rural villages often feel excluded and powerless within their communities. Rather than being part of an ideal community, many children – especially the least affluent, and teenagers – feel dislocated and detached from village life, and there is a strong sense of alienation. There is an overall impression that their needs and aspirations are rarely being met at a local level, and a lack of provision of appropriate services – particularly adequate public transport – heightens feelings of isolation and boredom.

In their day-to-day transactions, many rural children feel observed and censored – seldom able to find places where they can hang out with friends away from the adult gaze, and only tolerated within the public domain as long as their presence does not transgress the boundaries of adult sensibilities. For many children, living in a village does not live up to the expectations of a rural idyll.

Socio-spatial exclusion of this kind is typical of many childhoods, and can relate to children almost anywhere. However, a rural upbringing is particularly distinguished by the sharp disjunction between the symbolism and expectation of the “good life”, and the realities and experiences of growing up in small, remote, poorly serviced and fractured communities. Feelings of not belonging, and that no one is listening become all the more discouraging in the constant flurry of imagery that presents rural places as harmonious, united and inclusive.

Clashes with adults

The way in which space is organised is deeply invested with cultural values. For the most part, the public domain represents adults' own private space. Sibley (1995) discusses how the control of such space by adults is closely associated with the social production of identities in young people. By defining limits, and drawing boundaries based upon age-related assumptions, adults attempt to shape and command the process of growing up. Where it is acceptable for children to be, and what is meant by "out-of-bounds", are socially constructed. The spatiality of childhood is mapped by differing rationales (Massey, 1998). Some age lines are drawn for *control* – so playgrounds are perceived as acceptable and safe places for toddlers at particular times of the day, but are deemed as unacceptable places for teenagers, especially during the evening when unregulated by the adult gaze (Matthews, 1995; Sibley, 1995). Others are drawn for (moral) *protection* – such as the age limits that define entry into places serving alcohol, and showing certain sorts of films. Discourse about young people's presence on the street becomes understandable in these terms. For many adults, streets (and other outdoor places) are dangerous spaces, largely because they are both difficult to *control* and are settings where little *protection* is afforded from the afflictions of anti-social behaviour (eg, crime, drugs). Declaring "streets" as out-of-bounds both (re)imposes an adult governance on space, and (re)asserts an adult sovereignty over children (Valentine, 1996b).

Inevitably, when children are out and about, collisions and confrontations with adults are an almost daily experience. Being with friends when outside the home is very important to young people. Yet it is when young people congregate together that they are often seen as out-of-place, and their behaviour is construed as threatening. Our survey suggests that in most cases all they are doing is making themselves feel safer by being together (Table 2.4). Environments where adults and children frequently clash head-on include street corners, indoor shopping centres (Box 2.5), and – ironically – playgrounds during the evening.

By hanging out together in these settings, children transgress the boundaries defined by adults, and their visibility and non-conforming use of places are seen as threatening. The irony of playground conflict is that, because these are places where adults accompany young children at certain times of the day, during the evening they become vacant plots where older groups can congregate away from the adult gaze. Yet a group of teenagers in a public park are frequently chased away, and so made to leave that very territory created by adults to contain young people (Matthews et al., 1999). By denigrating groups of young people on the street as an unacceptable presence, and by continually ignoring children's points of view, adults ensure that clashes of this kind are a persistent and destabilising feature of community life:

Box 2.5: The magic of the mall

A popular social venue for some young people is the shopping mall. Of those interviewed on site, one-fifth visited every day, and 90 per cent visited at least once a week. Visiting frequencies increased with age, such that one-third of 16-year-olds made daily visits. Shopping malls afford free, convenient, safe, warm, dry places, where young people can sit or stand around chatting; having a laugh; drinking; eating; smoking; and watching the world go by. The bright lights, crowds and music create a compelling “buzz”.

When talking with friends, nearly one in two had been asked to move on by security guards. The proportion was higher for boys than girls. Young people noticed

that they were more likely to be moved on when in a group of four or more. Their responses varied. Most moved to another part of the mall, or left for a short time before returning. Most young people felt that they were being watched at all times. They resented being treated with suspicion, and as potential criminals. They pointed out that adults could stand and talk in groups, or window-shop without concern. When consulted, most suggested changes that would make shopping malls acceptable places for young people to meet and hang out, without the threat of being asked to leave.

Source: Matthews et al. (2000)

(What do the people round this area think of you hanging around?) “They hate us... Some of them moan all of the time... We’ve had [name’s] mum calling us slags when we just sit here and talk as friends. We’ve got people... who are calling us tarts, ’cause we are sitting with... It’s like everyone judges us on the way we look, just because they think we’re louts and layabouts... we just sit down here.” (14-year-old girl)

(Has anybody ever told you to go away?) “From North Way... They come out and say, ‘Get out of here.’ ... Old biddies who live there... They say no ball games and there’s not a sign anywhere.” (12-year-old girl)

“This is the best place to meet up with your friends... sit here talking... Yeah... that bloke

puts cooking oil to stop people sitting on his wall.” (16-year-old boy)

“Down the brook, the edge of the brook they moved us. They said we were wrecking the wall and that we were causing a noise... and that we were dropping litter and stuff.” *(And what were you doing?)* “Just sitting... We were just sitting on the wall... talking.” (13-year-old girl)

(Has anybody ever tried to stop you hanging round?) “Yeah... [W] and [D] up at the pub always come out and say f... off.” *(What reason did they give?)* “Because it’s [the pub]... right by the side of the launderette where it’s nice and warm for us to go and sit when it’s really cold... and they don’t like it. They can be as noisy as they want in the pub, but not noisy as we want outside.” (11-year-old girl)

“People from the houses by the park said we were making too much noise when we was in the park... They says if you’re going to make that much noise you can go some place else.” (10-year-old girl)

“What you forget is we got to go on the streets some time... what people are trying to do is get all kids off the street and think that we’re not even allowed on the streets.” (14-year-old boy)

“I think they’re narrow-minded because they forget they were children, and they forget that they had to go somewhere.” (13-year-old girl)

By attempting to regulate space, adults relegate all children to less than adult, or adults-in-waiting, a group whose best interests are served only by the withdrawal of their civil rights. Furthermore, basing judgement on a universal view of the child as either “angel” or “devil” fails to acknowledge the diversity of children’s life experiences.

Children’s fear of place

Satterthwaite et al. (1996) draw attention to a broad range of environmental hazards that may be detrimental to children’s development, but to which adults are less susceptible. These include types of pathogen and pollutant; physical hazards; and psychosocial stressors. Levels of risk are products partly of the characteristics of children (eg, their age; sex; physical attributes; health and nutritional status), and partly of their social and environmental backgrounds (eg, quality of the home environment; care-taking conventions; and

access to resource provision). They set out an agenda on how to achieve a sustainable and fulfilling future for all children, which depends on the minimisation of these risks. As previously noted, this and other studies (Blakely, 1994; Goodey, 1994; McNeish and Roberts, 1995) emphasise that the world as viewed and experienced from the perspective of the child is a very different place from that perceived and encountered by adults.

In the course of their environmental transactions, children commonly encounter threats that often go unnoticed by adults. Many childhood hazards are not dangers in later life.

In our study, by far the most articulated danger was traffic, which far outweighed the fear of bullies and gangs; fear of attack, and fear of strangers. For the under-tens, traffic is perceived as a major threat, often interfering with their street games (Table 2.3). A number of other studies highlight the dangers of children and traffic (Hillman, 1993; Hillman et al., 1990). Boys are more likely to be involved in road accidents than girls. Explanations are speculative, but hinge on boys’ different use of public space (for example, number of journeys; time in the street; modes of transport; the spontaneous nature of play), and on psychosocial factors (for example, levels of motor skill; spatial abilities; and risk-taking).

Younger children frequently complain about how their play is often disrupted by unleashed or stray dogs, especially when out and about in parks. Percy-Smith (1999) found that adults were quick

to dismiss children's fears, by claiming that their dog was "only playing", and "meant no harm". For a small child, however, reassurances of this kind provide little comfort.

Children's environmental fears also commonly reflect parental values, the role of the media, and their own sense of powerlessness. Cahill (1990) draws attention to the role of television dramas, documentaries and newspaper reports in the creation of popular fears. Through a bombardment of publicity about child abductions and murders, she claims, many adults became convinced "that there was a virtual army of villainous adults stalking and preying upon children who dared to venture outside the protective fortress of home and school." (Cahill, 1990, p. 393). Goodey (1995) notes further aspects of the social dimensions of fear and danger. She found that from an early age, girls are taught to fear violence and sexual assault, whereas boys become afraid of physical assault and fights. Both boys and girls are fearful of men in public spaces. In combination, fears of this kind mean that many streets (because of traffic, children's lack of visibility, and poor lighting) and public parks (because of stranger-danger, and stray dogs) are places that are being withdrawn from children's daily environmental repertoire. Yet, it also seems that young people's place fears are largely the products of how adults use places:

"I was walking the other night with my brother... and this car come down and it span all the way round and it span off again and for a 12-year-old boy that's a pretty big scare.

Obviously, I'm used to it... You get them flying up here, and the ramps have been put in to stop them from doing it. They just fly up here." (15-year-old girl)

"A lot of people come round here on motorbikes ... you heard about the crash down there? It's scary. We try to play football there... [we] can't play decent matches... 'cause people come along on their motorbikes and wreck the game." (14-year-old boy)

"We were around here one day and we were playing, all of us were playing football down at Vine Street, all the children were... and all of a sudden it [the ball] hit this car, and everybody started laughing and... the driver stopped, and he says... 'I am going to phone up the police.'" (11-year-old girl)

(Does anything scare you about coming round here?) "It scares me... if you get people coming out of the pub and starting stuff. And I get really scared about that." (13-year-old girl)

Children also face many of the same fears as adults. In a study of Bangladeshi children in Camden, Howarth (1997, p. 15) found that fear of racism profoundly constrained the behaviour of a group of 8–12-year-olds:

"Most of the time it is not safe outside because of the white gangs. I am not scared of the Bengali gangs, because we are the same colour, and they will not hurt me." (9-year-old boy)

“When I see white boys I go inside, when I don’t see them I play outside.” (10-year-old boy)

“I was attacked when I was six years old. I went downstairs to get my ball, and white boys surrounded me. I wanted to run, but I couldn’t. I told my mum, but she couldn’t do anything.”

Safe streets are those close to home or relatives; away from traffic; where other people are around; and where young people experience little hassle from others (Table 2.4). An irony is that, while young people feel safe in places where they are not alone, the presence of others (adults) often interrupts and dislocates their social transactions:

“It’s close to home. Loads of people live round here, so it’s not that far to travel... There’s a chip shop here. We can buy food and drink. Get to see all your friends. You can always go to someone’s house... There’s always somebody around here just in case there’s trouble.” (10-year-old girl)

(Why do you... stay here as opposed to... over that side of the field?) “Cause it’s closer to the shops where people go, it’s closer to the pub if we need the loo, or to talk to people that are in the pub. It’s closer to the houses... It’s convenient.” (14-year-old girl)

(Do you feel that it’s safe here?) “Yeah... If we’re in a group... I always feel safe with these lot, ... ’cause I know that they won’t suddenly turn... on you for no reason.” (14-year-old girl)

Table 2.4 Social and environmental fears

	Under-10s (%)	Sample as a whole (%)
Fear when out alone	60	50
Fear when out with friends	32	24
Street dangers:		
Traffic	60	34
Bullies and gangs	13	13
Fear of strangers	2	2
Fear of attack	4	3
Safe streets:		
Close to home	26	34
Away from traffic	30	20
Adults around	4	8

Source: Matthews and Limb (2000).

(Outside a corner shop) “Well, if it starts raining you just go to the bus shelter, but it’s nice here, ’cause, like sometimes, we see our parents driving by and stuff like that.” (13-year-old boy)

“My mum likes me to stay around the shops and nowhere else, because she knows where I am... if anything happens... she knows where I am, and she can come and get me.” (10-year-old girl)

Adults seldom acknowledge children’s lack of power and control in their environmental designs. There is a certain hypocrisy in this. On the one hand, adults create the myth of stranger-danger, and promulgate “panics” about play in public spaces; on the other hand, their planning responses cast children into unsupervised and

segregated areas, so creating a disjunction between children's need for freedom with security, and parents' desires for closeness with visibility. One outcome of this is that children are often poorly integrated into the physical worlds of adults.

Children and regeneration

In the course of these everyday transactions with place, young people's experience of the physical world is often one of social marginality – a product of the centrality of able-bodied adulthood (Hockey and James, 1993).

Children's place, needs and values are seldom incorporated into the physical planning process, and so children are cast as "outsiders" within society. Simpson (1995) points out that, since the nineteenth century, the legislative system of the Western world has supported the exclusion of children from many parts of the environment, and has given them little, if any, voice in shaping that environment. The laws that have supported children's exclusion are based on a view that fails to recognise children's capacities to be active participants in societal processes (Archard, 1994). Therefore, children are relegated to a passive state, in which they wait for adulthood (Elder et al., 1993).

This view of children as "passive" – empty vessels, waiting to be filled with the sensible values of adulthood – erases many aspects of childhood (Caputo, 1995). It simply does not acknowledge the notion that young people have particular views and experiences of the social, organisational, material and environmental circumstances that

frame their lives (James et al., 1998). Nor does it recognise that some behaviour that is deemed troublesome – for example, graffiti and the dropping of rubbish – or incongruous – for example, hanging around in shopping malls, or on street corners – may, in part, be a product of the way in which the physical environment has been designed and built.

It is not surprising that young people feel disconnected from environmental policy. There is a need to understand children from their own perspective and experiences of life, which, as we have already made clear, may give them very different values about place and space from adults (Matthews and Limb, 1999). Rather than assuming that children know less than adults, we suggest that they may know "something else". Consultation with young people is a first step towards their integration within the community (Church, 1996; Hart, 1997; Adams and Ingham, 1998).

During the course of our research, young people expressed a strong sense of disenfranchisement in the environmental planning process (Box 2.6). Only one in four children in the study had ever talked to anyone (mainly parents, friends and relatives) about things they would like to see changed, or added to their local area. Few young people had ever contacted a local councillor (less than 2 per cent), or discussed matters with a youth worker (less than 5 per cent). Despite prominent efforts at community policing in all three study areas, less than 1 per cent of young people had made contact with the police. When asked why they had never spoken to anyone on

these issues, most young people claimed that they had never thought about it (52 per cent); no one had ever talked to them (7 per cent); they did not know who to contact (10 per cent); and nobody listens in any case (10 per cent):

“There was a meeting down at the... community centre... It was quite a while ago... Grown-ups were complaining about all the young people... Our head teacher had a go at us... because we didn’t turn up... we didn’t know about it. He comes and he started going on saying why we didn’t turn up at

this meeting for young people... well if we’d known about it we would have gone.”
(12-year-old girl)

“There was about two young people that turned up... They hovered around the door and that... then they went.” (13-year-old girl)

“You get these sort of leaflet things that come through the door every month all about what’s going to happen... what to do for young people... but it ain’t going to happen.”
(15-year-old girl)

Box 2.6: Landscapes of powerlessness

Of special concern to many children are the ways in which places are changing through actions beyond their control. These changes are often perceived as threats, not only to children’s maturing independence, but also to their developing senses of belonging and rootedness. In a study of 13-year-old children on an edge-of-town, public-sector housing estate, Matthews et al. (1997) reveal profound feelings of powerlessness and inadequacy:

“We had a maze and the council came along and knocked it down... and put in a little green patch.”
(13-year-old girl)

“There was a massive swing... a climbing frame and everything... a seesaw... and they knocked it down and put up a six-year-olds’ climbing frame there, a little slide... if we go on it, we get told off ‘cause all

the parents are looking out... There’s nothing for us to do... and no one asks us what we want... what’s the point?” (13-year-old boy)

In their attempts to reclaim some of these everyday public spaces, young people may leave their own territorial markers as existential gestures. In this context, graffiti may be interpreted as an inscription of demarcation – an attempt to “close-off” space by an outsider group. The daubed wall thus becomes the visible and unequivocal cue of the disenfranchised – a vain symbol in a struggle for power and ownership (Ley and Cybriwsky, 1974). Matthews et al. (1997) observe that groups of teenagers regularly congregate around their own graffiti, as if to express their collective identity, and reaffirm their autonomy. In this sense, graffiti is the language of the street – an emblem of both “groupness” and difference.

“We got promised loads of things would happen up in the field in the summer holidays. There’s nothing up there.” (*Who made these promises?*) “We were down the primary school and we were all going in the pool. We weren’t supposed to but we were. And she came down, there’s two of them and we were thinking, oh, we’d better make a move... And they stopped and they were asking questions like you are now... going on about what we do, how we do it and everything, and they started saying they’d be in the village and they were going to do archery and everything.” (*Where were they from?*) “I can’t remember now. That was about two years ago.” (15-year-old girl)

Conclusion

The time has come when we should no longer rely on a traditional social science approach, which observes children’s lives and goes on to report to policy-makers in the hope that they will bring about change and an improvement in quality. What is needed now is a more radical approach, in which children themselves “learn to reflect upon their own conditions, so that they can gradually begin to take greater responsibility in creating communities different from the ones they inherited” (Hart, 1995, p. 41).

It has been argued elsewhere (Matthews, 1995a; Matthews and Limb, 1998) that, to develop the skills of democratic citizenship, children need to be involved in the process, and adults need to become more aware of children’s capabilities and competencies. There is ample evidence to suggest

that democratic responsibility and social participation only result from practice and progressive involvement, and do not suddenly develop in adulthood. Every child has a right to a diverse range of environmental opportunities, which should both empower and enable them to express their own individuality in their world of “here and now”. Children who have observed others taking responsibility, learn to experience the benefits of reciprocity and co-operation, and to act on them as they grow up. Socialisation of this kind depends on integration, dialogue, and accessibility to constructive, purposeful activities, and not on social isolation in childhood ghettos. In order to enable children to participate, there needs to be an initiation of more relevant, inclusive and thorough environmental education programmes. From an early age, children should be encouraged to think about their local environment, and environmental decision-making of various kinds should become a “natural” part of growing up.

Within the UK, there are no mechanisms in place to enable, empower or enfranchise young people, by right, in their local communities. Therefore, it is not surprising that many commentators claim that the modern environment, which adults have created, has led to children being far less free today to move about, and to link up with friends independently of adults, than previously (Lansdown and Newell, 1994; Hillman, 1995; Satterthwaite et al., 1996). This has occurred not through deliberate intent, but rather as a consequence of the way in which places have been designed and constructed without young people in mind. Children are losing opportunities on the

street and in their neighbourhoods “for acquiring practical and social skills from direct experience and for starting to play a role in community life” (Adams and Ingham, 1998, p. 4).

The absence of children in participatory structures has a consequence for young people’s involvement in their local communities. Limited participation leads to restricted vision, and lack of opportunity to take part induces lack of motivation in the future. Also, by not consulting with young people, it is not surprising that

misapprehension and fear jaundice adults’ views. As we have seen, streets are vitally important in the shaping of young people’s identities. For many, they are an intrinsic part of the social fabric of everyday life. For children, not involving them reinforces a sense powerlessness and alienation. For adults, it establishes a positionality that further dislocates young people from their world. Fencing-off childhood in this way ensures that the hegemony of adulthood remains unchallenged on the landscape.

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3 Regeneration and community programmes

Summary of Chapter 3

- Despite wide-ranging policies aimed at urban renewal, there are still huge gaps between the worst estates and the rest of the country. For children growing up on the housing estates of the 44 most deprived districts, the future may appear very bleak.
- Through major shifts in government policy over the last 50 years or so, a number of lessons have been learned. These revolve around the fragmentation of decision-making, and the disconnection of the “local” from policy imperatives. Added to these are concerns about the relatively limited scope of regeneration funding, and the failure to take on board lessons learned beyond the UK.
- Another burst of policy-making is taking place, riding on a wave of reporting that claims to have identified and learned from the problems that have plagued past neighbourhood regeneration strategies.
- *The National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal* (2001) proposes both short-term and longer-term changes to the ways in which the Government is trying to help tackle problems at a local level. Over the next three years programmes will focus on: worklessness and supporting weaker communities; cutting crime; improving skills; combating poor health; and tackling poor housing and physical environments.
- The new national framework places considerable emphasis on joining up locally and empowering communities through ‘Local Strategic Partnerships’ that are inclusive of and responsive to disparate local needs – especially those of young people, and ‘Neighbourhood Management’.
- There are already signs that this kind of thinking is taking place, either organically – through changes that are encouraging wider participation – or directed through other policies, which, although not specifically designed for community regeneration, would, if executed, lead to significant change. However, the spin-offs from these arrangements are not always positive, and if not sufficiently thought through may have unfortunate consequences for those groups and communities that they are designed to help.
- If properly established, youth councils provide varied opportunities for linking young people to their communities; but there is always a danger that they act as little more than sops to children’s participation. In a different vein, the threat of child curfews – a constituent part of the Crime and Disorder Act designed to curb anti-social behaviour – would, if implemented, extend those processes that already exclude young people within society, both in principle, through children’s lack of voice, and in practice, by depriving children of access to their local environments at particular times.
- There is still much work to be done in order to ensure that young people get a better deal in their neighbourhoods.

Introduction

Despite sets of wide-ranging policies aimed at urban renewal, and billions of pounds of government spending over the last 50 years or so, there are still huge gaps between the “worst estates” and the rest of the country. Recent research for the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions identified 1,370 estates in England alone – mostly run by local authorities and concentrated into 44 districts¹ – that can be classified as “run-down” (Social Exclusion Unit, 1998). Here, unemployment levels are nearly two-thirds higher than average; under-age pregnancy and lone parenting are more than one-and-a-half times the norm; mortality rates are 30 per cent higher than expected; and the proportion of schools classified as being “on special measures” exceeds twice the national rate in the primary and nursery sector, and five times the national rate in the secondary sector. Add to this mix of poverty and deprivation high levels of children growing up in families on income support, poor housing, low rates of educational achievement and literacy, growing levels of anti-social behaviour, and widespread family breakdowns, it is not surprising that Britain’s run-down neighbourhoods are now among the poorest in the Western world. What is particularly galling is that Britain’s poor are becoming increasingly marginalised in society, by becoming ghettoised into these problem estates, from which there appears to be little chance of escape (Box 3.1).

¹ These districts are selected to show the problems experienced by very deprived areas. They contain 11.8 million people, comprising 24 per cent of the population of England.

Box 3.1: Deteriorating social conditions

Between 1979 and 1994–95:

- net incomes, after housing costs, of the richest tenth of the population grew by 68 per cent, while those of the bottom tenth fell by 8 per cent;
- the proportion of children growing up in families with less than half the average income grew by 10 per cent to 32 per cent;
- wards with the highest rates of male unemployment experienced the highest rises in sickness and levels of disability;
- areas experiencing a deepening of social deprivation were mostly located in large cities, with the poorest becoming concentrated in neighbourhoods of acute need.

Source: based on Social Exclusion Unit (1998).

The chapter is in three parts. The first focuses on the specific problems commonly faced by children growing up in Britain’s poorest neighbourhoods. The second part examines a set of policies which, over the years, have attempted to put in place strategies to tackle the multiple problems facing these socially disadvantaged communities – culminating in the new National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal (NSNR). The third part of the chapter examines two contrasting strategies to de-problematise the notion of youth, and to get communities working together. One depends upon active citizenship and local strategic

partnerships, building on, for example, the development of youth councils. The other depends upon curbing anti-social behaviour, for example through the use of child curfews.

Growing up in sink neighbourhoods and estates

For children growing up in the housing estates of the 44 most deprived districts of England, the future may appear very bleak. Young people face a mix of problems, from poverty and unemployment, to crime and poor health (Social Exclusion Unit, 1998). With poor family life – characterised by disrupted relationships, indigence and worklessness – and provision, within both neighbourhoods and schools, that does not meet their needs, young people are presented with a way of life that lacks stimulation, enjoyment and social opportunity. In consequence, youth disaffection and hanging around on the street with “nothing to” do are common outcomes, as these accounts testify (Matthews et al., 2000):

“We all comes down here (*outside a local shopping parade*) to meet up like... there’s nowhere else to go... nothing to do round here at all... nothing to look forward to... just sit and have a laugh... watch the talent... we’re pissed off most of the time.”
(14-year-old boy)

(*Right, I want to know why you hang out round here?*) G1: “’cause there’s nothing really to do round here.” (16-year-old girl).
G2: “Nothing to do... in the winter it just gets so boring. It’s pathetic.” (15-year-old girl).

(*So while you hang around here, what sort of things happen that are fun or exciting?*)

G1: “It’s not exciting. It’s boring.”

G2: “There’s nothing else to do. It’s somewhere to go. It’s better than staying in the house anyway... Apart from that.”

Although the claim of “nothing to do” has a universal resonance among teenagers (Corrigan, 1979; James, 1986), given the poor service base, relative remoteness, and poor public transport provision frequently encountered on these estates, and a profound lack of money, there are often few genuine social opportunities near to home. Feelings of despair are added to by the physical decay of these localities. Signs of dereliction, such as vacant and boarded-up properties, poor environmental maintenance, litter, graffiti and burnt-out cars, dull the senses and contribute to a deep sense of dismay. Faced with such a complex array of disadvantage and deprivation, social tensions are often rife within these sink estates. Problems are exacerbated through past policies that sought to dump “problem families” into areas with hard-to-let properties (Box 3.2). Although estates pass through “community careers” (Herbert, 2000), according to their demographic profiles, when high numbers of young people are evident, a downward spiral of disorder and incivility is typical (Figure 3.1). In many of the worst estates, neighbourhood unease gives rise to a flurry of clashes with vigilant adults. Feelings of anomie, and a diminished sense of belonging abound. With a decline in community spirit, anti-social behaviour may escalate to such levels that petty crime and vandalism become endemic, and a sense of hopelessness prevails. Neighbourhood decline may now be spiralling

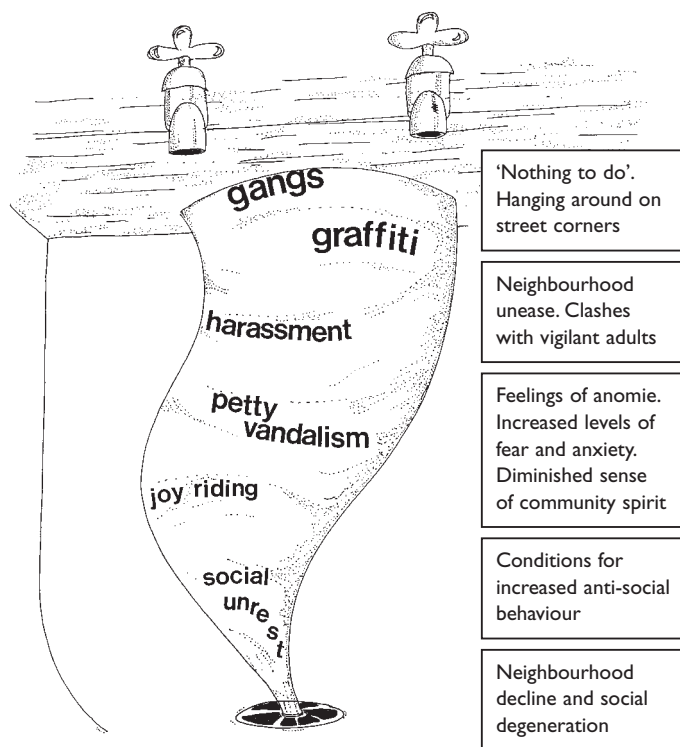


Figure 3.1 Young people, social problems and sink estates

out of control, culminating in pockets of extreme social antipathy. The Social Exclusion Unit suggests that young black and minority ethnic people encounter these problems disproportionately, not only because many live in poverty in disadvantaged neighbourhoods, but also because they face the additional effects of racism. In a study of an edge estate in Northampton, Matthews et al. (1997) uncover a series of accounts that provide glimpses into the ways in which bored young people attempt to relieve the drudgery of their lives:

“We just walk around the streets... when we get bored we start causing trouble... can’t help it ’cause you’re so bored that you just have to do something... Boys jump on the car bonnets and set the alarms off, and then we get blamed for it ’cause we can’t run fast enough.”
(13-year-old girl)

Box 3.2: Sink estates

Peter Hall (1997) identifies six reasons for the deepening problems of the worst estates:

- 1 Right-to-buy legislation removed better housing to the private sector.
- 2 Allocations of decreasing public-sector stock were made almost exclusively to marginalised groups, such as the homeless and single-parent families.
- 3 Gentrification displaced poorer tenants to edge estates.
- 4 High rents without subsidies excluded the working poor.
- 5 Cutbacks in state spending reduced family maintenance.
- 6 The gap between council tenants and jobs increased.

“The graffiti is pretty if they do it well, but other times it’s ‘I was here’ in marker pen and looks pretty stupid.... They clean them every week and the graffiti goes back on again... I like it when they do a really good design... but they just wash it off.” (13-year-old boy)

“The field is where it all happens, usually after dark... there’s a group of lads who are always riding about on motorbikes... and scooters, too, if they can get them.... I had a go once, really cool... you just hotwire them.” (13-year-old boy)

Despite the social, economic and environmental problems evident within this area, and its notoriety for public disorder, the teenagers often rationalised their apprehension:

“A couple of weeks ago there was this police chase... the car drove straight through our court past my house... suddenly the police helicopter goes by... the lights go shining in your room... it was just like watching football on TV.” (13-year-old boy)

“This area’s rough... violent... but it’s good in that way as well... The bad thing is the violence, the good thing is the excitement.” (13-year-old girl)

In short, marooned on their sink estate with few of the facilities taken for granted by the rest of society, these young poor showed all of the signs of having withdrawn from and been rejected by their communities. Like many of their peers, they were literally living a life on the edge.

Neighbourhood regeneration strategies

There have been many attempts to redress problems of deprivation and disadvantage, especially in urban settings. During the late 1960s, government policy towards urban renewal switched from slum clearance and redevelopment towards initiatives to encourage regeneration and rehabilitation. The first Urban Programme was launched in 1968, and was followed by a raft of initiatives increasingly grounded in a conviction that competitive, market-led strategies could provide just and efficient solutions to urban decline and decay (Matthews, 1992; Nevin et al., 1997). Major agencies, such as Urban Development Corporations, were established, with nominated members often drawn from commercial and business backgrounds, to steer and drive change. However, a strong element of experimentation led to a growing list of programmes (Table 3.1). During the early 1990s, for example, within Manchester there were six Urban Programmes, two Enterprise Zones, two Task Forces, two Urban Development Corporations, two Safer Cities projects and a City Action Team (Robson, 1994).

Increasing criticism – particularly accusations of fragmentation and lack of co-ordination – led to a winding-down of urban policy in the early 1990s. Between 1990 and 1996, urban funding was cut by 75 per cent, and initiatives – such as City Challenge – did not amount to a focused neighbourhood regeneration strategy.

Table 3.1 Selected urban policies

Date	Policy	Purpose
1980	Enterprise Zones	Economic regeneration through private investment
1981	Urban Development Corporations	Tackling urban decay with market-led strategies
1982	Urban Development Grant	Regeneration and redevelopment
1983	Derelict Land Grant	Replanning derelict land
1985	City Action Teams	Stimulating private investment
1986	Task Forces	Private job creation
1988	City Grant	Levering-in private investment
1988	Safer Cities	Tackling crime and fear of crime
The urban fracture: winding down of urban programme Urban programme funding cut from £280m in 1990 to £71m in 1996		
1992	City Challenge I and II	Competitive bidding for funding for social, economic and environmental regeneration
1994	Single Regeneration Budget	Simplified and streamlined assistance for regeneration

The Single Regeneration Budget (SRB), which began in 1994, at a stroke rendered irrelevant the 1980s policy programme. This move brought together 20 programmes administered by five Government departments, with the aim of simplifying and streamlining the assistance available for regeneration (Table 3.2). The SRB brought a promise of greater co-ordination and focused action, and reasserted the importance of local partnerships, involving Training and Enterprise Councils (TECs, now Chambers of Commerce) and local authorities, to concerted programmes of community change. Since its inception, there have been five rounds of funding, with a sixth underway, each attempting

to make real and sustainable differences to deprived areas. To date, over 750 schemes have been approved, worth over £4.4 billion in SRB support. The Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions (DETR) (2000) claim that local partnerships of this kind have safeguarded some 790,000 jobs; improved 296,000 homes; and supported the activities of over 103,000 community organisations and voluntary groups. Yet some social commentators remain unconvinced (Nevin et al, 1997; Herbert, 2000). They point out that in each of the early rounds there was a continued emphasis on economic outcomes ahead of social provision, and little evidence of community-based,

needs-led planning. Also, although new priorities have now been set, including comprehensive action in communities in the most deprived areas, and tackling pockets of need in other areas, these goals have rarely been linked to sustainable, longer-term objectives.

Lessons learned?

Through these major shifts in government policy, a number of lessons have been learned (Figure 3.2). These revolve around two major criticisms: the *fragmentation* of decision-making and the *disconnection* of the 'local' from policy imperatives. Added to these are concerns about the relatively limited scope of regeneration funding, and the failure to take on board lessons learned beyond the UK. It is hardly remarkable then, that urban policy has been dogged by charges of limited vision and short-termism. Each of these criticisms is considered in turn.

Table 3.2 Single regeneration budget: merged programmes

Programme	Funding: £m
Estate Action	373
Urban Development Corporations	286
City Challenge	213
English Partnerships	181
Housing Action Trusts	88
Urban Programme	83
Business Start-up Scheme	70
Section 11	60
Local Initiative Fund	29
Task Force	16
Regional Enterprise Grants	9
Compacts	6
Ethnic Minority Grant/Business Initiative	6
Grants for Education Support and Training	5
Safer Cities	4
TEC Challenge	4
Teacher Placement Scheme	3
Programme Development Fund	3
Education Business Partnership	2
City Action Teams	1

Source: Hansard (1994).

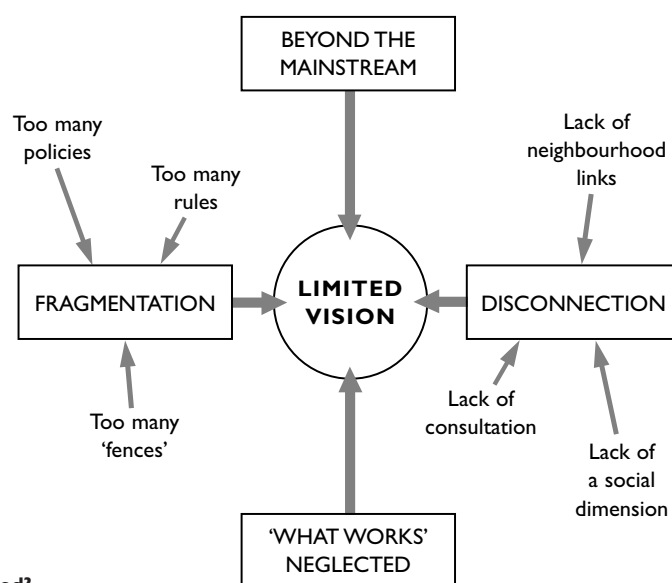


Figure 3.2 Neighbourhood regeneration: the lessons learned?

I Fragmentation

a) **Too many policies.** With the demise of the slash-and-build renewal that typified the immediate post-war period, neighbourhood regeneration has been characterised by a plethora of initiatives, each with its own specific focus, but rarely contributing to a holistic vision. Some of these strategies – such as Urban Development Corporations – have been broad in scope. Others – like the General Improvement Areas – have been much more limited. Most have been short-lived, and experimental. The involvement of at least five government departments, together with local authorities, numerous local and voluntary agencies, and many private businesses has often led to a confusion of responsibilities and conflicting goals. There has been very little genuine community participation, or harnessing of grass-roots energy and goodwill – especially that of young people.

b) **Too many rules.** On occasions, regeneration has been hampered by rules that have been insensitive to local conditions. For example, Estate Action was frequently stymied by regulations that did not allow the demolition of unfit property, even though this may have been the best option for regeneration. Also, by emphasising procedures rather than focusing on causes, not enough consideration was given to how neighbourhoods decline, and to how they may be revived through processes that involve pulling communities together.

c) **Too many “fences”.** At a local level, administrative fragmentation has been a particular problem. Just as Whitehall departments at times

find it difficult to work in partnership, similar problems abound within local authorities. Such a lack of joined-up-thinking creates tensions that are often detrimental to the effective delivery of cross-cutting regeneration strategies. The needs of young people have been poorly addressed. Poor communication between service providers and different departments has often meant that young people have been passed from agency to agency, only to be treated as individuals when a crisis point occurs.

2 Disconnection

a) **Lack of neighbourhood links.** The consistent emphasis on helping small areas appears not to be working. There is now a long tradition of this kind of approach, whereby only parts of areas or single estates are funded for change. The hope is that, by channelling resources to the worst affected parts of the built environment, general improvement will follow. Such an approach may be justifiable where problems are the result of the physical fabric of the locality; but where the problems are more deep-rooted, the strategy has major limitations. Arbitrary boundaries drawn around particular areas do not insulate them from the wider changes – such as economic restructuring – taking place at the core of the economy. Also, by attempting to improve one area in isolation, neighbouring areas suffer the consequences of a border effect. There seems little purpose in improving the housing stock on an estate if houses in a neighbouring area then become hard to let. Social division, and competition between communities for jobs and services, are often the unfortunate outcomes of redistribution of this kind. Equally, by fencing-off

neighbourhoods, information flow is impaired, such that jobs and opportunities may go unnoticed by the unemployed of a nearby area.

b) Lack of a social dimension. The notion of disconnection also extends to an insufficient focus on local social regeneration. Robson (1994) observes that while the swing back to local authority and TEC involvement was a welcome development with early SRB funding, because of the downgrading of need as a criterion, few strategies brought immediate benefits to locally disadvantaged groups. An analysis of the bids of the first round of funding show that 95 per cent had employment as the main objective. Whereas local businesses generally applauded such prioritisation, many communities felt aggrieved by the lack of an explicit social dimension. Young people, in particular, often feel excluded from the benefits of a trickle-down effect. For example, in Northampton's SRB area (Buchanan et al., 1999), towards the end of the funding round, few young people – particularly those under 19 years old – were able to discern any beneficial change for them. Many found it difficult to identify with their locality, despite a range of policies carried out in their “best interests”. Two-thirds of those aged between 20 and 24 felt no sense of community spirit, and only one-third of those aged under 19 felt part of their community.

Lack of participation, and a strong sense of disconnection, are particularly evident among minority ethnic groups. Young people of Pakistani and Bangladeshi origin are among the poorest groups in society, with poverty rates exceeding 60 per cent – four times as high as those among

white people. Yet their views are seldom heard, let alone acted upon. Chahal (2000) argues that their wider involvement is an absolute priority, particularly in local partnerships, if effective community regeneration is to come about in some of the poorest urban areas.

c) Lack of consultation. To their discredit, a lack of community involvement and the lack of a local steer were emphatic characteristics of many early regeneration projects. Typically, structures and policies were imposed from without, with local forums used as a sop to participation. For example, in Northampton, when people were asked how influential they felt their views had been in decisions affecting their local area, nearly 70 per cent could discern no influence whatsoever; 20 per cent felt they had some influence; only 1 per cent suggested that they had a great deal of influence (Buchanan et al., 1999). This compares with 50 per cent of respondents who considered themselves to be aware of community matters and issues. Also, despite five years of practice, only 8 per cent of respondents said that they had heard of the Northampton Partnership through being involved. Young people especially are cast as outsiders in the process of community consultation. Again in Northampton, four out of five of those aged 16–19 years claimed that they had not even heard about the local SRB programme, and there was little evidence of young people taking part in community forums. All too often, with the need to respond quickly to bureaucratic demands, local executives fell back on their own assumptions, rather than engaging in grass-roots politics.

If genuine participatory structures are to work at a neighbourhood level, a number of principles need to be set in place. In a report to the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, based on evidence from past experiences, Marilyn Taylor (2000) makes four recommendations that would allow the emergence of stronger, bottom-up cultures, and would put local communities into the driving seat. She argues that effective neighbourhood management depends on:

- commitment at every level of public policy-making;
- willingness to give local people the power to take action in their neighbourhoods;
- community-owned assets (eg, leisure and community centres) that give local communities an income and control over their resources;
- good quality employment opportunities for residents in local public services.

Taylor and Duncan (2000), too, suggest that significant shifts in institutional cultures are necessary if new forms of local community management are to take root. They favour approaches that enhance the role of community development workers, and that support targeted action in under-performing regions and communities on the margin.

3 Beyond the mainstream

In relation to total government spending, the funding targeted at neighbourhood regeneration has always been small. The Social Exclusion Unit (1998) points out that while public spending represents a large proportion of total incomes in most poor neighbourhoods, the largest single element is in benefit payment not regeneration

grants. Also, governments have been particularly remiss in not recognising the adverse locational effects sometimes generated by their national policies. For example, during the late 1980s, at a time of massive deindustrialisation and economic restructuring, the Government offered considerable financial support to encourage the application and development of advanced technology. For a variety of reasons – including better environment, lower operating costs, and less unionised labour – the newer industries shied away from the inner cities and other disadvantaged areas, in favour of smaller towns and greenfield sites. The Government's support of such practice meant that, in effect, disinvestment within the inner city was legitimised. In a similar vein, more recent money targeted at educational change and training has ended up largely in areas and with groups not located in the most deprived estates. Poor linkage of this kind further contributes to feelings of disaffection among young people, and distances current practice from what is needed.

4 “What works” neglected

Too little attention has been given to the experiences of successful neighbourhood regeneration strategies within the UK and elsewhere, particularly in relation to the involvement of children (for example, see Adams and Ingham, 1998). Chapter 4 draws attention to a broad range of projects that have engaged children in positive local action. Bartlett et al. (1999) provide examples from many parts of the world as to how children have participated in community and municipal planning – often in surprising and unexpected ways. Chapter 1 drew attention to the role of local youth councils in France and other

parts of Europe that routinely connect young people with their communities. However, examples of child and youth involvement in local government are not limited to Western societies (Box 3.3).

With the “New Labour” administration in the UK has come another burst of policy-making, riding on a wave of reporting that claims to have identified and learned from those problems that have plagued past neighbourhood regeneration strategies. The process was started in 1998 with the Social Exclusion Unit’s report *Bringing Britain Together*. This established 18 Policy Action Teams (PATs) “to fast-track policy thinking on some of the most intractable problems”, and an 18-month reporting period. As part of its remit, each PAT was asked to look specifically at minority ethnic community disadvantage in deprived areas. PAT 12 had a particular focus on building a future for young people, with the intent of addressing two issues: “what needs to be done to develop cost-effective preventative work with disaffected young people in poor neighbourhoods”, and “to develop an action plan with targets to take this forward” (HM Treasury, 2000).

The outcome – *The National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal* (NSNR)¹ – was published in January 2001 (Social Exclusion Unit, 2001). It proposes both short-term and longer-term changes to the ways in which the Government is trying to help tackle problems at a local level and

¹ The National Strategy applies to England only, but will be drawn upon by the administrations in Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland in compiling their distinctive strategies.

Box 3.3: Non-western examples of children’s involvement in community action

- In Ecuador, through a national programme, children are encouraged to use participatory action research to identify local issues that are fed into a network of local community organisations and government agencies, which then assist in supporting change.
- In Colombia, the Children’s Movement for Peace is regarded as a major catalyst for societal change, at both a national and more local level. In 1996, nearly 3 million children aged 7 to 18 took part in an election, in which they were asked to choose which of their rights were most important to them. Unambiguously, children chose the right to life and peace. A significant outcome of this movement has been the legal recognition of children’s right to participate in town meetings. Commentators suggest that this new ingredient has effectively revived the interest of local communities in making more effective use of these meetings, and has considerably strengthened the local democratic base (Cameron, 1998).
- In Argentina, newly established Municipal Councils of Children have been instrumental in developing new neighbourhood policies. In Rosario, for example, children’s ideas have been instrumental in traffic planning, and in the design of green space.
- In India, a developing network of children’s Panchayats, or local government bodies, are used to shadow and inform adult decision-making organisations.

to narrow the gap between the most deprived neighbourhoods and the rest of the country. Over the next three years programmes will focus on: worklessness and supporting weaker communities; cutting crime; improving skills; combating poor health; and tackling poor housing and physical environments. The new national framework places considerable emphasis on joining up locally and empowering communities through 'Local Strategic Partnerships' that are inclusive of and responsive to disparate local needs – especially those of young people – and local 'Neighbourhood Management'. To help ensure its targets are delivered a new Neighbourhood Renewal Fund is being implemented with £800 million earmarked for local authorities in the most deprived areas of England. Among its recommendations is the immediate need for clearer structures for leading and delivering the Government's objective of the social inclusion of all children and young people. Also, it is now recognised that all Government departments and local agencies should have a policy of consulting and involving young people in any service delivery. The Government has already gone some way towards meeting aspects of its action plan, through three new developments announced in July 2000: the establishment of a Cabinet Committee on Children and Young People's Services; the formation of an inter-departmental Children and Young People's Unit within the DfEE to co-ordinate youth policy; and the appointment of a Minister for Young People.¹

¹ Each of these developments is discussed in more detail in Chapters 2 and 6. It is still too soon to report on how well the initiatives are working.

To complement the NSNR, the Government has introduced a range of new, area-based programmes designed to turn around some of the most deprived neighbourhoods. Many of these programmes have a focus on involving young people:

- **New Deal for Communities.** Launched by the DETR, initially in 17 pathfinder areas, the programme provides £800m over three years to support the regeneration of small neighbourhoods. A strong condition is that projects must be inclusive, flexible and very local, and engage the community.
- **Sure Start.** Targeted at children aged 0–3 years in deprived neighbourhoods, this programme provides funding for improved childcare, primary healthcare, play and support for families. Five hundred local Sure Start programmes are planned between 1999–2004 that will target a third of children aged under 4 who live in poverty. Fifty-nine 'trailblazer' projects are already up and running in disadvantaged neighbourhoods.
- **Health, Education and Employment Zones.** The designation of a series of "zones", especially in areas of intense social exclusion, is seen as integral to new ways of working with communities.

In addition, the Government has implemented a range of generic programmes which, although focusing on the specific needs of different groups of young people, are likely to have neighbourhood effects. These cover a new, universal youth support service, and teenage pregnancy, crime-reduction and anti-drugs strategies:

- **Connexions.** Following the SEU report *Bridging the Gap*, that focused on 16–18-year-olds “lost” to education, and the DfEE’s White Paper, *Learning to Succeed*, the Connexions strategy sets out a youth support service designed for all young people. Its specific purpose is to “lead to a step change in learning achievement for all teenagers in England, stretching the most gifted, raising aspirations and providing opportunities for all young people to achieve their potential and provide effective, targeted help and support to those who need it” (DfEE, 2000). Set to be launched in April 2001 in 16 areas, Connexions will be co-ordinated with other services for vulnerable young people, including mental health services, supported housing, and drug treatment.
- **Quality Protects.** The programme, which itself is part of *Modernising Social Services*, is investing £885 million over five years (1999–2004) to enhance the effectiveness of services to children in need.
- **Strategy for Teenage Pregnancy.** With one of the highest teenage pregnancy rates in Europe, skewed significantly towards disadvantaged neighbourhoods, the Government is aiming to halve teenage conceptions by 2010. A network of 141 local co-ordinators has been established, backed by local and national media campaigns.
- **Preventing Youth Crime.** As part of its remit to tackle crime of all kinds, the Government has undertaken a radical overhaul of the youth justice system. As a result, new structures have been put in place including a Youth Justice Board and new Youth Offending Teams.

In addition, 70 Youth Inclusion Projects have been initiated within the country’s highest crime estates targeting the fifty most high-risk 13–16 year olds locally.

- **Children’s Fund.** Worth more than £450m over three years starting in 2001, the Fund will support services to identify children and young people who are showing early signs of disturbance, and will provide them and their families with the support they need to get back on track. Its aim is to prevent children falling into drug abuse, truancy, exclusion, unemployment and crime. Initially the Fund is for two programmes:
 - £380m is going into *preventative work* with children – mainly those aged 5–13 years, to bridge the gap between Sure Start and Connexions. The Fund will work in partnership with local authorities and the voluntary sector, and dovetail with other initiatives such as Excellence in Cities.
 - £70m is for a *network of local children’s funds*, which is to be developed in consultation with the voluntary sector. This money is for children of all ages, and is intended to help local and community groups to provide local solutions to the problem of child poverty.

These generic programmes are overseen at a strategic level by the new Cabinet Committee on Children and Young People’s Services, and are administered by the new Unit. Through these mechanisms, a short-term goal has been set of improving the local co-ordination of services for young people.

Central to both area-based and generic programmes is the wish to build community capacity, by getting both young people and adults involved in their neighbourhoods. Participation is being encouraged through other initiatives, too. The Government's *Best Value Performance Framework* (1998) requires local authorities to consult users, and to involve them in evaluating services and future policy proposals; while the DETR consultation report, *Modernising Local Government* (1998), together with its *Guidance on Enhancing Public Participation in Local Government* (1998), have opened up opportunities for greater public involvement in local decision-making.

Davies and Marken (2000, p. 30) suggest that there are good reasons for planners and practitioners to take advantage of these policy shifts, to "draw young people into consultative, evaluative and service delivery-roles and into broader empowering experiences for achieving social change". Three kinds of potential are especially evident:

- Young people can contribute unique insights into their own needs, and how they experience local services.
- Young people can develop a greater sense of ownership of the services, and of inclusion in their community.
- Young people can develop further understanding and skill.

However, Davies and Marken point out that these gains are not automatic, "especially after two decades of officially demonising young people". *The Real Deal*, published by Demos (1999)

involving consultation with 150 young people "with direct experience of severe disadvantage and exclusion", vividly illustrates the extent of young people's disconnection. Not only did these young people feel alienated from politics and labelled and discriminated against by adult society, they also did not recognise the conventional definition of community, seeing it as sentimental and irrelevant. However, despite feeling let down by the educational system, and marginalised by the workplace, these young people wanted to be respected, and they wanted their ideas to be listened to.

Two contrasting strategies to build up community cohesion

The new national framework for neighbourhood renewal places considerable importance on active citizenship; social inclusion; and community partnerships that involve residents – both adults and young people – and local agencies from the public, private and voluntary sectors. Good neighbourhood management, too, depends upon controlling anti-social behaviour and getting communities to work together. However, the spin-offs from these new arrangements are not always positive, and if not sufficiently thought through may have unfortunate consequences for those groups and communities they are designed to help. The rest of this chapter focuses on two outcomes that have taken root as a result of society redefining the ways in which it seeks to address the problem of its youth within communities.

First, youth councils as participatory mechanisms are examined and evaluated. Regeneration partnerships, drawing upon a wide array of local agencies, have been especially proactive in setting up youth fora of various kinds. If properly established, youth councils provide varied opportunities for linking young people to their communities; but, as observed earlier, there is always a danger that they act as little more than sops to children's participation.¹ The purpose of this section is to consider the effectiveness of youth councils as a strategy for engagement – lessons learnt from successes and failures are highlighted.

Second, the newly acquired powers of local authorities to impose curfew orders where there is a demonstrable need to tackle the anti-social behaviour of some young people is considered. In contrast to youth councils, which seek to heighten the visibility of young people within their communities, curfews represent an attempt by adults to reclaim the street as their own property, so limiting the presence of 'troublesome others' within these domains. The curbing of young people in public places is not new and has taken many forms – for example, through the ghettoisation of children into clearly demarcated playgrounds and the imposition of local bye-laws that demand 'no ball games'. However, the temporal regulation of children within outdoor environments is a radical move within the UK and represents an extreme attempt to cleanse and purify neighbourhood space – at least, during

certain times of the day. Controversial since their inception, critics suggest that curfew orders, whether enforced or not, are both socially divisive and politically harmful. This section looks at the arguments for and against curfews as a means for social control. In essence, youth councils and curfew orders are bi-polar responses, the 'ups' and 'downs' along a continuum of neighbourhood strategies that seek to get communities working through processes of either inclusion or exclusion.

Youth councils: an example of young people's participation

There are encouraging signs that, at the local level, attitudes are beginning to change with regard to the involvement of young people in decision-making – albeit organically, ahead of these new government programmes. Part of this movement towards giving young people a say has been the development of youth councils and forums. The terms "council" and "forum" are used interchangeably, to describe the range of ways in which congregations of young people come together, usually, but not exclusively, in committee, to voice their views about their needs and aspirations. Adults often establish youth councils largely because they are perceived to provide tangible opportunities deemed to enable ongoing participation by young people rather than because of demand from young people themselves. However, emerging evidence suggests that many youth forums are flawed and inappropriate participatory devices, often obfuscating the voices of young people in local decision-making. Indeed, if not properly constituted youth councils may serve to disempower many young people within their

¹ Youth councils are discussed further in Chapters 4 and 5.

communities. This section reviews the history and development of youth councils in the UK, and considers their efficacy as a mechanism for getting young people involved. Whilst attention is drawn to some notable successes, discussion highlights common pitfalls that any local organisation seeking to engage with young people would need to address.

Youth councils have existed for some time, and there have been two previous surges of interest. During the late 1940s and 1950s, a number of youth parliaments were set up throughout the UK, as a means for supplementing the adult-run Youth Service. In 1949, there were as many as 240 youth councils, based largely on “Rotarian” lines (Joseph, 1984). Butters and Newell (1978) identify three ideological pulses behind these developments: *character building*, which aimed to integrate young people into society, and so produce mature citizens capable of rebuilding the country; *social education*, which sought to move young people into positions where they could work for institutional reform; and, more radically, *self-emancipation* – conceived as a means to equip young people with the skills and capabilities to challenge and take control of those organisations (and structures) that effectively disenfranchised them. These early attempts failed, partly because of a lack of common purpose, for there was little cohesion between these three strands; and partly because the councils were fundamentally flawed, in that they had been set up by adults with political agendas divorced from the priorities and sensibilities of young people (Crossley, 1984).

A second wave of youth councils developed during the mid-1980s. The *Thompson Report* (1982) on the Youth Service laid great stress on the idea that young people should participate in decision-making, and that the best way forward was through youth councils (Paraskeva, 1992). At the time, a number of county youth services sought to establish youth councils in each of their major towns (Crossley, 1984). However, hardly any of them lasted more than a few years. Like those established in the earlier round, the driving force behind the participation of young people was not convictions of desirability and basic rights, but political expediency. Unfortunately, in their rush to form youth councils, many youth services made the fatal mistake of creating makeshift structures and constitutions.

The youth councils of today represent a new wave of interest in this form of political participation, and they have become by far the most popular way of encouraging youth involvement in community regeneration. A recent survey (Matthews and Limb, 1998) revealed that there are over 300 youth councils in the UK,¹ although these have developed in different ways. A number of national organisations have played important, yet differing roles in their development. There is therefore an unevenness of provision within the four home countries. In England, the National Youth Agency (NYA) and the British Youth Council (BYC) provide advice and information on request about youth councils. The Wales Youth Agency (WYA) has a similar remit. These are agencies which, although proponents of young people’s participation, have limited capacity to

¹ A directory of youth councils is available from the BYC.

support development. The development of youth councils in England and Wales has therefore been largely haphazard. Their form and character depend partly on such factors as the demography, political make-up and traditions of a locality; and partly on existing institutional and organisational structures, and charismatic individuals.

In Scotland, development is more coherent. A partnership between the Scottish Community Education Council (SCEC), Youth Link Scotland and the Principal Community Education Officers Group, which followed four years of research and consultation, gave rise to the Connect Youth programme, launched in 1995. Targeted at 14 to 25-year-olds, this programme sought to promote effective involvement of young people in the decision-making processes that affect their lives, and to engage young people in determining their views on services, and the development of opportunities for enhanced community involvement (SCEC, 1996).

By far the strongest tradition of youth councils in the UK, however, is in Northern Ireland. In 1979, the Department of Education established the Northern Ireland Youth Forum (NIYF), with a brief to encourage the development of a network of Local Youth Councils (LYCs). Members of the LYCs were recruited from local youth groups, including statutory and voluntary agencies, both uniformed and non-uniformed. The purpose of the LYCs was to get young people involved in tackling local issues, and to ensure that Local District Councils respected their voices. The NIYF now co-ordinates the activities of a broad range of groups and is proactive in campaigning for young people's rights across four major

domains: policing; accommodation; employment; and education (NIYF, 1996). As a result of high-profiling in the media, young people's views are increasingly valued by statutory providers. Currently being discussed are proposals to get youth representatives on each District Council, and the formation of a Northern Ireland Youth Parliament.

Six kinds of youth councils or forums may be identified within the UK. This classification is designed to draw attention to their disparate constitution and function. Given that there is no national model, it is inevitable that some of the categories are not mutually exclusive. In essence, what is being recognised is the roles that organisations can fulfil, and there is a possibility that organisations may perform more than one role.

Feeder or constituent organisations

Many feeder or constituent organisations have been established as outcomes of Local Agenda 21. They are characterised by a commitment to engage young people in decision-making of various kinds, and are planned and resourced to fall within the orbit of the local authority. In effect, they feed into or contribute to ongoing strategies. For example, the Leeds Environment Initiative incorporates a number of youth forums and two major consultative projects (Freeman, 1997). Together these inform the Children and Young People's Strategy, which is a major City Council programme (Burden and Percy-Smith, 1996). Elsewhere, in Manchester and Northamptonshire, Young People's Local Agenda 21 forums have been set up, co-ordinated respectively by the city's Planning Department

Sustainability Team, and the county's Planning and Transportation Department. In Manchester, a young person's Local Agenda 21 officer has been appointed on a two-year basis to co-ordinate these activities. Five youth councils in Dumfries and Galloway feed views and information to the councils' Youth Strategy Executive Group. This Group has recently been reformulated to comprise six young people and six councillors, all of whom have received training on ways in which to extend participation. One of the largest local authority supported youth forums is in Milton Keynes: in 1995 it had over 200 members aged between 13 and 25 years.

Shadow organisations

These are a set of parallel bodies that mimic existing, adult-based organisations. They range from shadow parish councils (for example, Woodford Halse, Northamptonshire) to local youth parliaments (for example, Stirling). Devon County Council runs a shadow county council, comprising 20 young people, with a full-time co-ordinator and a self-managed budget of £6,000. A set of youth forums and district youth committees feed into the council. In Hampshire, youth parish councils have been established in many areas of the county, and their success has led to the formation of the Hampshire Youth Council, which is supported by the Hampshire Association of Parish Councils and the Hampshire Youth Service. The Community Council in Hawarden (Flintshire) works with local sixth formers to convene a shadow community council of young people. In Wolverhampton, a series of area-based youth forums have been introduced, through which young people elect three representatives to the council's youth affairs

sub-committee. In recent elections, about 6,000 young people voted to choose from 25 nominees. In 1997, Stirling Council set up Scotland's first Youth Congress. It comprised 22 members, aged between 16 and 25 years, and had a brief to represent all young people from the age of 12. Anyone living and working in Stirling was eligible to stand. Stirling Council provided training for each campaign team in preparation for the election, and paid the expenses of any elected delegate.

Issue-specific organisations

Typically, issue-specific organisations are initiated by single-issue bodies, such as the police or health authority, with the intent of engaging young people in agendas that are organisationally led, such as crime reduction or drug misuse. As part of Connect Youth, and in co-operation with the Scottish Office Crime Prevention Unit, a programme of consultation with young people on issues to do with community safety was launched throughout Scotland. In Girvan, Ayrshire, this gave rise to Move On – a young people's forum whose members are directly involved in the delivery of drugs education programmes to primary schools, and who sit on the Community Council. Frequently, discourse on this subject spills over to encompass other aspects of young people's local environment. The Youth Service as an organisation is increasingly involved in this sort of dialogue. For example, the Dorset Youth Services' Speak Out initiative is based on a set of area youth consultative committees, and their success is leading towards a form of youth council for the whole county. Within the London Borough of Sutton, a Youth Issues Forum has been developed from within the youth service,

in order to empower young people in the civic life of the community. Eight area youth forums established by the Wigan Youth Service provide a mechanism for consulting directly with young people, and for involving them in planning and evaluating provision. In Cornwall, as a result of an event organised by Cornwall County Youth Service and the NSPCC, which encouraged 10–16-year-olds to express their views on key issues such as the environment, employment, recreational opportunities and public transport, a formal youth network is developing across the county. In Scunthorpe, funding from Yorkshire Arts is supporting the North Lincolnshire Youth Arts Forum. Although the principal remit of this group is to provide peer support and small-grant funding to community arts projects, interesting spin-offs are anti-bullying strategies and training in peer-advocacy and mentoring.

Community development organisations

Community development organisations have a strong local focus. Often their purpose is to secure further resources for the immediate locality. The seedbed for these kinds of initiative is diverse, although there are a number of projects funded by the SRB. For example, in Sandwell, SRB monies are being used to create a local youth forum, and in Newark, the Unique Coffee Bar project – a spin-off from the local youth forum – provides a new social venue for young people. The Bentilee Neighbourhood Project in Stoke-on-Trent provides an opportunity for 14–18-year-olds to have a say in what they want to happen in their neighbourhood; a similar project is running in public housing estates in north Hull, co-ordinated by the local Housing Action Trust. Likewise, the Camden Goods Yard Estate Youth Forum has

been formed on a new housing estate, in order to enable young people to make decisions and participate in the way in which the estate is developed. A particularly innovative development is the Keats Way Youth Council in Loughborough. Established in 1998, after four years of detached youth work within a small housing estate characterised by high male unemployment (>80 per cent), high crime and drugs abuse, and no community centre or amenities, this is a community-based youth council that functions on the street rather than in a building. Its core membership is a group aged 14–17 years, that meets every eight weeks to discuss issues relating to young people's community needs. The Council has won an award from 3M for innovative, community-based practice. On a slightly broader scale, the Leeds Listens programme consulted 2,000 young people to establish what they wanted for their city, and to draw up an action plan that places young people at the heart of policy-making (Freeman, 1997). In Shetland, a youth forum was set up because of an awareness that young Shetlanders are poorly provided for in respect of local leisure facilities. There are no fast-food outlets, few cafés and no cinemas. The forum campaigns for change, and is assisted by community workers and youth leaders.

Group-specific organisations

Group-specific organisations represent groups of young people who share a common identity, often through their marginalised position in society. Issues and experiences of intolerance, discrimination and inequity provide powerful forces of cohesion for young people with disabilities, gay and lesbian groups, and minority

ethnic groups. Sometimes these groups are set up within a local context. For example, the Somers Town Youth Forum in north-west London represents an anti-racist initiative developed after a local murder. Following disturbances in the Manningham area of Bradford in 1995, a local forum, open to 12–25-year-olds, was formed. Divided into under-25s and under-18s, this forum is regarded as a major conduit of communication for the views of Asian young people about their local area.

Young-people-initiated organisations

As yet, there are few examples of organisations initiated by young people – that is, organisations established independently by young people, and run on agendas and activities set through their own volition. In the first place, such organisations may have been convened in response to a successful local campaign, but in due course they evolve to take on a broader brief. More typical are those structures set in motion and supported by an external agency, but which operate as independent bodies. For example, in Liverpool the local Youth Service provides a support worker, office accommodation, and secretarial and financial support for a forum open to anyone over 13 years old. It is up to members to organise meetings, decide upon an agenda, and negotiate on their own behalf with local decision-making organisations, as well as council committees. In a similar vein, the Coventry Youth Service supports a group of local young people who are planning their own conference on Local Agenda 21, and who wish to publish a newsletter to link together the activities of other groups within the city.

Success factors affecting youth councils

Although generally perceived as a “good thing”, a major problem confronting the development of a coherent structure of youth councils in the UK is the piecemeal and ad hoc manner in which they are being set up, and the experimental nature of many of the initiatives. At present, unlike many other European countries (see Chapter 1), there is no single organisation responsible for their inception. Even when national agencies are involved, decisions are largely left to individual statutory and voluntary organisations. Consequently, within a relatively small geographical area there may be many kinds of youth council, rarely drawing upon the experience of each other. Also, as there is no framework to define the structure of these councils, there is often a sense that they are novel and slightly risky experiments operating outside the mainstream. Symptomatic of this general lack of organisation is that, until very recently, there has been no comprehensive listing of youth councils.¹

Inevitably, when there are various kinds of participatory structure, and in the absence of coherent guidelines, the dangers of tokenism are ever present. For example, there are few safeguards to ensure that, when given a voice, young people have a choice about the subject, the style of communication, or any say in the final outcomes. Unless young people are confident that their opinions will be treated with respect and seriousness, they will quickly become discouraged,

¹ The BYC and NYA began to compile a directory in 1997. However, the transient nature of youth councils means that it is difficult to keep a directory up to date.

and will dismiss the participation process as ineffective, with all the implications this has for their confidence in democratic processes as they grow into adulthood.

Poor participatory mechanisms are very effective in training young people to become non-participants. The lessons learned from school councils are of relevance here. In many cases, these operate as little more than “ideas groups” (Spinks, 1997), used to disseminate information and to communicate ideas, rather than being concerned with the business of making decisions. Strongly hierarchical, and often dependent upon the enthusiasm of individual teachers, school councils rarely encourage responsibility for the implementation of new ideas and, as such, become settings where young people’s involvement lacks an action dimension (Fogelman, 1991). Indeed, as the Children’s Rights Development Unit (1994) suggests, there can be few less democratic places than our schools.

Given the developing nature of these structures, and the lack of well-defined performance indicators, it is difficult to judge whether youth councils and forums are effective mechanisms for the incorporation of young people into decision-making processes in the UK. From a detailed study of four youth councils in Leicester (1), Milton Keynes (2), Northampton (3) and North Lincolnshire (4) – undertaken as part of a project funded by the Nuffield Foundation (Matthews, 2000) – we see that there are a number of important issues facing any organisation claiming to represent the views of young people. These relate to the *initiation*, the *process* and the *outcomes* of youth participation.

Initiation

- Successful youth participation depends in part on the conditions in which it is initiated. There is a need to identify *who has initiated the participation*, and their reason for doing so. Where adult-dominated agencies or authorities initiate participation, there may be ulterior motives such as conflict resolution or social control. For example, in one case a youth forum was developed because there already existed forums for the elderly, gays and lesbians, and minority ethnic groups, and it was thought politically expedient to address youth issues as well. Even where there is a genuine commitment to participation on the part of agencies and authorities, the participatory mechanisms must be examined carefully, to ensure that participation amounts to more than tokenism. This requires a clear interface between young people and adult decision-makers.
- A further significant aspect of the initiation process concerns *who is included and represented*. Youth participants in the UK have generally been in the older age group (16 years and above). Yet there are examples in mainland Europe illustrating the successful involvement of much younger children (see Chapter 1). In the Nuffield study, too, all forums recruited younger people with considerable success (1 = 13–17-year-olds; 2 = 12–17-year-olds; 3 = 14–16-year-olds; 4 = 11–25-year-olds). The constitution of the group – in terms of sex, class, ethnicity and ability – is important if youth participation is not to be open to the accusation of elitism. Elite participation may be acceptable if the participants represent the interests of a wider constituency of young

people, but there is a danger that participation advances the interests of the vociferous, articulate and confident at the expense of the rest. This appearance of youth participation lends legitimacy to adult decision-making, and may increase marginalisation among the silent majority of young people. All the youth councils in the case study recruited widely, and were representative of their communities. Some had explicit strategies designed to encourage participation by young people who are generally “hard to reach”.

- The initiation of youth participation has implications for *training*. In order for young people to participate fully in these councils and forums, they need to be equipped with the generic skills of communication, and versed in the debates about citizenship. This raises questions about whether space should be allocated within the school curriculum for these matters, or whether by being active and creative members of organisations young people are both developing skills and defining notions of citizenship for themselves. In Northampton, for example, good practice involved all delegates attending a residential training weekend, provided by the local authority and the youth service, before taking up their roles as youth councillors.
- If youth participation is to be successful, consideration must be given to *the setting* in which it is initiated. Places where adults meet may not provide appropriate spaces for young people. A committee room in a council building can be an intimidating setting for the exchange of views. Venues and meeting times will also determine levels of attendance. Interestingly, in Northampton and Leicester,

both groups of young people expressed a preference for their meetings to be held in the council chambers, as these settings added a perceived “gravitas” to their work.

- For youth councils to be effective, clear structures and good support are essential from the outset. In one case, a forum was observed to be experiencing particular difficulty because of a change of personnel within the local authority. As no immediate replacement was found, the youth council was temporarily suspended, with considerable frustration and a loss of confidence among its members.

Process

- Where participation has been successfully initiated, there are a range of issues to do with how the process of participation might be managed. *The agenda* of a youth council or forum is an ongoing concern, and there is a need to examine how issues are identified and negotiated if adult-directed groups are not to obfuscate the real concerns of young people. This conflict is all the more problematic where the adults concerned are “experts” on youth matters, as there is the potential for them to propose what they consider to be in young people’s best interests, rather than enabling them to decide for themselves. This enabling role should ensure that participants have a clear brief. In particular, they need information about the range of options available to them; the procedures and processes that control these options; and the implications of their decision-making. Yet, for the brief to be enabling, it must not be prescriptive, and this balance is not easy to achieve. In one forum, for example, the attendance of a well-meaning

but strong-minded local councillor proved particularly disruptive. The young people complained of the lack of a sense of ownership, and of being manipulated. In contrast, in another forum, adults were allowed to attend only if invited by the forum. These young people appeared far more confident in discussion, and there was a greater sense of openness.

- A further problem with the process of participation relates to *life span*. Young people who engage in these groups are likely to be involved in many other activities, and able to participate on only a limited basis. Some may be involved in the group for only a short time – for the “present” or the “now” of young people is constantly changing. For example, two years ago the Milton Keynes forum was among the largest in England, with over 200 members; today, it has fewer than 20 members. In each of the other cases, recruitment strategies were firmly in place. In Northampton and Leicester, for example, annual elections took place in each of the town’s secondary schools, while in Lincolnshire, regular Arts Days were used both as a means to raise awareness of the work of the forum, and to encourage the recruitment of new members.
- The deadlines of adult decision-making processes may not coincide with the activity of the group, and the rhythms of the local planning process may be discordant to the practice of the group. Many forums arise out of the identification of special concerns that may be both spatially and temporally determined. Once the particular issue has been addressed, there may no longer be a need for

that kind of representational structure. The pressure to prolong the life of a group in the interests of adults who may need to claim that consultation is taking place, rather than those of young people, is something to be guarded against. Also, young people’s timescales for action rarely replicate those of adults. For example, in Northampton, the young people were concerned about the cost of bus fares for 14–16-year-olds. They determined to try to get the age limit for adult rates raised to 16 years. The local bus companies took their concerns very seriously, and agreed to change their cost structures. However, the process took more than ten months – a reasonable timescale for the adults concerned, but much too long for the young people.

- Where there is commitment on the part of young people to an ongoing participatory mechanism, there will need to be a resource commitment. Without some limited funding or support in kind – such as the provision of a meeting place – most youth forums are unlikely to survive in the long-term. Each of the forums had a small budget available to support their members’ expenses, and to enable development work to take place.

Outcomes

- The value of any public participation is likely to be judged by the *outcomes* produced, and youth participation is no exception. To ensure that such outcomes are meaningful, the process must involve genuine communication. Young people need to be confident that their views will be listened to and taken seriously. In one forum, for example, the lack of a structured agenda, and the absence of officer roles, caused

considerable frustration for the young people. Accordingly, business was often haphazard, poorly thought through and debated, and little progress was made. However, in another case, an agreed agenda was pre-circulated; clear guidelines were set to inform action, and considerable achievement was evident. These young people felt that their decisions mattered, and that their views counted.

- Even where consultation is genuine, there is an unresolved issue of power, and of the extent to which participating groups of young people can – or should – have any authority. There is a danger that youth councils, if not carefully constituted, become little more than sound boxes, capable of making considerable clamour, but without the means to bring about change. Yet the devolution of power by local authorities and decision-making agencies raises issues to do with public accountability, which must be thought through carefully if participation is to be effective. Where participation does occur, it is important that proper feedback is ensured. Young people have the right to know the outcome of any decision, and if these decisions are contrary to their wishes, the reasons should be explained clearly. Good practice was observed in several cases, where unsuccessful outcomes were fully explained by delegated officials

Many of these issues resonate with concerns about the effectiveness of public participation in general, but Matthews and Limb (1998) suggest that young people are doubly disadvantaged. In the absence of legitimate political rights, authorities and agencies may perceive any participatory

opportunities as optional favours. As such, these opportunities are subject to the vagaries of political fashion, and the transitory resource allocation this entails.

The Nuffield study also considered the views of young people not participating in youth forums. Typical concerns included the following:

- Youth councils have no power.
- Youth councils are tokens to the posturing of adults.
- Good ideas are never carried out.
- They do not represent the views of people like me.
- All the members come from the same background.
- Adults control the agenda, and the process.
- Not enough time to get involved.
- No idea what they can do.
- Too much time is spent in fundraising.
- Youth councils are too bureaucratic.
- Rather do other things.
- Never heard of youth councils.

These answers confirm some of the problems facing any organisation claiming to represent the views of young people in local decision-making. Responses of this sort suggest that local organisations should be wary of relying solely on youth councils as the panacea for encouraging young people's participation. Indeed, youth councils represent just one sort of opportunity for developing active citizenship – there are many others, for example, young people's hearings, citizen's juries, street-corner councils, peer-support projects (for a review see Chapter 4).

Yet, if set up properly, local youth councils can provide a way forward, both to integrate young people into their local communities, and to encourage feelings of political worth and engagement. Indeed, within many communities youth councils represent an important first step towards the political involvement of young people. However, unless coherent strategies are developed, both nationally and locally, which establish principles and procedures to enable inclusiveness and practices that ensure young people's views are appropriately fielded, listened to and taken seriously in community decision-making, the youth councils of today are unlikely to rise above their Cinderella status and, sooner rather than later, like their predecessors, many will be in danger of collapsing altogether.

Curbing anti-social behaviour: the curfew debate¹

Not all current legislation and practice facilitates a sense of inclusiveness among young people. Designed to make society in general a safer and better place, the publication of the White Paper *No More Excuses: New approaches to tackling youth crime in England and Wales* (Home Office, 1997), and the subsequent Crime and Disorder Act 1998, represent not only major shifts in the youth justice system, but also signal recognition of a fundamental reconceptualisation of children and childhood (Matthews et al., 1999). From being

innocent and vulnerable “angels” – victims of circumstance, in need of care and protection – in the late 1990s, children in trouble have been systematically reconstructed and (re)presented as “demons” (Davis and Bourhill, 1997; Goldson, 1997) – the knowing perpetrators of malevolent and evil acts. Valentine (1996a) traces the origins of the moral panic that has progressively fuelled this redefinition, to the media reports on Teddy Boys and “mods” and “rockers” during the 1960s (Cohen, 1972), and the subsequent identification of a male youth sub-culture, typified by an attitude of alienation and resistance through ritual² (Hall and Jefferson, 1976).

The political and social context for curfews

However, more than any other criminal act, it was the murder of two-year-old James Bulger by two ten-year-old boys in 1993 that prompted a maelstrom of media fury against the supposed lawlessness of many young people (McRobbie, 1994; Franklin and Petley, 1996). Since then, other cases of child murderers and children's gangs have established a widespread belief “that young people are in some way turning feral” (Jeffs and Smith, 1996, p.1), and that a growing proportion are involved in criminal activity. Mulgan and Wilkinson (1995) have coined the term “underwolves” to describe what they claim are

¹ The discussion reported here is based on a paper first published as H Matthews, M Limb and M Taylor, ‘Reclaiming the street: the discourse of curfew’, *Environment and Planning A* 31, 1999, pp. 1, 713–30. The author is grateful to the editors for permission to reproduce this material.

² Others take a broader historical perspective. For example, Carlen (1996) notes that for some time working-class children have been constructed as outside of respectable society because of their presence (visibility) on the “street”. Rose (1985) traces the continuity of this view from the nineteenth century to today. Pearson (1983) provides a temporal perspective on other moral panics relating to troublesome youth.

a growing band of young people “disconnected from society”, who increasingly threaten the social order. A rhetoric has become established that labels children as a group running out of control, and which fears “an anarchy inherent in children left to themselves” (Davis and Bourhill, 1997, p. 34). Goldson (1997, p. 134) suggests that “the demonisation of children has provided a new ‘enemy within’”, and, paraphrasing Margaret Thatcher’s accusation a decade earlier, he suggests that “the miners of the mid-1980s have been replaced by the minors of the mid-1990s”. Therefore, it is not surprising that “lawless children” are to be tackled head-on, with a series of new measures in the Crime and Disorder Act.

Among its statutes, the Crime and Disorder Act establishes procedures for local authorities to put

in place local street curfews for children aged under ten years, which will insist that all these young people are indoors, preferably at home, by 9pm. Although largely new to the UK, curfews are commonplace in the USA (Box 3.4), where they are perceived as integral to other strategies focusing on neighbourhood regeneration. One estimate suggests that over 1,000 localities have imposed night-time curfew orders since 1990 (Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 1996). Seventy-six cities have gone further, and established daytime curfews (Riechmann, 1997). The language of alarm and fear in the USA, charged by further gun rampages involving children (Whittell, 1998), draws attention to how society is hanging on an edge; and unless harsh action is taken to curb youth crime, “the human capital on which America

Box 3.4: Examples of statutory provision of juvenile curfew ordinances in the USA

City	Age	Weekday times	Weekend times	Parental fines (US\$)
Chicago	Under 17	10.30pm–6am	11pm–6am	200–500
Dallas	Under 17	11pm–6am	midnight–6am	up to 500
Denver	Under 18	11pm–5am	midnight–5am	none
Jacksonville	Under 18	11pm–6am	midnight–6am	none
Little Rock	Under 18	10pm–6am	midnight–6am	fine for 2nd offence
New Orleans	Under 17	8pm–6am	11pm–6am	500 and/or serve 60 hours of community service
Phoenix	Under 16 16 and 17	10pm–5am midnight–5am	10pm–5am midnight–5am	up to 75 up to 75

Source: Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.

must build its future, will fall into an abyss of crime and violence, drug and alcohol use and abuse, unsafe sex... lack of job preparedness, and feelings of despair and hopelessness" (Lerner, 1995, p.136). In this context, curfew orders represent a strategy for both control and deterrence, and for the rebirth of community spirit. They are typically justified as ways of "protecting juveniles from becoming victims of crime; reducing the likelihood of juveniles engaging in criminal activity; and assisting parents in carrying out their responsibility to supervise children" (Jeffs and Smith, 1996, p. 6).

In the UK too, there are discourses that present a vision of a society escalating towards lawlessness and moral decline, particularly in the run-down estates of the most disadvantaged and deprived areas. In making its case, the White Paper drew attention to a range of "facts about youth crime" (p. 7). For example, it is estimated that people under the age of 18 years commit seven million offences a year. In 1996, 14 per cent of known offenders were aged 10–14 years, and 25 per cent were aged 10–17 years. The majority of young people who commit offences do so infrequently, but a small "hard core" of persistent offenders – about 3 per cent – commit more than 25 per cent of all youth crime. Most offences committed by young offenders relate to property crimes, but in the years 1985–95, known offending rates for robbery and drugs increased substantially. According to data based on crimes cleared up by the police, most youth crime is committed by males. In 1996, 142,600 males aged 10–17 years were convicted or cautioned, compared with only 34,000 females. Youth crime is costing the public

service £1 billion a year. Not only do young people "commit crime disproportionately, they suffer from it disproportionately" (White Paper, p. 9). Both the British Crime Survey (1992, 1996), and a survey undertaken by the Audit Commission (1996), show that young people are generally at greater risk of all types of violence than adults, with 21 per cent of men aged 16–25 years recorded as victims of violent crime, much of which takes place in public spaces.

Given this scenario, one of the aims of the Crime and Disorder Act is to establish a preventive strategy, so that young people are not drawn into crime, and neighbourhoods become safer places. Curfews are not entirely new within the UK, and they have been piloted in different areas. In Hamilton, near Glasgow, a curfew has been in place since October 1997, as part of the Children and Young People Safety Pilot Scheme (Massie, 1997). This followed moves by the local authority, police and parents to curb youth crime. Under the local regulations, under-16s are required to be home by 7.30pm. If they are picked up by police after that time, they are taken home or held at the local police station until they can be collected. A similar scheme has been tried in North Tyneside (Jeffs and Smith, 1996, p. 9). However, here the experiment collapsed, partly because the police "were reluctant on legal grounds to hold the children they picked up in custody", and partly because of lack of co-operation by parents and youth workers. For, as one youth worker explained, "the appointed time was so ridiculously early kids were being lifted on their way home from the youth club and classes".

Arguments against curfews

Although it is undoubtedly true that some children cause problems for residents of some neighbourhoods, and that being out unsupervised late at night is generally regarded as unacceptable, in most cases young people on the streets are not a problem. This section presents ten arguments against the legal recognition of curfew, based upon both an empirical study – the Fourth Environment Project¹ – and other observations derived largely from the US experience. Threading through the discussion is a conviction that local places matter to young people in ways often not envisaged by adults. Also, although curfew legislation has been introduced with good intent, its practice may inhibit rather than enhance community regeneration, and encourage rather than discourage youth disaffection:

- 1 The notion of a curfew is “a breach of the European Convention on Human Rights”, in at least three ways (Hodgkin, 1998, p. 67). The Convention provides that:
 - i no one, including children, can be deprived of their freedom without state orders on specified grounds;
 - ii the State cannot interfere, without reason, with the rights of parents to look after their children in ways that they see fit;
 - iii everyone has the right to freedom of association (a right further specified in Article 15 of the UNCRC).
 Simply being young and congregating with others of a similar age on a street is not a crime. Breitbart (1998, p. 307) discusses how

urban youth are increasingly being defined as “undesirable occupants” of public space, and how media images are used to justify punitive rather than socially supportive policies that reduce their geography and enforce their invisibility. Yet, legislation that curtailed the geography and similar rights of adults, would not be tolerated; nor would legal intervention that criminalised people because of gender or race. For this reason, Bradley (1996) proposes that age is the forgotten dimension of inequality, and that age-related discrimination is unjust, unreasonable and indefensible.

- 2 For many young people, public spaces (such as streets) are an important social arena, as either they have nowhere else to go, or they perceive other opportunities as unattractive (see Chapter 2). If young people are forced back into the home, for many (mainly the non-affluent), such settings do not provide freedom away from adults, nor spaces to hang out with friends. Being together on the street affords a sense of safety, and provides a range of opportunities for social transactions. From this perspective, the street becomes a safe place, or affords a liminal space where young people can gather to affirm their sense of difference, and celebrate their feelings of belonging. By virtue of being away from the adult gaze, streets become stamping grounds where young people carve out their own identities (Ruddick, 1998). Denial of these opportunities – through constraints such as curfew orders – is about cultural politics, and the (re)imposition of adult hegemony over space (Breitbart, 1998). Curfews represent an attempt to purify space,

¹ Survey undertaken as part of the “Children 5–16” programme, funded by the ESRC. (See Chapter 2 for details.)

or a means by which to disinfect the landscape of “troublesome others” (Fyfe and Bannister, 1996).

- 3 Curfew as a solution to (adult) society’s concerns about the behaviour of some, challenges the notion of young people as responsible citizens, and both potentially taints the majority because of the actions of a few, and punishes the innocent for the anti-social behaviour of the minority. From a survey of over 1,087 children aged 9–16 years in Northamptonshire, drawn from the inner city, edge-of-town-council estates and rural villages, it was found that most young people have a keen sense of responsibility in terms of the times they need to be back home. Parents, too, mostly set clear limits, and these were particularly well defined for those children most likely to be affected by a street curfew. There was a clear progression by age. For example, during the school summer holidays, 93 per cent of under-10s, and 73 per cent of 11–12-year-olds were home by 9pm; 94 per cent of 11–12-year-olds and 77 per cent of 13–14-year-olds were in by 10pm. During the school summer term, only one person aged under 10 was out after 9pm (back in by 9.30pm), and 89 per cent of all young people were in by 10pm. In the winter, after school, all under-10s were in by 9pm, and 91 per cent of young people were in by 10pm (Table 3.3):

“It’s nice to sit here on [a] night when it’s getting dark, just sit around with your mates, having a laugh and talking to them about everything that’s going on... you

don’t have to be inside just to sit down and talk... We’re out here from about half six to about half nine, ten... And during the day as well, when we’re off school. At the end of the day, maybe we go in for our dinner, but sometimes we just stay out all day.” (Group of five boys and three girls, aged 13–14 years)

“We just sit there... buy food from the shop. Things happen.” (*So how long would you hang round here for?*) “Two hours. In the summer holidays about 11 o’clock. Week nights no later than 10–10.30.” (Two boys, aged 14 and 15 years)

(*Winter night, about 8pm. How long might you stay around here?*). “I was just about to go.” (*So is there a group of you guys?*) “A load of people... from all over the village.” (*What about the other guys, where have they gone?*) “Gone in, I think.” (Two boys, aged 15 years)

As Hodgkin (1998) points out, the police already have the power to take home an individual child considered at risk, and local authorities – through the Children Act (1989) – have the power to apply for an under-ten to be curfewed. “The difference between these powers and the curfew is that the curfew does not have to name an individual child” (Hodgkin, 1998, p. 67).

Table 3.3 Reported times for returning home

	Under-10s (per cent)	Sample as a whole (per cent)
Back home in summer holidays by:		
8pm	64	19
9pm	93	52
10pm	100	84
Back home in summer term by:		
8pm	85	45
9pm	99	67
10pm	100	89
Back home in winter holidays by:		
8pm	92	41
9pm	99	66
10pm	100	95
Back home in winter term by:		
8pm	86	70
9pm	100	76
10pm	—	91

Source: Fourth Environment Project (2000).

4 If a curfew is imposed, it will discriminate against the least affluent, in that children from more wealthy families are the most likely to be escorted between different commercialised leisure opportunities, or to be at home in any case. Percy-Smith (1999) describes how a group of 9–10-year-old children from a middle-class neighbourhood rarely ventured beyond their immediate home close by themselves. All journeys, whether to school, club or sports activity, were taken accompanied by their parent or guardian, usually by car. Much of their free time was spent at home with friends, or at a friend's home. In contrast, a group of children of the same age from an

inner-city area were much more streetwise. These children lived in close contact with their neighbourhood, spending most of their free time outdoors, away from the parental gaze. The results from the Fourth Environment Project also confirm the importance of the street to the lives of young people in socially and economically disadvantaged communities (Table 2.1). For less affluent families – those in the inner-city and edge-of-town council estates – the street offered the main social forum, especially as many could not afford to participate in other leisure and recreational opportunities, or chose not to do so. For example, in these two types of area,

37 per cent and 44 per cent respectively met friends daily on the street during the summer, compared with 31 per cent in rural areas. Because of these differences, the introduction of a curfew is likely to be socially divisive, creating an underclass of young people who are denied the rights of many of their peers.

- 5 A blanket curfew suggests that age rather than gender is a determining factor in crime. As Home Office records show, males are the most likely to be involved in any criminal activity, and it is difficult to see how a curfew on young women could be justified (Jeffs and Smith, 1996). McRobbie (1991) notes the seeming invisibility of girls in debates about public space, as if female street use is morally taboo, and tarnished by an adult image of “streetwalkers”. The Fourth Environment Project found that many girls aged under ten years used the street as their principal social venue, and the imposition of a curfew would severely erode their opportunities to mix and socialise. These findings resonate with the work of Pearce (1996), and Watt and Stenson (1998), who have shown the importance of outdoor places to girls’ social rounds.
- 6 A blanket curfew would mask the plight of those young people who are staying out for particular reasons, such as to keep away from drunken, violent or abusive parents. In an early review of US curfews, Plotkin and Elias (1977) noted that the violators of curfew were often those young people who did not have a satisfying relationship with their parents. For this reason Hodgkin (1998, p. 67) contends that curfew as a strategy is an affront to the

child protection principles of the Children Act: “State agencies, such as the police and social services, have a duty to consider the needs... of children as individuals, not as a group.” The results from the Fourth Environment Project also highlight how, in the cramped conditions of inner Northampton, many young people only rarely used the home as a place to meet friends, preferring the perceived freedom of the outdoors.

- 7 There is a fear that the local authorities most likely to impose a curfew are those whose communities are already “close to the edge” of society – whose miserable environments offer little for young people in the first place. Such a policy response does not provide young people with the support they need, and is likely to increase hostility towards them (Hodgkin, 1998). Breitbart (1998) observes that, whereas many middle-class youths would comply with restrictions on free access to public space, by seeking refuge in commodified and expensive private indoor recreational settings, for the less privileged there is no choice. The imposition of a curfew would add to the bleakness of these places, and further contribute to a society of “haves” and “have nots”.
- 8 Like previous area-based strategies that have attempted to confront social problems head-on, there is a strong likelihood of a buffer effect. Not all local authorities will wish to impose a curfew, and some will only do so for particular neighbourhoods. Unless a curfew order becomes widespread, young people will soon realise that by hanging-out in neighbouring areas they will be able to escape

from its jurisdiction. Indeed, Starr (1983), in a study of the Detroit curfew, noted a strong displacement effect of this kind. However, there may be a hidden danger in this process (Jeffs and Smith, 1996). By herding young people in this way, curfews insidiously promote ghettoisation, and encourage detachment from the adult world (Matthews, 1995; Matthews et al., 1998). Displacement may have other consequences as well. If the social space of young people from multiply deprived neighbourhoods is “squeezed”, or comes under siege, there may well be a movement to “better-off” areas. Here, the visibility of young people will be perceived as even more discrepant, giving rise to increased resistance from adults, and producing scenarios where young people are given fewer opportunities to meet in public spaces.

- 9 At best, curfew as a solution is a response to the symptoms of societal malaise, and does not tackle the root causes of dysfunction. Curfews neither automatically lead to “good parenting”, nor dissuade young people from taking part in anti-social behaviour. Additionally, curfews do not promote the encouragement that is required to get young people involved in their communities. Under the European Convention on Human Rights, parents already possess the power to curfew their own children, and the imposition of a curfew law is, in itself, unlikely to alter child-rearing practices. In the American experience, despite the prospect of fines, community service and probation, coupled with a requirement for parents of transgressors to attend family therapy centres, there is little

evidence to suggest that bad parents turned into good ones, and violators turned into non-violators.

- 10 The effectiveness of curfews as a method for control and deterrence is by no means clear or convincing. Evidence from the USA is contradictory. Protagonists cite examples such as Houston, where the juvenile crime rate fell by 22 per cent in the two years after its inception (Campbell, 1993), and New Orleans – a city with one of the strictest curfew regimes, requiring all young people to be off the streets during weekdays by 8pm – where there was a 29 per cent fall in the juvenile crime rate between 1993 and 1994 (Morial, 1995). However, antagonists provide other evidence. In Baltimore – which has had a curfew for almost 20 years – the rate of juvenile arrest for assault is currently twice the national average (Bannerjee, 1994); whereas the dramatic fall in the crime rate in New Orleans can be related to a much wider city strategy (for example, the provision of recreation centres has more than tripled, and 1,300 new youth jobs have been provided). Closer scrutiny also reveals only a 9 per cent fall in juvenile crime during curfew hours (Schiraldi, 1996). When Oakland was considering the imposition a curfew ordinance, the council revealed that as in the rest of the USA, 80 per cent of juvenile crimes in the city occurred between 9am and 10pm – times unaffected by most curfew laws (Schiraldi, 1996). By comparison, when San Francisco rolled back its curfew law in 1990 – following a report revealing that minority youth were

significantly over-represented in curfew arrests – the juvenile crime rate, as measured by arrests, fell by 16 per cent (Schiraldi, 1996). Equally, for those who champion curfews as a means of keeping young people away from danger, the evidence is also equivocal. Of the 26 individuals killed in the District of Columbia in 1988 – a period when curfews were high on the local political agenda – not one person was killed at a time or in a place affected by a curfew. Despite the widespread adoption of curfews in the USA, there is still no recent and sustained empirical research on their overall impact (Bannerjee, 1994; Blumner, 1994; Ruefle and Reynolds, 1995). For, as Jeffs and Smith (1996, p. 10) suggest, curfews may be successful in the short term simply because of their shock effect, but as a long-term strategy their efficacy is not proven. Also, what works in “the special circumstances of many United States cities and towns is unlikely to apply in the same way to UK experiences” (Jeffs and Smith, 1996, p. 10).

The curfew order of the Crime and Disorder Act provides a legislative response to what Valentine (1996, p. 596) describes as public anxiety “about other people’s ‘dangerous’ children”. It reinforces a view that public domain is adult territory, to which young people have only limited entitlement, and then only with the sanction of their “betters” (parents, police, state). In essence, safe streets are where adults do not have to confront the seemingly aberrant use of place by young people. At present, only the under-tens will be affected by a curfew, although at the time of writing, the Criminal Justice and Police Bill

(2000), if it is enacted, would extend curfews to children up to the age of 16. Yet, if the US experience is followed, future moral panics are likely to fuel an increase in age restrictions.

Throughout the curfew debate, there has been no attempt to incorporate the views of young people about how they see the street. Yet the Fourth Environment Project has shown that, just as their experience of the environment is different from that of adults, so too are young people’s perceptions of place (see also Chapter 2). Nevertheless, it is taken for granted that adults can impose rules without recourse. This response flies in the face of the UNCRC, which, through its 54 Articles, sets out principles and standards for the treatment of children. Two Articles in particular are relevant to the imposition of curfew: Article 12 states that children have the right to express an opinion on all matters or procedures that concern them, and that their views should be taken into account; Article 15 states that children should have the right to freedom of association, and to freedom of peaceful assembly.

If implemented, street curfews extend those processes that already exclude young people within society – both in principle, through children’s lack of voice, and in practice, by depriving children of access to their local environments at particular times. Instead of curfews, what we need are strategies of inclusion, which encourage the incorporation of young people into communities; empower their voices in social and environmental decision-making; and challenge the hegemony of adulthood over the landscape.

Conclusion

Recent strategies towards neighbourhood renewal are encouraging a major transfer of power and responsibility down to communities themselves. For example, within the new national framework are plans to place neighbourhoods in the frontline of planning and change. To facilitate this shift, ministers will provide communities with unprecedented levels of information, through a series of “neighbourhood statistics”, which will allow comparisons with similar areas in terms of rates of joblessness, school-stayers, exam results, and crime and anti-social behaviour. The intention is that more statistical information will enable communities to chart their progress, and allow the Government to set specific improvement targets for individual areas, rather than simply measuring them against national averages. Implicit in this new strategy is a belief that communities belong to their residents, and that everyone has a part to play in neighbourhood

regeneration. Young people are central to these plans, and there is a keen sense that much more needs to be done to ensure their close involvement in the way services are designed and delivered, together with the implementation of coherent local youth policies. However, experience to date suggests that adults, communities, local bureaucracies and government departments are not well versed in consulting young people in this way. Where participatory structures have been developed – for example, through youth councils – many mistakes have been made, and there need to be stronger national guidelines to assure a coherence of purpose and an equity of outcome. Also, while youth participation is high on the present Government’s political agenda, there are other forces at play, such as the threat of street curfews, that may dislocate attempts to get young people taking part with conviction in their communities. Clearly, there is still much work to be done in order to ensure that young people get a better deal in their neighbourhoods.

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4 Children and Regeneration

Summary of Chapter 4

- A new social economy is developing, in which non-state actors and communities are increasingly valued as agents in the process of local social change.
- The practice of involving children as agents in regeneration can be a most enriching experience, both for the young participants and for the community in general.
- A new typology of community action is proposed which recognises four ways in which children are being drawn into neighbourhood renewal:
 - i *Dialogue*: whereby children are consulted and listened to
 - ii *Development*: where teams of adults work within their communities for the benefit of children
 - iii *Participation*: where young people work together for the good of other young people
 - iv *Integration*: where young people work alongside adults as equal partners in community programmes.
- Each of these stages is associated with a different set of community benefits. In turn these are communication, reconstruction, rehabilitation and regeneration.
- There are many different ways in which to engage young people. Some of these are: forums, councils and hearings; citizens' juries; youth consultation; media initiatives; community development initiatives; safer neighbourhood schemes; and broad-based community programmes.
- Some lessons learned from these different kinds of community action are:
 - a) Local bureaucracy is often a major barrier to participation
 - b) Adults often find the process of letting go difficult
 - c) Participation by some young people may obscure the voices of others
 - d) The purpose of participation needs to be clear from the outset
 - e) Enabling young people to set their own agenda is an important goal
 - f) Community regeneration takes time
 - g) Uncertainty of funding inhibits progress
 - h) Building trust and confidence with young people is complex, sensitive and time-consuming



- i) Departure of project staff can severely disrupt local group dynamics and impede progress
 - j) Unless sufficient sensitivity is shown, adults may take over projects, to the detriment of young people
 - k) Effective participation depends on good training
 - l) Neither adults nor young people are right all of the time
 - m) Isolated schemes contribute only slowly to children's full participation in society.
- Participation through processes of collective action encourages a sense of ownership and confidence that is likely to endure beyond the scope of the project. When young people become stakeholders in their communities, their lives have more meaning, are more challenging, and are imbued with greater worth.

Introduction

Recent policy initiatives have put participation and community involvement high on the political agenda again. A new social economy is developing, in which non-state actors and communities are increasingly valued as agents in the process of local social change. However, the ways in which social capital is being harnessed to promote the health and wellbeing of communities vary, as do the ways in which power and decision-making are distributed among the participants. From observations in Glasgow on how young people have been incorporated into community regeneration programmes, Fitzpatrick et al. (1998) provide some cautionary notes. They suggest that the practice of taking part is often tokenistic and, as with many other strategies targeted at neighbourhood renewal, is characterised by the need for a “quick fix”. Problems occur mainly because long-term frameworks to include young people, and others, in community decision-making are not clearly established before the regeneration programme starts. Once programmes are up and running, there is immediate pressure to ground the project within the community, which results in weak or temporary participatory structures being imposed. When regeneration monies are used up, the framework to include young people and the community, that may well have been handed on to the local authority, is often dropped due to insufficient resources. Lack of sustainability, together with the short-term need of local officials to tick the correct social measure as part of their performance review, are fundamental weaknesses of many community rehabilitation schemes. This applies especially to the current trend to develop youth forums.

Many SRB programmes are now attempting to involve young people through this means. In Chapter 3 we discussed the potential value of youth councils as ways of encouraging dialogue. Yet, as Fitzpatrick et al. (1998) suggest, these structures fade and fold all too readily once the momentum provided by the funding round has dissipated.

Where renewal strategies emanate from the bottom up – from within communities themselves – there may also be problems relating to sustaining children’s involvement. The Community Development Foundation (Henderson, 1997) draws attention to how the preparation of responsive community bids is often undertaken at such speed that there is little time to carry out full local consultation. It is all too easy to miss out young people at this stage – particularly those who are traditionally hard to reach. Also, the skills required for working with children in relatively open-ended situations are of a high order, and the advice and expertise of professionals such as teachers, youth workers and community development officers are essential. Development work of this kind requires both time and resources, and it is not uncommon for there to be a mismatch between the funding regime and the grassroots action that is needed.

Nevertheless, the practice of involving children in regeneration can be a most enriching experience, for both the young participants and the community in general. This chapter considers the multiplicity of ways in which children have been drawn into neighbourhood regeneration. Discussion will attempt to highlight the unfolding landscapes of voluntarism; where and

in what ways children are particularly active; what motivates local participation, and how this might be reproduced for the empowerment of young people and communities elsewhere. I will attempt to shed light on how these new configurations of local governance – characterised by a developing relationship between actors from the statutory, business and voluntary sectors, and the local community – provide examples of good practice for the betterment of other neighbourhood spaces.

Figure 4.1 proposes a typology of community action that recognises the different ways in which children are drawn into neighbourhood renewal. These four types, although not entirely mutually exclusive, represent a hierarchy of involvement.

Dialogue provides the starting point, whereby children are consulted and listened to. It represents the beginning of a *communication* process that places young people's views on the agenda and, if properly and sensitively executed, ensures that their ideas are taken seriously.

Development is often the next stage. This describes those situations in which teams of adults work within their communities for the benefit of young people. Children generally play little part in these community-building activities, but through the energies and drive of trusted and caring adults the quality of their lives is significantly changed and bettered. Indeed, through these collective actions, whole communities may be *reconstructed*.

Participation refers to young people working together in their communities for the good of

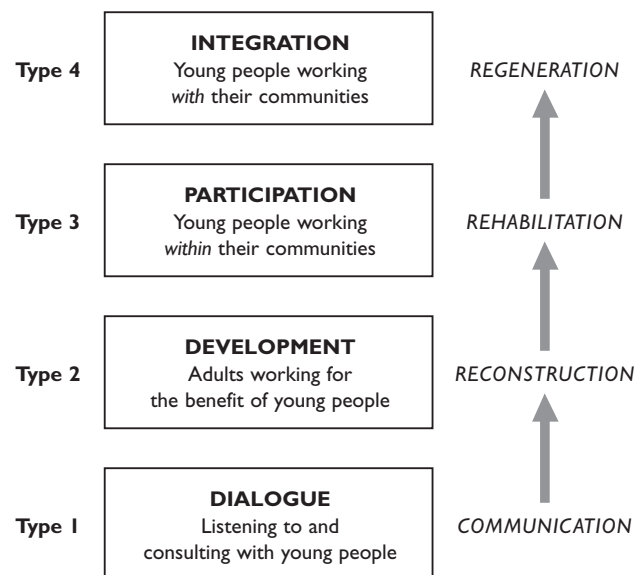


Figure 4.1 A typology of community action

other young people. Activities include peer-advocacy and mentoring programmes, whereby young people engage with their fellows in order to confront such issues as drug misuse, sexual health and bullying. If effectively accomplished, spin-offs may include changes that are not only of value to young people themselves, but also encourage the *rehabilitation* of whole communities.

Integration is a goal that, to date, is rarely achieved. It comes about when young people work alongside adults, as equal partners, in community activities and programmes. Co-operation of this kind promulgates opportunities for the sharing of ideas; better understanding; generation of mutual respect and the enabling of those conditions that promote neighbourhood *regeneration*. The rest of this chapter looks at examples of each of these kinds of activity (Table 4.1).

Table 4.1 Examples of community action

Type	Project
Integration	<i>Community programmes:</i> School Grounds Project, Youth Environment Project, Young Voices, More to Life
Participation	<i>Community programmes:</i> Youth First, We All Live Here, Quest, Youth Works, Site Savers, Young Leaders, M-Power, Intermediate Labour Markets, Children and Neighbourhoods in London, Information and Advice, Saying Power
Development	<i>Community development:</i> Cynon Valley Project <i>Safer neighbourhoods:</i> Child in the Community Programme, SCRAP, Home Zones, Working with Young People on Estates
Dialogue	<i>Youth councils/forums:</i> Having Our Say <i>Citizens' juries:</i> Voice 97, Cambridge CJ <i>Youth consultation:</i> What Do We Think?, If We Don't Play Now When Can We?, Childcare and Regeneration <i>Media projects:</i> Action @, Children's News, Youth Central, Children's Express

Dialogue

There are many ways in which children are being consulted and listened to. These include councils or forums of various kinds; young people's hearings; citizens' juries; neighbourhood or community surveys targeted at young people; and community arts projects that enable the publication of newsletters and pamphlets written by young people themselves. The following case studies are chosen to represent these various approaches, and to draw attention to lessons that will inform future strategy.

Forums, councils and hearings

Manchester Young People's Forum

Youth forums and councils are discussed more fully in Chapters 3 and 5. This section considers some case studies of good practice, and some of

the unintended effects that sometimes occur when adults attempt to let go.

Manchester Young People's Forum (MYPF) was established in the mid-1990s, through a partnership of Save the Children and Manchester Youth Service. Initially targeting young people aged 14–21 years, from youth centres across the city, it was conceived to develop a keener understanding of young people's issues, and to encourage local participation.

In its first three years, a changing group of young people aged under 16 chose, planned, organised and delivered seven large open forums on themes ranging from drugs, racism and health, to Local Agenda 21. They undertook a broad range of environmental activities, encouraged other young people to establish local forums, and published a regular newsletter (Box 4.1). In order that their

Box 4.1: Selected achievements of Manchester Young People's Forum**Forums**

- Environment
- Drugs
- Challenging racism
- Bullying
- Difference
- Health
- Love is...?
- Our Manchester, our future

Developing other young people's participation

- Workshops in Newcastle, Denton, Reddish, Leyland, Canterbury
- Article 12 national event

Children's rights

- Write and perform play for 50th anniversary of the United Nations at Manchester Town Hall
- Workshop "We live in this world too"

Environmental activities

- Workshops on food and empowerment
- Young People's Food Group
- Participation in Local Agenda 21 forum
- Workshop at Manchester Environmental Education Jamboree

Other activities

- Regular newsletter
- Peer Support Group
- Participation in Manchester Young People's Council

Source: *Having our Say* (1997)

views could be appropriately fielded and taken seriously from the outset, the project was overseen initially by a Management Group comprising representatives from the partner organisations. As the project matured and young people's confidences grew, the Management Group developed into the Management Team – a mixed committee of adults and young people, chaired by one of the young representatives. A particular feature, too, was the development of regular "Speak Out" sessions with local decision-makers and councillors. These sessions took different forms – from committee meetings to occasions

where a panel of experts was questioned in an open forum (citizens' jury) – and heightened awareness about young people's aspirations, and their sensibilities to issues and problems confronted as part of their daily round.

Throughout its development, the MYPF has been sufficiently flexible to take on different forms, and to reconfigure its agenda in order to reflect a changing constituency. Conceived as a group that would organise and hold quarterly events or forums – largely under the direction of a young people's planning group, assisted by a

development worker – it has grown to become a more devolved organisation that supports various sub-groups of young people, mostly aged under 16, who meet regularly to discuss and plan a diverse range of events and activities. A high spot was their participation in the Manchester Young People's Council held to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the United Nations at Manchester Town Hall, where their spontaneous oratory, role-play and discussion skills were recognised and highly valued by many observers.

An evaluation of the first three years of the MYPF (*Having Our Say*, Save the Children and Manchester Youth Service, 1997) highlighted a number of issues that will have relevance for future initiatives of this kind. Particular strengths recognised included the project's contribution to the integration of young people within their communities, which encouraged feelings of heightened self-worth and self-esteem, and provided opportunities that connected young people more effectively with their peers and with interested adults. However, the process of dialogue was not always smooth, and there have been tensions and many lessons learned. For example, for some adults the process of letting go was not easy, and on occasions this led to confusion over accountability and ownership. Similarly, young people's participation depends not only on their own actions, but involves adults redefining their

perceptions of the capability of young people, and sometimes standing outside the power relationship that places them in positions of advantage. Also, although the involvement of young people in local democracy is an admirable goal, the bureaucracy of many local authorities and its concomitant committee structure does not encourage participation, and is seen as a major barrier. Young people require structures and methods that are appropriate to them, and are sufficiently responsive to provide a sense of control and ownership. Given that young people are not a homogeneous group, for a forum to be truly inclusive, multifaceted methods and structures will need to be developed. Equally, to become more than just a "user-group", and to encourage the widest constituency, any forum must be located outside existing young people's organisations – such as youth clubs and schools – so that it can draw from several, yet not be based on any. Success, too, poses some problems. There is a danger that agencies seeking the views of young people will turn to a successful forum with the misconception that it represents the views of all young people and, in so doing, further obscure the voices of others, particularly those who are the hardest to reach. Lastly, although a forum may be perceived to be autonomous, self-contained and well organised, the group will continue to need support and cannot be assumed to be self-maintaining (Box 4.2).

Box 4.2: A tale of two councils

Council A has been running for one year. Its 18 representatives, all aged 13–16 years, are elected from secondary schools across a large Midland town. From an adult perspective, the council has been a considerable success. Good practice has been observed at each stage of development, including: providing a residential training weekend for elected representatives prior to their office as councillors; creating a small budget managed by the council to assist its development strategy; and offering administrative support at each meeting. Successful outcomes have been achieved, particularly a policy decision by a local bus company to reduce fares for 14–16-year-olds following actions raised by the council. However, at the end of their term of office, despite considerable achievements, many of the young councillors expressed a strong sense of dissatisfaction. Their disappointment centred on the running of the council meeting, and a lack of a sense of ownership. Although the council had appointed its own chair, and attempted to set its own agenda, the councillors felt manipulated and intimidated by the adults who attended the meetings – particularly one strong personality. Consequently, there were often occasions when councillors were reluctant to speak, with the ensuing hiatus routinely closed by adult intervention. Despite their good intentions, with time the balance of the meetings shifted away from matters raised by young people to issues thought to be meaningful by the attending adults. When interviewed about their perceptions of the process, and why they felt their attendance was important, some of the adults claimed that their presence ensured that the young people's

forum was not treated differently from other forums within the town. These concerns have now been recognised and addressed; a part-time youth worker has been appointed to assist the young people, and future meetings will include only invited adults.

Leicester Youth Council has been operating for five years. Its recruitment mirrors that of Council A, although membership is larger – 56 in total – and extends from 13 to 17-year-olds. Among these councillors, however, there is a pervading sense of empowerment. Unlike Council A, only one adult – a youth development worker – attends the meeting by right. All other visitors – and no more than three are allowed – attend through invitation only. The larger size of the council enables active sub-groups to work outside the meeting, and to report back on their activities. Each councillor, too, reports back to their school council, and uses this process to field new ideas. Achievements have included the development of school-based, peer-led anti-racism strategies, and a range of environmental activities, including preparing a site for a football pitch and building BMX ramps on wasteland. Unlike Council A, the meetings run as almost autonomous events, but there is appropriate adult support beyond the forum. For example, the council is supported by an advisory group made up of: two city councillors; two school governors; two representatives from a teachers' co-ordinating group; the chair and vice-chair of the youth council; a clerk/legal adviser; a financial adviser; representatives from the youth council's sponsors; and up to two observer members from the council.

Citizens' juries

Voice 97

Citizens' juries provide an alternative way of involving communities in decision-making. A jury represents a group of lay people drawn from a community, who are empowered to interview and cross-examine experts and representatives from participating agencies about an issue of local concern. Following consultation the jury will feed back to the community and feed on suggestions for change to professional decision-making groups.

The project Voice 97 established one of the first citizens' juries for young people. Established in the Grimethorpe district of South Yorkshire, to inform the Grimethorpe Partnership about local needs and concerns, the project developed through a number of stages. The first two stages involved a group of young people identifying issues, and designing a questionnaire that sought the views of over 850 local 10–16-year-olds. The results showed a consensus that crime and drug misuse were significant problems in the area. The jury's remit, therefore, was to consider ways in which these problems could be mitigated. Out of a pool of 450 volunteers, 12 young people aged 11–16 years were selected to become jurors. This group received training in the jury process, and in strategies to tackle crime and drugs.

Over the next two-and-a-half days, the jury cross-examined 16 expert witnesses. They included representatives from organisations such as Lifeline, the Home Office Drugs Prevention Team, police, local MPs, ex-drug users and members of the local community. The jury also interviewed financial

experts, in order to gain a better grasp of funding issues. To ensure that the jury process was open to scrutiny, all information was transmitted over the Internet, via the Grimethorpe Electronic Village Hall. Extensive media coverage led to over 250,000 "hits", within hours of the site opening.

After hearing from all witnesses, the jury deliberated for a further two days, during which time they prepared a local plan. Their proposed strategy was both sophisticated and far-reaching. It recognised that crime and drugs cannot be isolated from wider societal issues of unemployment, poverty, and community decay. They took a long-term view, and among their suggestions was the creation a local action team comprising both adults and young people, to enable an integrated programme of regeneration. The plan was presented to the Grimethorpe Partnership in the early part of 1998.

Disappointingly, however, the intended outcomes did not materialise, for despite initial assurances, there was ultimate reluctance by local policy-makers to take the proposals seriously, and the plans were not implemented. Nevertheless, the project's model methodology offers an excellent pointer for future work, and the sensitive and insightful ideas of the young jurors are a convincing testament to the value and potential of dialogue of this kind. Since Voice 97, a number of junior citizens' juries are now in place. One example is a jury in Cambridge, involving 15 11–17-year-olds, whose focus extends across a host of issues designed to improve local quality of life, and whose views are making a difference.

Youth consultation

Youth consultation can take many forms, depending on its purpose, and can represent various arrangements of community involvement. A range of examples are examined, each exemplifying contrasting practice and methodology, but all sparking communication and kick-starting processes of community regeneration (Box 4.3, Figure 4.2).

What Do We Think?

Undertaken in three socially and economically disadvantaged neighbourhoods of Sunderland, *What Do We Think?* represents a successful, medium-scale youth consultation project with 5–18-year-olds. Initiated by members of the Pennywell Neighbourhood Centre and Pennywell Youth Project, its aim was to open up dialogue with young people, in order to find out about what they think of the areas in which they are growing up; the extent to which local amenities match their aspirations; and what facilities they consider should be based locally for their use in the future.

Information was collected through questionnaire surveys aimed at three age groups: 5–7 years (infant school); 8–11 years (junior school); and 12–18 years (secondary school). For the two youngest groups, all questionnaires were completed within local schools, with the co-operation of classroom teachers. For the oldest group, however, good practice involved detached youth workers carrying out additional interviews on the street and within community settings, to supplement those questionnaires completed within a local comprehensive school, and in order to reach out to those groups whose views would otherwise have been

missed. In total, nearly 750 usable returns were received.

The results of the survey highlighted young people's keen sense of local issues, and realism about local planning. For example, children in all three age groups suggested a strong link between a lack of youth provision; more young people on the streets; and boredom, crime and vandalism. When asked what they would design as something new for local young people, one of the most popular choices was a park or playground with appropriate facilities – especially those that enabled them to meet and socialise without fear of being chased away. With age, there was a growing sense of dissatisfaction, such that more than three-quarters anticipated moving away from the area, once old enough. Yet, a majority of young people, especially within the older group, welcomed the suggestion that a youth action team should be formed, particularly if it enabled young people to take part in local decision-making.

The final report draws attention to important issues for others undertaking similar work. A salutary observation relates to how projects of this kind are to be used, if at all. Given that consultative exercises inevitably raise young people's expectations, all partner organisations should make transparent from the outset how and in what way the results will inform future policy-making. Otherwise, there is a danger that young people will feel even more disempowered as the project winds down. However, the results of the *What Do We Think?* project have considerably enhanced the ways in which local youth workers are able to reach out, listen to and meet the needs of young people in their community, and have provided the catalyst for community change.

Box 4.3: Children's and young people's participation rights in the North-East

During the mid-1990s, Save the Children ran a series of workshops with young people from schools and youth groups in the North-East, in order to develop information that could help set the agenda for a forthcoming conference on children's participation. At these workshops, many young people expressed an interest in finding out whether or not the "people with power" listened to young people's views when making policies and decisions that affect their lives and, if not, why not. They wanted a chance to put the "people with power" in the hot seat.

Fifteen young people – all from St Thomas More School, Blaydon – who had participated in the initial workshops volunteered to work with a research officer from Save the Children in order to carry out a questionnaire survey of local policy-makers. Following training, the young people designed and executed the interviews themselves. The questionnaire targeted three issues: knowledge and awareness of the UNCRC; whether they consulted with young people when developing service delivery plans; and their attitudes to involving young people as consultants.

Twenty-eight policy-makers from six local authorities (Durham, Gateshead, Newcastle, North Tyneside, South Tyneside, Sunderland) agreed to take part. These included senior representatives from Social Services, Leisure Services, Education, and the police, as well as the Leader of the Council from each area. The survey showed that:

- 82 per cent had heard of the UNCRC.
- No consistent practice or clarity was evident in how local authorities and police authorities were taking the Convention into account when planning their work.

- Only two policy-makers knew about the content of Article 12 of the Convention.
- All respondents agreed that young people were capable of making informed decisions, according to their level of maturity, and that they should be consulted as a matter of right when decisions were being made.
- In relation to practice, 48 per cent of policy-makers confirmed that they always consulted children; 11 per cent replied that they never did.
- When setting up a new service, or changing an existing one, only 27 per cent confirmed that they always consulted young people.
- The process of consultation varied, from methods such as meetings and forums, to talking and comment slips.
- 44 per cent employed a nominated person to consult with young people.
- Consultation was perceived as a "good thing", particularly if young people are contacted face-to-face in their own environments.
- When consulting, care must be taken not to raise expectations that cannot be met.

The results suggest that while policy-makers set about delivering their services with the intention of improving the quality of life for all, there is often a gulf between their intentions to be truly responsive, and the ways in which they link up with user groups – particularly young people. Also, the rhetoric of participation is not matched by common practice, such that many groups of young people are unlikely to be well served, or routinely consulted.

Source: Nevison (1997).

If We Don't Play Now, When Can We?

In recognition of the fact that different groups of children have different community needs, Camden Joint Consultative Committee provided funding that enabled the Hopscotch Asian Women's Centre to undertake a research and development project to look at the needs of Bangladeshi children, young people and families in Camden (Howarth, 1999). Additionally, the project sought to look at effective mechanisms to promote ongoing dialogue between the statutory sector and each of these groups. Initial meetings were held with voluntary organisations and community groups, to identify issues and concerns. As a result of these meetings, the project was planned in three phases. The discussion that follows focuses on the first phase only, that considered the play and leisure needs of young people aged 8–12 years living in King's Cross, Regent's Park and Somers Town, as well as the barriers that prevented these children from accessing local authority services.

An important aspect of the project was the involvement of children in all of its stages. This ensured that the research was grounded in the lifeworlds of the participants, and considered the issues from their perspectives. Young people aged between 11 and 18 years were recruited to a "research group", and received training to enable them to carry out the work. The group was involved in designing the questionnaire; interviewing the children; and presenting the findings.

Recruiting the research group involved a range of strategies. Young people were contacted through local networks; their families; local schools;

community and youth organisations; and the users of the Hopscotch Centre. Although there was some initial apprehension – particularly as many noted that surveys and assessments carried out in the past had not resulted in much change – when the assurances of local agencies and the council to the project were explained, young people became convinced about the value of their active involvement. Thus, from the outset, there was a strong sense of ownership and a commitment to common goals and objectives.

When designing the survey, the research group involved children aged between 8 and 10 years in their discussions, and this helped in framing questions at a level suitable for the target audience. The research was undertaken using a variety of methods, including face-to-face interviews and focus groups with children and focus groups with parents, in order to explore attitudes to their children's play. An audit of playcentres and after-school clubs was also carried out.

The results (Figure 4.2) – written up in the report *If We Don't Play Now, When Can We?* – not only provided a keen and often poignant insight into the particular perceptions and sensibilities of this group of children, that may have been missed through other surveys, but also enabled a set of priority actions to be identified and worked upon. Of special significance is that, although the research focused on play and leisure, a number of issues raised by the children highlighted their concerns over community safety and racism, and their lack of confidence in the police. The research also showed that these Bangladeshi children – although all aged 12 and under –

understood the significance of consultation and its value for users. There was readiness, too, to maintain dialogue, and to get involved in future decision-making and community action.

Safety

- Make it safer to play outside
- Put police on the streets in the evenings
- Put big iron gates around our estates, so that we can play outside and don't get attacked
- Put security guards near our homes
- There should be guards at the play centres to stop fighting and bullying
- The police should listen to children
- Check the traffic: too many cars makes it difficult to cross; some don't even stop if the lights are red
- Children attending play centres should have ID cards or security cards, so that not just anybody can come in
- Cameras at the centre

Open spaces

- We want more places to play, like parks
- We want more clean and proper swings and things to play in the parks
- We want clean benches and more benches to sit on
- Please clean the parks, this is the only place for us to play outside
- Places where girls can go out to play
- More open spaces near our homes to play

Consultation

- We should have the right to say something that would make our community better
- Children should be involved; they must ask us what we want, otherwise activities will be boring
- We want to plan what we do so that we can enjoy it

Play activities

- We want centres with large pool tables, table tennis, badminton and cricket, but ONLY for children – if older boys come in we don't get a chance
- We want new things. More things, and a big open play area
- More football areas for us children to play
- We want expensive things in our centre, like a good hi-fi music system
- We want activities for girls like sewing, knitting, handicrafts and reading
- We want our own play centre with a big snooker table
- More football pitches
- Separate play areas for girls and boys
- There should be a Bengali person at the Centre, because there are some children who come from Bangladesh and don't understand English
- It would be a good idea to have Arabic ... and Bengali together
- We want centres to open at weekends
- I want a centre near my house
- Give our parents information in both Bengali and English
- A Bengali lady should come home and explain things to our parents
- Someone should explain about the centres to our parents, and describe the activities and tell them how good it is

Getting information

- Inform us about play activities and holiday play schemes through our teachers
- Tell us in our Bengali classes
- Gives us leaflets in our school
- You can even contact us by telephone
- Put posters everywhere

Charges

- We don't want to pay for play
- Play should be free for children, we don't earn money

Figure 4.2 The recommendations of Bangladeshi children in Camden (in their own words)

Source: Howarth (1999).

Childcare and Regeneration

The project *Childcare and Regeneration* (Save the Children, 1997), carried out in the Dingle district of Liverpool, illustrates the worth of using members of the local community as research consultants. The aim of the study was to consider whether existing childcare services in a community facing multiple social deprivation matched the needs of children, local parents and employers. Prior to the survey, six local residents attended a three-week training course on research methods, and worked closely with a support group provided by members of Save the Children, The Children's Society, Kids' Club Network and Dingle SRB. More than 240 children were interviewed, as well as over 130 parents. On the whole, these children's needs were relatively straightforward: they wanted to be "involved in organised, interesting activities and have fun in a safe environment". The parents, however, drew attention to the importance of providing affordable, flexible and more diverse childcare services; while the reluctance of employers to take part confirmed a mismatch between their expectations and community needs. However, the worth of the project went beyond these results, which, nevertheless, became the basis of a new service delivery plan. In value-added terms, the process of consultation – particularly the inclusion of residents as part of the research team – raised community confidence; demonstrated to local people – especially children – that their views count; and showed that local participation can facilitate and lubricate social change.

Groundwork

If environments are to reflect their needs and aspirations, young people must gain a strong voice, and Groundwork is helping them to be heard through a variety of schemes. For example, 50 children from two schools in Hackney took part in a public consultation event that considered the area's "Park Development Plan". As part of a wider, six-month programme involving four schools, Groundwork Hackney assisted council officials to incorporate children's ideas into their actions. Seven hundred young people from four schools in the Kirkholt Estate, Rochdale worked with Groundwork Rochdale, Oldham and Tameside, in partnership with the Children's Society, to build a large-scale model of their neighbourhood, and used it to pinpoint their safety concerns. Subsequently, these ideas were acted upon. Members of Groundwork Birmingham's Youth Board have not just been involved in environmental project work: through follow-on exercises they were encouraged to have a say in which projects should be undertaken within their communities. Through enterprise of this kind, not only do young people begin to recognise their worth as citizens and stakeholders, but also adult decision-makers are able to tap into young people's creative and expressive abilities.

However, if the process of consultation is to be effective, it is important that young people should be able to set their own agenda, and not be too constrained by the conditions imposed by those seeking information. Wellard (1997, p. 20) points out that "at present children's views are more likely to be sought on issues for which there is already an acknowledged need, which means that unrecognised needs may well continue to



Figure 4.3 Examples of media initiatives

go unmet. It also important that the wider community of children and young people are involved – not simply the users of existing services.”

Media initiatives

Young people’s involvement in local affairs is often deemed to be newsworthy, but often the presentational mode is one of patronising superficiality. For example, children’s work may be applauded, but without specifying why it is important, or what influence it may have. This section provides examples of where young people have taken a lead, enabling their views to become both more widely heard and regarded as valid.

Action @

The publication of newsletters and local papers by young people, for young people, often provides stimulating and appealing media for the expression of views and ideas. *Action @* is

produced by a consortia of Black Country youth councils, funded through SRB-2, and co-ordinated by a working partnership of the Walsall Community Arts Team and the National Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders (NACRO). It reports on the activities and issues raised by young people in Brownhills, Goscote, Harden, Moxley, North Walsall, Ryercroft and Coalpool and South Willenhall, many of which form part of a series of projects called “Hands On”. The purpose of this scheme is to develop creative activities, and to provide opportunities for young people to gain qualifications at the same time. Each project is planned through consultation between a development worker and a planning group. By participating in all aspects of their project, the young people in the group achieve qualifications recognised by the Open College Network, as well as taking part in activities of benefit to their communities. *Action @* provides

an important link in this relationship, raising awareness of young people's achievements in their communities and opening doors for future action (Figure 4.3).

Children's News

Children's News (Figure 4.3) is a paper written by children of five junior schools in the Liverpool 8 area. It is produced with support from Healthy Cities 2000, the Granby/Toxteth Partnership

and Liverpool City Council. The children's group was formed to carry out work that would enable them to have their views listened to by adults. In a special edition of the paper – published after a successful conference that brought together organisations and individuals identified by the children as being able to help make things better – a series of local issues and concerns are exposed. Some of those observations are shown in Figure 4.4.

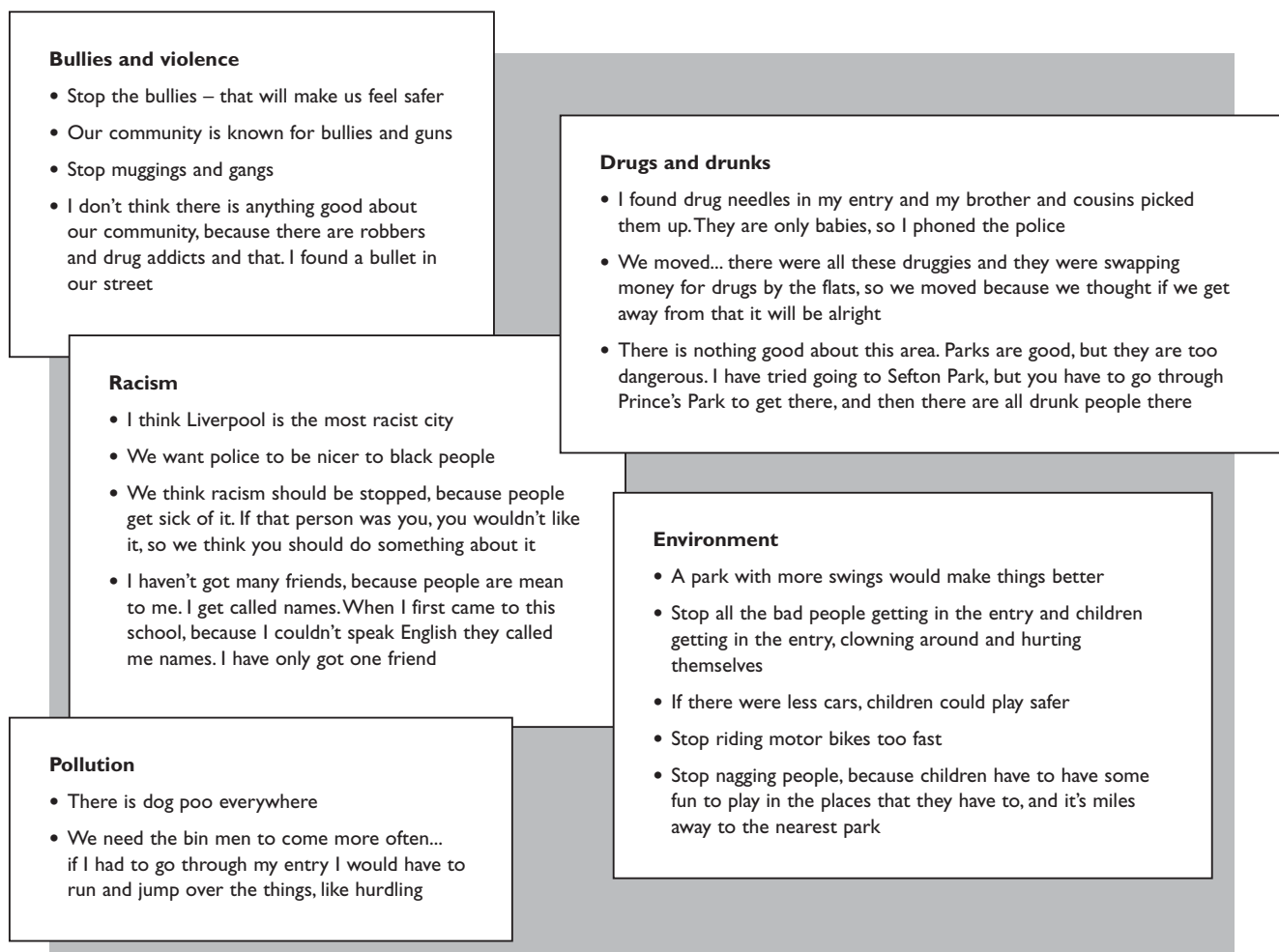


Figure 4.4 Children's News: views and concerns about growing up in Liverpool 8

Source: *Children's News* (1997).

Youth Central

The production of *Youth Central* marked the official launch of the Cardiff Youth Network *Right On*, in 1997. Linking groups and individuals from across the city, the network is involved in a broad array of community projects. *Youth Central* was sent to all local schools and play centres, and dealt with a wide range of issues of concern to young people, including health, crime, sports and leisure, education, and the Internet. The paper took a stand on Article 12, and campaigned for the right of young people to be involved in community decision-making.

Children's Express

Children's Express operates on a different scale. It is a news agency that provides a programme of learning through journalism for young people aged between 8 and 18. Among its aims are "to give young people the power and the means to express themselves publicly on vital issues that affect them, and in the process to raise their self-esteem and develop their potential". Based on an idea from the USA, *Children's Express* is now expanding in the UK. The London office, which opened in 1995, has been joined by another in Newcastle. Gerry Hunwick (1997), of Save the Children, is in no doubt about its benefits and value: "[T]hrough *Children's Express* we are giving children the means, required under the UNCRC, to express their views freely, in the mainstream media. These opinions are important not only to them but are relevant to society as a whole. In the process it empowers children by developing communication skills and a sense of participation in the world around them." These sentiments hold not just for this project, but for other attempts, too, that enable children to have a say.

Development

Community reconstruction depends on actions that go beyond consultation. On occasions, adults may carry out interventions of this kind with the best interests of children in mind. These strategies are entirely appropriate when the children involved are very young, particularly vulnerable, or simply unable to bring about change. Examples of projects defined by each of these conditions are discussed under two headings: community development and safer neighbourhoods.

Community development

The *Cynon Valley Project* (Thomas, 1999), set amid two of the poorest communities in Wales, is a powerful testimony to the role of community development and the capacity of local people to develop and sustain their own responses to their community's needs. From its initial aim of putting into place strategies to improve the quality of life and range of opportunities for pre-school children, the project spawned a community programme that enabled local people to exercise greater control of many aspects their lives.

The project's initial vision is set out in the central column of Figure 4.5. At the heart of the programme are the community's children. The issue of their wellbeing was used to spark a range of activities that would increasingly draw parents, and then other interested adults, into a process of community reconstruction. In reality, what happened was that, after a time, the experiences of the two communities split to follow different paths, before coming together to achieve their

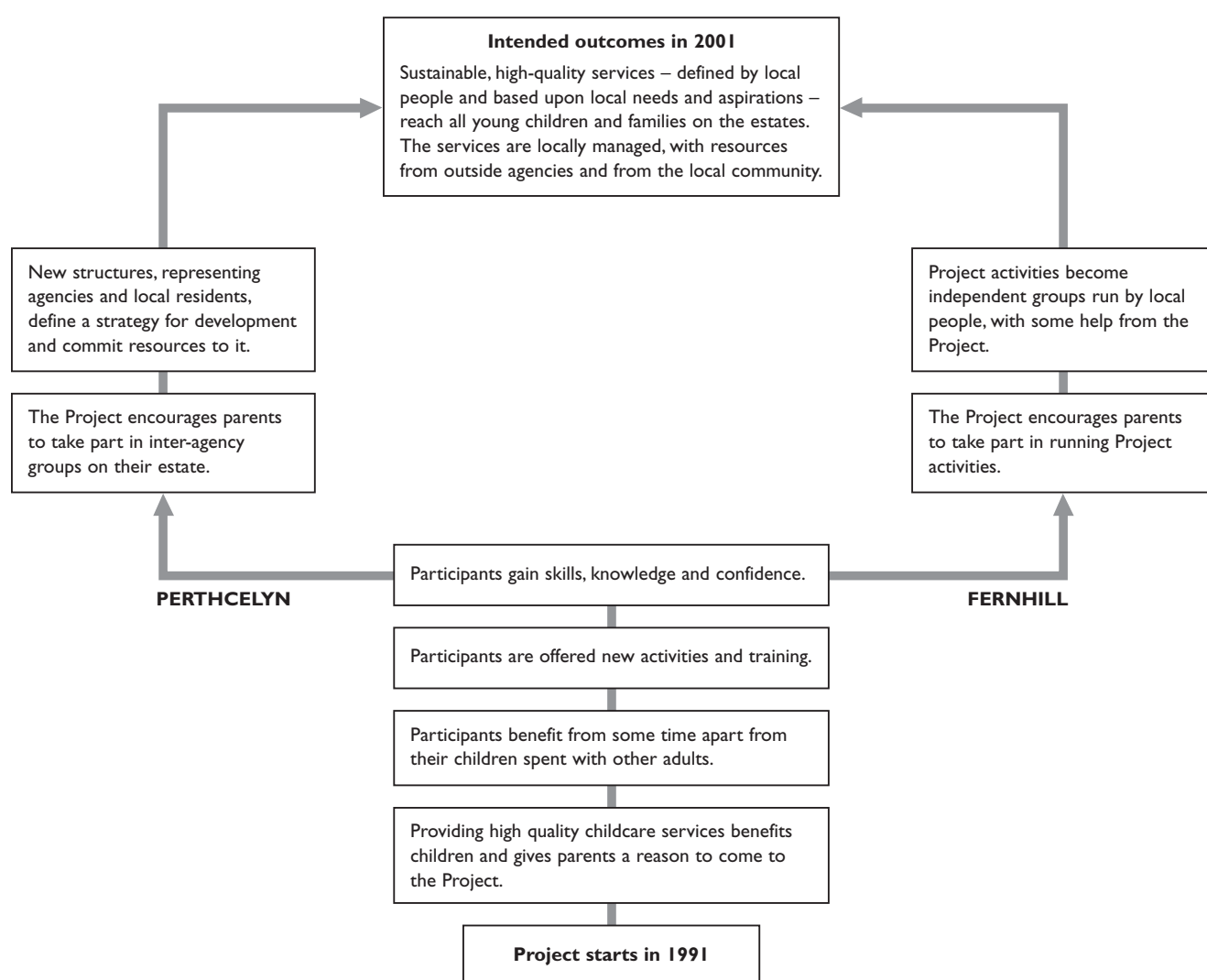


Figure 4.5 The community development approach to the Cynon Valley Project
Source: Based on Thomas (1999).

common sustainable goal. In essence, the project had four stages, as shown in Box 4.4.

In a sensitive and detailed review of the entire project, Thomas (1999) speculates what will be left in 2001. He identifies four commendable achievements: promoting child development

through high-quality pre-school provision; empowering adults through personal development; enabling new activities through voluntary action; and promoting regeneration through the mobilisation of community leaders. Taken together, the legacy is lasting community reconstruction.

Box 4.4: Stages in the Cynon Valley Community Development Project

- **Stage 1: Planning and preparation, 1989–91.**

During the late 1980s, a planning group was established for the Cynon Valley Project, comprising representatives from key agencies working with children in the valley, including Save the Children. This group established the project's aims; set out its core values; and, after close consultation with a wide range of residents and agencies, tested and refined these. Development and administrative staff appointed.

- **Stage 2: Opening doors, 1991–92.** Childcare services were provided in both communities. Parents attended, as they wanted their children to benefit from the high-quality provision of pram clubs, drop-in centres, and playgroups. Parents were required to stay in the building while their children played, and new relationships developed.

- **Stage 3: Empowering parents, 1992–96.**

Parents became involved in more formal activities. Under the lead of project staff, groups were set up; new initiatives and activities were started; and training was provided. The course of the project took a different direction in each community. In Fernhill, the parents became closely involved in running their own childcare services; in Perthcelyn, parents were more interested in taking protest action, which eventually led to a sustained campaign for change.

- **Stage 4: Handing over and moving on, 1993–98.** Overlapping with the previous stage, the project team progressively handed over roles, responsibilities and the management of activities to residents. Residents not only ran their own groups, but began to take a lead in initiating new actions. In Fernhill, childcare groups were managed by residents; in Perthcelyn, residents worked closely with the local authority towards the broader regeneration of the estate.

There are lessons to be learned from the success of this project. At the outset, the programme was strongly grounded within the community, through a long lead-in time, and a process of consultation involving a broad group of participating agencies. External funding – guaranteed for a ten-year period by a Dutch charitable trust – ensured that the project was not dependent on additional monies as it developed, and had a realistic chance of lasting long enough to achieve its goals. The vision of

providing high-quality childcare services not only gave the project credibility with local agencies and the communities, but also – through its operation – allowed local people to become intrinsically engaged with both provision and planning. As Thomas (1999, p. 84) concludes, “as well as the tangible outcomes, the work of the Cynon Valley project also means that, for the residents of two local authority housing estates in Wales, poverty has now a lot more to do with hope than it did a few years ago.”

Safer neighbourhoods

As part of its nationwide campaign to prevent cruelty to children, and to ensure that children grow up in safe, supportive and secure neighbourhoods, the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) launched its *Full Stop* programme in 1999. Built around five strands – children’s well-being in general; within the family; at school; in the community; and in society – the programme is designed to engage with social work, healthcare and legal professions; local authorities; and organisations and groups that do not have a direct child protection role, such as employers’ organisations and locally-based community organisations. Among these strands, *The Child in the Community Programme* (CCP) echoes the notions of development and reconstruction set out in Figure 4.1 (page 119). Its specific aims are to stimulate the development of communities that are inclusive and child-friendly, through co-operative strategies, and to ensure that the whole community pays attention to the needs of children.

Underpinning the CCP is a conviction that by strengthening communities so that they can better support children – especially the most vulnerable – other benefits will accrue, such as improved public health, a reduction in crime, and economic regeneration. As part of this strategy, 16 Child Friendly Action Zones, each with a five-year life-span, are being established. The first ones are in Teesside, Hull, Southampton, Oldham and South Manchester. An Action Zone brings together local schools, businesses, recreation services, statutory agencies and others to ensure that the whole community pays attention to the needs of

children. As they develop, within each Action Zone neighbourhood, guardians or “block parents” will be recruited. This idea is new to the UK, and is based on a Canadian scheme that has been running successfully for some 20 years. The aim is to give children a source of immediate assistance, and to keep everyone in the community aware of child safety. Each pilot will have up to 40 volunteers of this kind – ideally, two per street. In addition, measures that encourage social education, child-friendly employment policies and practices, and training targeted at better parenting and crime reduction, will be implemented to boost community regeneration.

In a similar vein, the SCRAP (Support Community Re-education about Protection) project encourages parents to work with others to develop constructive approaches that protect children from a wide range of crimes and dangers, with the hope of bringing about stronger communities. SCRAP was set up in Belfast in 1998 by a group of parents who were concerned about their children’s safety. These parents had received a letter from their local primary school, informing them that a known sex offender had been housed close to the school. The parents’ initial reaction was to campaign against this decision and force the offender to move. However, they also negotiated four weeks of intensive training in child protection issues from their local social services department. This helped them to understand the best ways to help protect their children, and made them aware of the dangers of forcing sex offenders “underground”. The parents wanted to pass on their newly gained knowledge to as many other parents as possible,

and with the support of the NSPCC, Social Services and the Probation Board, the project is being extended to neighbourhoods throughout Belfast.

In another attempt to reclaim residential streets as safe havens within neighbourhoods, and to make local places safer for children of all ages, the Government has launched the *Home Zone* programme (Box 4.5). Projected as a scheme

Box 4.5: Key features of Home Zones

- **Changes in priority.** Drivers must give way to pedestrians and cyclists, and are responsible for any injuries caused.
- **Very low speed limits.** Top speeds of 20mph are imposed (supported by new legislation, introduced in June 1999, which gives local councils greater freedom to control road speeds), although a 10mph limit is preferred.
- **Recognition of change in status.** The change in the status of an area is clearly indicated through signing, traffic calming measures, and landscaping features such as seating, other street furniture and plants. In some streets, parking is rearranged to make better use of space.
- **Residents' support.** For a Home Zone to be successful, a majority of residents must be in favour of the scheme, and share a willingness to support it.

that “returns streets to residents” (Lord Whitty, Transport Minister, August 1999), Home Zones are pedestrian-friendly areas designed to improve local quality of life. Within these zones, motorists are not squeezed off local streets, but road space is shared between motor vehicles and other road users, with the needs of children, pedestrians and cyclists coming first. By making the urban residential environment a more pleasant and safer setting for children and other residents to socialise, instead of routes for traffic, Home Zones are seen as means of strengthening communities, and preventing the dispersal of people away from public spaces in neighbourhoods. It is also hoped that they will promote healthier lifestyles, through an increase in walking and cycling, and by reducing car dependency.

When the scheme was announced, 48 local authorities submitted applications. Following consideration by a panel comprising the Children's Play Council, Transport 2000, and the DETR (Department of Environment, Transport and the Regions), 9 Home Zones were approved for piloting in England and Wales (Table 4.2). Since then the Scottish Parliament has given the go ahead for 4 pilots in Scotland (Aberdeen, Dundee, Edinburgh and Thurso) and an additional scheme has been set up in Northern Ireland (Belfast). Although the Government is sponsoring these schemes by funding the monitoring activities, the respective local councils fund each Home Zone. There is nothing to prevent other pilots being established in the UK, although these will not be Government-sponsored.

Table 4.2 Home Zones

<p>London: West Ealing, Five Roads The Home Zone covers five residential roads. The area is typical of many parts of London, with houses without garages; on-street parking; straight residential roads that encourage speeding; “rat-running”; HGV traffic, and poor accessibility for emergency vehicles.</p> <p>London: Lambeth, Holmewood This is a small conservation area of residential through-roads bounded on two sides by “A” roads – one of them a Red Route. Resident concerns focus on high speeds and poor pedestrian conditions.</p> <p>Leeds: Chapel Allerton, The Methleys This is a large neighbourhood scheme, based on a cluster of Edwardian terraced streets. Central to the area is a primary school, located between two busy routes into the city centre. Residents are particularly keen to make the area safer for children, and to provide social spaces where people can get to know each other.</p> <p>Manchester: Northmoor, Longsight This forms part of a larger urban regeneration project. The area comprises a number of main roads; much on-street parking; and few recreational facilities for children.</p> <p>Monmouthshire: Magor Village Centre The only zone in Wales. It is set in a rural area around a traditional village core. Problems identified include conflict between traffic and children walking to school; inadequate pavements; and blind bends.</p>	<p>Nottingham: Clifton, Nobel Road Estate This is a large neighbourhood scheme in one of Nottingham’s outer public-sector housing estates. The area comprises a series of cul-de-sacs off a curved spine road. Vandalism and car crime are prevalent.</p> <p>Peterborough: New England An area of Victorian terraced housing bounded by main roads. There is limited on-street parking for residents. Speeding traffic using through-routes that cross the area is a problem.</p> <p>Plymouth: Morice Town Adjacent to the naval base, with a mix of private, council and social housing, this is a severely run-down and socially deprived area. There is no bus service, and fast traffic is a problem. The Home Zone is part of a wider regeneration initiative.</p> <p>Swale (Kent): Cavel Way This is a single, 380m long cul-de-sac with some off-street parking. The area is socially deprived, and residents are concerned about joy-riding and the speed of local traffic. Some road humps are already in place.</p>
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Source: Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1999)

Home Zones are not an entirely new concept. Currently, there is no formal legislation in place in the UK to support them, but this is not the case in many European countries. Pioneered in the Netherlands, where they are called *woonerven*, Home Zones have also proved popular and effective in Austria, Denmark and Germany. In Germany the term *verkehrsberuhigung* means literally “traffic calming”. In most of these continental schemes, a much greater emphasis is given to slowing traffic, and limits of 10mph are commonly in place.

There is evidence to suggest that Home Zones have a considerable community benefit. In Germany, for example, children appear to have much greater freedom in their neighbourhoods. One-third of schoolchildren in England are taken to and collected from school by car – almost four times as many as in Germany. German parents are far less fearful of allowing their children to play outdoors and, unlike the UK, where the home range of girls is particularly restricted, in Germany there is no difference in street use by boys and girls.

Box 4.6: Working with young people on estates

Among the aims of the Social Exclusion Unit is to develop and sustain approaches that tackle the acute social problems evident within the worst housing estates. *Working with Young People on Estates: The role of housing professionals in multi-agency work* (Chartered Institute of Housing, 1999) draws attention to a range of approaches being trialled in work with disaffected young people on ten estates across England. Such work includes diversionary activity; developmental work; centre-based practices; and detached youth work. Evaluation suggests that “knee-jerk” responses that close off spaces like stairwells and alleyways are singularly unsuccessful in combating nuisance and vandalism. Actions of this sort amount to little more than “social fencing” – at best simply displacing the problem, by encouraging groups of young people to gather elsewhere.

A recent guide produced for local authorities – *Thursday's Children* (Wadham, 1999) – provides an overview of what can, or ought to be done to meet the needs of young people on estates. It takes as its starting point the notion that young people have the

right to be listened to, and that treating “youth as a problem” merely exacerbates their lack of voice, and sense of social isolation in these bleak environments.

An exemplar of an innovative and successful development strategy led by a housing organisation is that currently under way in Thamesmead Town. Experience showed that local youth forums did not work – young people found them boring and bureaucratic. Instead, it was decided to provide a range of youth diversionary activities, such as a DJ masterclass, which is offered as a pre-vocational training course; a drug- and alcohol-free disco, which is regularly attended by over 180 young people; and an Action Card that gives discounts in shops, reduced entry fees to events, and a members' magazine. The Thamesmead Town approach also recognised that housing managers should not expect to find a “cure” to young people hanging around, as this was part of growing-up; rather, they should consider finding suitable spaces for them to meet on the estate (Wagstaff, 1999).

Participation

When young people become involved in community action through informed consent, genuine participation of a highly positive kind can be said to be taking place. Yet participation may serve many different functions, and be recognised in varying ways. De Winter (1997) identifies three positive benefits that reflect the different

forms and purposes of participation, and each of these, when successfully developed, enables and contributes to the growth of communities. A simple form involves young people taking part in limited and selective activities, through which a sense of *fitting-in* and *belonging* is encouraged. More extensive interventions often induce stronger feelings of *empowerment* and *social worth*. When participation gives young people a chance

to develop into competent, independent and responsible fellow citizens, then consciousness of *democratic citizenship* may be achieved. This section focuses on examples of those activities carried out by young people in order to enlarge their influence on their own living situations, and their own environments. Given that such commitment can develop only when young people have an expectation of active support from the community in which they grow up, enterprise of this sort is an important building block in the rehabilitation of places. The positive spin-offs from these activities may induce any of the benefits noted above. For clarity, because of the diversity and scope of these projects, each one is discussed under its own heading.

Youth First

Youth First – launched in 1999 as a three-year programme, with the support of Marks & Spencer and Groundwork – has led to projects in Leeds, North Nottinghamshire, South Wales and Northern Ireland. Targeted at areas of acute social disadvantage and minimal youth provision, the programme employs outreach youth work to encourage 14–17-year-olds “to do things for themselves” within their communities, as well as gain accredited skills training.

Youth First in Allerton Bywater, Leeds

Since the closure of the local colliery, the Lower Aire Valley and Allerton Bywater have encountered multiple social and economic problems. Young people have been among the hardest hit, particularly as they are least able to travel beyond the local area. Through the efforts of Groundwork Leeds, considerable changes are now taking place. The intent has been to involve

not only those who are keen and motivated, but also to reach out to those who would not normally take part in community projects. This has been achieved through an extensive programme of outreach and detached youth work, linked to activities with an instant appeal. As relationships develop, so these young people have been drawn into broader networks and a wider range of local projects. Particular achievements include the development of a Youth Environment Forum, where young people can discuss environmental and regeneration issues and feed ideas, in a structured way, into the new local Millennium Village initiative that redefines Allerton Bywater. Practical activities include a tidy-up campaign; local cycleway development; BMX track design; woodland management and environmental conservation schemes; and lifeskills projects.

Youth First in Nottinghamshire

The Coxmoor Estate, Kirkby in Ashfield, is a large, run-down council housing area where, for most children and teenagers, there is little to do. A community audit carried out by young people highlighted four main areas of concern: litter, environment, vandalism and crime. *Youth First* aims to establish projects that enable young people to tackle each of these. Currently, work is under way to undertake litter picks; reduce vandalism through “youth policing”; and improve the local environment. In nearby Newark, a Young Resident Group (BYRG) has been established on the sprawling Balderton Estate, with the purpose of carrying out schemes that enable environmental, social and physical change. Members of the BYRG are now acting as mentors to young people on the adjacent

Box 4.7: We All Live Here

The rationale behind this project is that housing associations, when they exist as community-based organisations, are ideally placed to act as catalyst and broker for a wide range of activities designed to reinvigorate neighbourhoods. In West Everton and Windermere Green – two of the most socially and economically disadvantaged parts of Liverpool – a programme is under way that aims to ensure that young people are consulted; their views taken into account; and their energies put to good use during the planning and management of their local estates, and in other initiatives that affect their physical environment. Project activities have included:

- bringing young people together to play, discuss and engage in small-scale environmental projects, such as building gardens;
- exploring children's views, and needs for the future, through photography, video, drama workshops, publishing newsletters, neighbourhood walks, three-dimensional planning exercises, and environmental project work;
- development of a "good practice" guide for housing associations, so that lessons learned from these exercises can be further disseminated. In particular, the guide highlights recommended routes for access between landlords, service providers for children, and young people, in order that mutual benefits may be achieved.

Winthorpe Estate, so that voluntary action of a similar kind can be both legitimised and initiated there. In Mansfield, Groundwork is working with young people as part of the Crime Concern Neighbourhood Safety Project on the Oaktree Lane Estate. The co-ordinated action of the youth group extends across a range of activities designed to mitigate vandalism, reduce local crime and dissipate drug use.

Youth First in Merthyr Valley, South Wales

Like many of the towns in the South Wales valleys, Treharris, Trelewis and Ynysowen have a recent history of disinvestment and de-industrialisation. Yet two large-scale projects are bringing new hope: the Southern Valleys Partnership is establishing a multi-agency community development strategy; and the Taff Bargoed Millennium Park project seeks to reinvigorate through the development of a large leisure complex. Groundwork Merthyr and Rhondda Cynon Taff are enabling young people to be involved in both programmes. Of particular note has been *The Adventure Begins* video project. Made by a group of 12 young people, the 20-minute film compares life in the past with the opportunities of today. The video was awarded the Youth Work in Wales Excellence Award in 1999. It is being used as a platform for debate, and is encouraging young people's broad involvement in a range of local environmental projects.

Youth First in Derry, Northern Ireland

Developing out of an existing youth environment programme, *Youth First* aims to extend cross-community participation in Derry. So far, emphasis has been on recruitment, and training

on environmental issues and community auditing. Following several “Planning for Real” events, young people are working with Groundwork Northern Ireland to draw up detailed project plans to tackle the priorities they have identified.

First-year evaluation

In an evaluation of the first year of the programme (Youth First, 2000), some salutary observations are made that will resonate with other work of this kind. First, although each of the project teams started their activities at about the same time, the differing needs and contexts of each community meant that the projects varied in their progress. In some areas, considerable time was needed in order to connect with young people, and to gain their trust and confidence. Quick-fix solutions are rarely possible when reaching out to those who are disaffected, alienated or isolated. Second, in one of the areas, the departure of two project staff considerably disrupted the local dynamic of a group, so the project nearly failed. Building up a relationship is a complex, sensitive and time-consuming process. It depends on methods geared to the needs of individuals and their communities. In this case, the special association that had slowly emerged was completely dislocated. Fortunately, an exchange visit with an environmental youth team from London succeeded in motivating several young people to try again.

Youth Works

The long-running Youth Works programme, established in 1994, targeted 8–21-year-olds in deprived neighbourhoods, where young people were at risk of drifting into crime. Throughout this period, projects operated in Blackburn

Box 4.8: Quest

Quest is a personal development programme, operated by Groundwork Black Country, that offers participants an opportunity to develop new skills, or enhance existing ones, within an accredited programme. Teams of young people aged 16 years and over are accepted on to a 14-week programme to take part in practical projects, outdoor pursuits, and problem-solving tasks. As part of the course, each team is helped to organise, co-ordinate and carry out a practical project within their own locality. Typically this involves fund-raising; liaison with community groups and agencies; and the formal presentation of results. Quest centres on building the confidence of young people to express their own needs and aspirations. Its practice counters the accusation that too often youth work emphasises activities identified by adults, who continue to insist that they know best. “Efforts to enable young people to develop as decision-makers will only be undermined if those decisions are limited to areas determined by adults” (Hurley and Duxbury, 2000, p. 11).

(Roman Road)¹; Hackney (Frampton Park Estate); Leeds (Beeston); Plymouth (Barne Barton Estate) and Sunderland (Easington Lane). Youth Works aimed to engage young people in a range of practically based schemes to enable social, environmental and community change. At a national level, these projects were managed by a Programme Board, including representatives from

¹ All projects have now concluded, except Blackburn.

Crime Concern, Groundwork, Marks & Spencer and Whitbread. Locally, project managers worked closely with young people and their communities. The project became a real force for neighbourhood renewal, and helped to rehabilitate local places.

Social initiatives included the Pre-caution Project in Beeston. Here, first-time offenders had the option of attending a ten-week, peer-education training programme that promoted positive alternatives to re-offending, and opened the door to new employment opportunities. In Hackney, Headstart '97 linked young people to new career paths, through a multi-agency approach. Also, the Leaders for Life project equipped 15–21-year-olds with transferable life-skills, through a modular training package. The enjoyment and learning gained from the programme had many positive spin-offs. Confidence levels within the group increased, and participants are now actively involved in their schools, and in the wider community. Young people are putting their leadership qualities to use at the Frampton Park Youth Club, and in other voluntary activities within their community.

Environmental schemes included a graffiti removal project in Leeds; a community arts project that involved the production of landscape murals, waymarking signs and other art-based events designed to improve a local estate in Blackburn; and a playground project in Hackney. For this latter project young people were involved from the outset. They made visits, held discussions, built scaled models of their ideas, and assisted in its construction. The new playground provides a stimulating and satisfying environment

for local children; it is well used, and fully approved by RoSPA (Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents). Youth offenders maintain the site. At Easington Lane, young people were encouraged to consider what they wanted from their neighbourhood. Among their preferred options was a wildflower garden, which they helped to construct in a quadrangle of the local school. Environmental improvement projects of this sort, that offer immediacy of action and bring tangible results in the short term, are particularly valuable when working with young people. On the one hand, they sustain interest and prevent the disillusionment that may result when projects become bogged down by adult bureaucracy; and on the other hand, they provide an instant focus of attention, and an opportunity to integrate a local success story into a broader regeneration strategy.

Community projects to improve local quality of life in general, have been the cornerstone of the *Youth Works* programme. Bridging the Gap, in Hackney, attempted to address the friction and misunderstanding between young and old. It involved workshops where groups of adults and children shared experiences of growing up today and in the past. These workshops led to new ways of seeing, and helped to break down generational barriers. For example, instead of being seen as a problem and a drain on resources, young people were redefined as contributing and respected members of the community; whereas heightened sensitisation by young people to adults' needs meant that they were no longer seen as the enemy. In Barne Barton, Plymouth, the naval dockyard next to the estate was the base for the Wheels project. Here, young people were encouraged

to channel their interest in cars by learning responsible driving skills in an off-road environment, and through a training programme in car mechanics. As a consequence, local car crime was reduced significantly. In Blackburn, Groundwork is working with young people to eliminate juvenile nuisance. New funding from a local housing association has enabled the provision of Outward Bound courses, arts projects, sponsorship of a local football team, and the setting up of a new youth club. After two years, although vandalism has increased across the Borough, rates have fallen by 35 per cent on Roman Road.

All of these achievements not only change individuals – they change communities. Participation through processes of collective action encourages a sense of ownership and confidence that are likely to endure beyond the scope of the project. When young people become stakeholders in their communities, their lives have more meaning, are more challenging, and

are imbued with greater worth. The new values that projects leave behind are likely to be both sustained and added to. Groundwork intends to set up similar *Youth Works* projects in other areas, working with Crime Concern and local trusts where appropriate criteria are met.

Young Leaders

Supported by the Bank of Scotland, Groundwork's *Young Leaders* programme (1996–97) set out to put to more productive use the energies and talents of young people – particularly teenagers – by training them to lead projects that would benefit themselves, other younger people, and the wider communities in which they lived (Box 4.10). It recognised that an initial obstacle for many young people in terms of getting involved is peer pressure, and the risk of losing credibility through activities perceived as “uncool”. Equipping young people with skills to be local leaders helps to break down these social barriers. A key aspect of the programme was the

Box 4.9: Site Savers

Site Savers is a national partnership between Groundwork and Barclays Bank, which attempts to engage and enable local people to transform derelict and underused sites in their communities into new leisure resources. In particular, it aims to involve socially excluded groups – especially young people – in regeneration activities. Site Savers acknowledges that the process of involving local young people is as important as the reclamation itself. Reclaiming derelict land helps to break cycles of vandalism and decay, and develops feelings of collective ownership, social

cohesion and community pride. As part of the programme, Groundwork Macclesfield and Vale Royal is working with a group of young people to introduce new leisure facilities to Colshaw. A community environmental plan identified a lack of affordable sports opportunities for young people. Following a carefully prepared and researched proposal by a youth team, a new sports pitch and cycle/rollerblade track is being constructed, with the help of local young people.

Box 4.10: Young Leaders: Sholver Estate, Oldham

A lack of leisure and recreation facilities was a key problem identified by young people on the Sholver Estate, Oldham. A group of young people worked alongside Groundwork Rochdale, Oldham and Tameside to revitalise a dilapidated children's play area, and create a landscape seating area in front of a local community centre. As a follow-up to this project, the Young Leaders campaigned for, and helped to provide, the estate's first sports area – one that would be open and accessible to the whole community. In preparation for these projects, they received training in health and safety, teamwork, communication and presentation skills.

use of “action in the environment” as the means to develop not only young people's personal, practical and social skills, but also to bring about positive neighbourhood change. Most of the projects took place in areas of multiple social disadvantage.

Among the many projects supported by Groundwork, environmental playschemes are often an attractive and popular option. At the Finchfield Environmental Centre, Groundwork Black Country provided training in aspects of ecology with a view to developing activities that would encourage habitat restoration. The Young Leaders worked with local children to build a birdnesting raft, and organised other environmental activities and games. In Derbyshire, Groundwork Erewash Valley

brought together young people from different towns, and provided training that enabled the Young Leaders to plan and run an eight-day summer play scheme for over 100 younger children from surrounding areas. In South Oxhey, training provided by Groundwork Hertfordshire led to a group of Young Leaders organising a five-day environmental programme for 8–11-year-olds. Following six weeks training with Groundwork West Durham, a group of 12 young people initiated the “Earth Guardians” playscheme that attracted younger children from throughout the local area. Projects included litter picks, footpath clearance, and the renovation of the Cenotaph site in Craghead.

Social education also formed an important part of the *Young Leaders* programme. Groundwork Wigan, in collaboration with the Prince's Trust, ran a 12-week personal development course that equipped a team of young people with skills to organise various environmental projects in their community. In the Wirral, Groundwork worked with the Rathbone Community Institute – a training organisation specialising in providing support to young people with poor basic skills, and special training needs – on a team-building programme that enabled a group of 11 teenagers to undertake various environmental projects, ranging from landfill restoration to countryside management. This group went on to work with younger children on a range of other conservation and landscape projects.

The *Young Leaders* programme was grounded in the belief that, through heightened self-awareness, young people can be encouraged to take a

keener interest in their community and its needs. If personal reflection can be harnessed into community action, then through environmental work, community pride may be enhanced, and disaffection and “at risk” behaviour lessened. Also, by providing positive role models, particularly for young males, re-engagement and integration are more likely to be achieved. Projects that bring

together different parts of the community are important, not only in breaking down stereotypes, but also in developing cohesion. They enable those networks that are vital to social inclusion, and which are so “damagingly lacking when young people become isolated from work, education and other social structures” (Hurley and Duxbury, 2000, p. 5).

Box 4.11: M-Power Millennium Awards

A Prince's Trust scheme, funded up to £2.7m, is providing young people aged 14–25 years with the opportunity to develop projects that will be of benefit to them and their communities. The M-Power Millennium Awards provide groups or individuals with up to £10,000 of funding, and the organisers are keen to ensure that the programme reaches out to those who are socially disadvantaged, and who might not normally take an interest or get involved. Above all, the aim is to encourage new projects that are peer-led.

Smart Zone – an anti-drug peer education project in County Durham – exemplifies what can be achieved. Run in connection with Durham's police and Youth Enterprise Scheme, the project trains young people to be drugs educators. In its first two years, Smart Zone delivered drugs awareness sessions to over 1,000 young people. The project operates a roll-on – roll-off training programme, where this year's educators train next year's teams. The project was deemed so successful that it received the 1998 Philip Lawrence Award.

Box 4.12: Intermediate Labour Markets

Groundwork is developing new approaches to employment that offer young people real jobs on programmes to revive the environmental, social and economic prospects of their neighbourhoods. Working in conjunction with New Deal, Intermediate Labour Markets (ILMs) provide sheltered job placements for 18–25-year-olds that act as a bridge between benefit dependency and work. There is scope, however, for the approach to be extended to 16–18-year-olds, who have become disconnected from statutory provision, and who would undoubtedly benefit from training in personal, social and practical skills.

Groundwork Leeds is working in partnership with Leeds City Council to provide ILM workshops in Kippax and Halton Moor – two areas with a high proportion of early school-leavers and high youth unemployment. New training is providing opportunities that enable young people to see beyond the short term, and to contribute to projects that are bringing about neighbourhood renewal.

Children and Neighbourhoods in London

The *Children and Neighbourhoods in London* programme is a five-year partnership between the Children's Society, five London Boroughs – Bexley, Camden, Enfield, Hackney and Lewisham – Hammersmith and Fulham Urban Studies Centre, and Planning Aid for London. The purpose of the project is to involve children in local decision-making, especially in relation to their neighbourhoods and schools (Fuller, 1997). Throughout the life of the project, a variety of methods have been used to engage and reach out to children who would otherwise be hard to reach. All share the common underpinning principles of taking children's ideas seriously, and working with them so that their concerns are heard by those with responsibility and power to effect change.

In Hackney, young people from the Stamford Hill Estate worked in partnership with the local Youth Crime Prevention Initiative group to

address issues of common concern. Through video, music, drama, discussion and art, children were encouraged to present their anxieties and ideas to representatives of national and local government, and to a range of other decision-making agencies (Figure 4.6). The effects have been tangible, both upon the young people and their neighbourhoods. Developing confidence and skills encouraged this group of 12–16-year-olds to take part in a number of community projects, including a graffiti clean-up and the construction of an environmental mural. A campaign to make safer a local playground led to Hackney Council erecting a new fence, and to a feasibility study to consider further change.

In Hammersmith, local children assisted in the development of a Safe Routes to School project. In a rounded programme of activities, they carried out historical searches to examine how the area had changed; designed and executed a community survey that exposed issues and problems; undertook traffic counts; developed plans; and presented their ideas to local councillors, the media, and MPs. These children also acted as advisers in a “footprint” initiative that laid down safe paths to follow within their neighbourhoods.

Children in Lewisham have been involved in a number of projects designed to raise awareness of their needs, and to bring about positive change on their estates. One problem readily identified was a lack of safe play spaces. Local vandalism was so acute that a nearby park had been closed because of extensive damage. Motivated by this concern, a core group of 30 children began to focus on local play provision. As part of their strategy, the group

Our rights as young people:

- We should be able to be safe around the estate.
- We should have respect from adults.
- We should be allowed to get a job, no matter what we look like.
- We have the right to be safe at night.
- We should be able to play around the estate, without having to go all the way to the park.
- We should have more play equipment on the estate.
- We should be allowed to work from 14 years old.

Figure 4.6 Young people's views on the Stamford Hill Estate, Hackney

undertook usage surveys, and carried out interviews with their peers, and with infants. From this research base, the children developed a five-point action plan that was confirmed by their local school, and subsequently presented to councillors from Lewisham and Bromley, and to the Minister of the Environment. A similar approach was used by a group of 10- and 11-year-olds from a neighbouring school to highlight anxieties about personal and community safety. Through an extensive questionnaire survey, and discussions and meetings with the Downham Pride community group – which comprised adult residents, senior council officers, and representatives of the police, these children too provided a set of proposals for neighbourhood action. In both cases, the validity of the data and the conviction of these children's thoughts so impressed the local council that aspects of their ideas were incorporated into local planning strategies, particularly in the design of neighbourhood Home Zones.

A case study from Enfield presents interesting lessons for other projects. From discussions with a group of 12–15-year-old boys living on the large Cowper Gardens estate, and perceived as local troublemakers, it became clear that there were few accessible sports facilities in the neighbourhood. In particular, the boys bemoaned the lack of local football pitches and basketball areas. They also looked at the estate from the point of view of all residents, and identified a number of environmental problems, including poor lighting, litter and graffiti. After several months, the group's confidence had grown sufficiently for them to present their ideas to a multi-agency

committee of council officers, police, representatives of victim support, and local community leaders. In turn, working with Planning Aid for London, the boys translated their ideas into a full community consultation through a "Planning for Real" exercise. The young people then used the model as the centrepiece of a subsequent presentation to an audience that included the Leader of the Council and an array of local decision-makers. This group was so impressed with the ideas that they applied to the Borough of Enfield for a capital grant to build all-weather sports surfaces on an open space on the estate, and to the Football Development Trust for the provision of floodlighting.

At this point the young people suddenly became very concerned. They were worried that the pitch – which was now to cost £70,000 – was far more elaborate than what they wanted. Also, for the floodlighting of the kind proposed, a local planning application had to be made, with the possibility of local residents' objections. Leisure Services further announced that, in order to recoup some of the monies, they intended to run courses and hire it out – thus excluding the very young people whose idea it was. The boys expressed these reservations at a workshop of the London Listens to Young People conference. Their fears were heeded. A more modest facility was subsequently announced, that was much closer to their original ideas and plans. In addition, Housing agreed to cover the running and lighting costs as part of the general maintenance budget, ensuring that the leisure complex remained part of the community.

Saying Power

Targeted at 16–20 year-olds, who are disadvantaged, marginalised and with few formal qualifications, the *Saying Power Millennium Award Scheme* is an innovative programme established by Save the Children and its partners the Millennium Commission and Comic Relief that attempts to involve young people in projects which bring about change for themselves and their communities. In operation for three years, a particular focus has been to get young people to address local social issues of relevance to themselves and their peers (Thompson, 2001). Young people are encouraged to apply to the scheme with their own ideas and all Award Holders commit themselves to the project for one year, full-time, during which time they receive a living allowance. Save the Children provides training, advice, support and assistance in developing the project from an initial idea to a working plan. All Award Holders undertake a comprehensive induction which covers advice on children's rights, health and safety, equal opportunities, as well as personal skills training and team-building.

Projects are wide-ranging (Thompson, 2001) and examples include: tackling homelessness; leaving care initiatives; confronting bullying; raising disability awareness; speaking out through youth forums; and anti-racism initiatives. In Birmingham, a mental health advisory board for young people is proving successful; in Glasgow, young people are working to bridge the gap between two rival gangs on neighbouring estates; and in Cardiff, a full inventory of local services for young people is being produced.

The Award Holders have benefited enormously from the scheme (Thompson, 2001). After the first year, high on the list of perceived benefits were increased confidence and self-esteem, feelings of worth and respect within their communities, and an invigorated sense of making a valid contribution to neighbourhood change – as these testimonies suggest:

‘By working in the Upper Springfield Development Trust, I have now become part of my own community which I have been isolated from for 20 years and I now understand that there is nobody to blame. I have enjoyed the experience of working with different people and finding out what goes on in the community’ (Belfast).

‘I have come out of this Award as a more confident person and feel more able to make an informed decision when it comes to future employment’ (Scotland).

‘During School I wasn't one of the better students, in fact you could say I was a complete idiot. I never saw the point in studying or working in class and I paid with pretty bad GCSE grades. Being involved in ‘Saying Power’ has given me confidence and allowed me to get involved. I have learnt to respect others and I have become respected as a young person. My experience has enabled me to get accepted at university’ (Newcastle).

Box 4.13: Information and Advice Services

Among the ways of keeping young people informed about their localities, and of providing assistance that enables them to lead full and active lives as members of their communities, is the provision of information and advice centres. The Bolton Young People's Advice and Support Service (BYPASS) – aimed at 16–25-year-olds – runs as an advice and drop-in centre. It offers guidance on welfare rights, housing, counselling, and sexual health, and assists young people leaving care. User involvement is crucial: from the outset, young people decided what services should be offered, and assisted in BYPASS's management and development. The project is supported by Save the Children and a range of local service-providers.

In the Wakefield area, the Infospots project provides places where young people can meet and socialise, and receive information on such matters as health, jobs, training and local projects. Each is managed locally by a group of young people with the support of a youth worker.

Options is Devizes' first information café, specially designed to meet the needs of local young people. Targeted at 12–25-year-olds, Options is run by young people, and supports peer-education projects, careers advice and counselling, with the help of local agencies.

Integration

The concept of fellow citizenship depends on recognising young people as equal and contributing members of a society. We have seen how, by using the “environment as a tool” (Hurley and Duxbury, 2000), and through supportive youth work, disaffected young people can be given a chance to reconnect with their communities. However, integration will only be fully accomplished when young people work alongside adults as partners. To date, despite an emerging social and political agenda that redefines the status and rights of young people, these occasions are few and far between. This section considers a number of examples of young people and adults working together to improve their

communities. Through such involvement – which depends upon real decisions and genuine actions – conditions for authentic regeneration are set in place.

School grounds projects

School grounds improvement schemes provide an excellent starting point for regeneration in the wider community. Often, schools are the only local focal point, so any changes that take place are highly visible and popular. Groundwork is working with schools across the UK in programmes that are having a real impact on young people's morale, motivation and performance. Figure 4.7 suggests how projects of this kind encourage spin-offs that benefit the whole community.

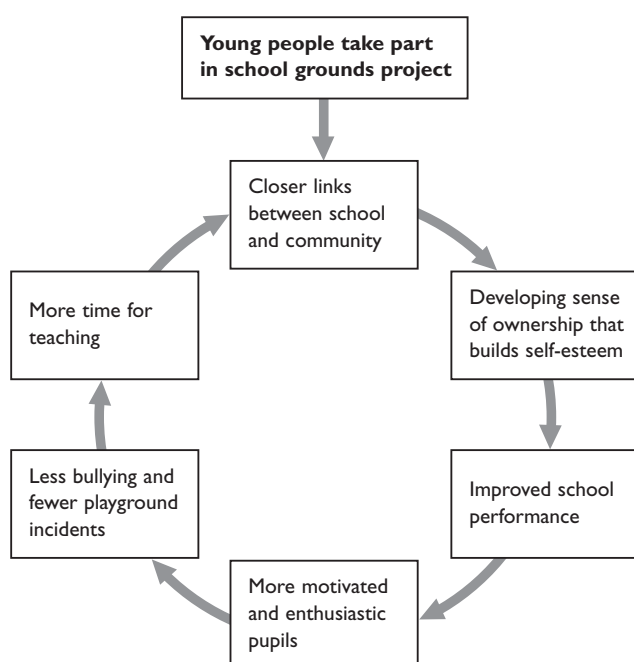


Figure 4.7 School grounds projects and regeneration

To combat local vandalism and disaffection within an area of high unemployment, Peafield Primary School, Mansfield, launched an initiative to transform an area of barren tarmac playground into an attractive, stimulating environment for learning and play. From the outset, children were encouraged to participate. They drew up designs; chose materials; consulted with a local architect; and assisted in the construction. As stakeholders, children took a great pride in their achievement, and local rates of vandalism fell.

Cranford Park Primary School is sited in the middle of a large, socially disadvantaged housing estate in Hillingdon. When the area received SRB funding, Groundwork Ashfield and Mansfield helped local people voice their ideas for regenerating the community. Improving the

school grounds was one of the most popular suggestions. Working with the local residents' association, young people transformed a redundant courtyard into an enclosed garden with a water feature. In recognition of their efforts, the school and community organised a celebratory opening.

Miles Platting is one of the most deprived areas of Manchester. Before improvements to the school grounds got under way, disruptive behaviour that eroded the teaching environment was commonplace. What little space was available was dominated by football, which left other children standing around, getting bored and acting aggressively. With the assistance of parents and staff, Groundwork worked with young people to redesign the school grounds. There is now a larger space for play; a football pitch; knockabout areas; benches for people to sit; and an impressive outdoor amphitheatre. The project has also led to stronger links between school and community. Out of school hours, the parents' group keep the key and ensure the facilities are available for local young people to use in the evenings and at weekends.

Tower Bridge Primary School lies in the heart of the North Southwark Education Action Zone – a poor environment, dominated by traffic and with little open, green space. To improve the playground, the school consulted with children and local residents; fed their views into the plans; and encouraged their participation in construction work. A large, vandalised shelter is now an attractive performing arts centre, with a mosaic floor and benches, that serves as an important social focus for the community.

The lesson from these initiatives is that, through small-scale projects, large-scale community benefits may be reaped. By taking part in manageable exercises that deliver tangible outcomes within realistic timescales, children develop in confidence and learn the teamwork skills needed to become active, responsible citizens. The school is placed at the centre of the community; and rather than being a site of disaffection, becomes a rallying point for community development and renewal.

Youth Environment Project, Young Voices in Regeneration, and More to Life

The success of the *Youth Environment Project* (YEP) – launched by Groundwork as an action-based outreach programme targeting 14–25-year-olds in the North-East – has encouraged close links with two further initiatives that enable community regeneration. The first of these is *Young Voices in Regeneration* – a

national programme being developed in partnership with Save the Children in South Yorkshire, Durham, Liverpool and Hackney. The second is *More to Life* – a co-operative venture with the Rural Development Commission, set in Durham and West Cumbria.

The *Youth Environment Project* in Durham sets out to meet the needs of young people by building their capacity to engage with existing decision-making structures, and by placing young people at the heart of regeneration initiatives. It encourages young people and adults to break down barriers through participation in activities that benefit the entire community, and improve their own prospects. Figure 4.8 synthesises the project's methodology. The intention is that, through initial outreach work, a project is developed that moves from being owned by young people to becoming part of a broader community strategy.

Stage	Process	Ownership
Identification	Establishing need	Project team
Liaison	Meetings with young people and other community groups	Project team/young people
Reconnaissance	Street-based work, publicity	Project team/young people
Targeting	Developing links with young people, prioritising	Young people
Development	Extending recruitment of young people, and developing community links	Young people/community
Main programme	Training; development of management groups; decision-making; production of tangible benefits; development of succession strategies	Young people/community
Sustainability	Identifying additional support and furthering community activities	Community

Figure 4.8 An environmental outreach model

For example, the young people of Cornforth – an ex-mining village in East Durham – had become increasingly detached from the rest of the community. A lack of employment opportunities and communal meeting places meant that the young people had little means of mixing and integrating with adults. Through outreach youth work, young people and adults were brought together in a range of environmental activities. A series of dance and drama workshops enabled over 50 teenagers to explore, and express to the community at large, their views about where they lived. As a result, a “young people’s night” was established at the local community centre, and teams of young people and adults worked together to redecorate the building. Local success was such that the community – through a partnership arrangement involving local adults, young people, contributing organisations, and locally elected members – took ownership of the project, and sought to extend the programme by establishing new ways of easing young people from education, to training and on to work.

Young Voices in Regeneration is a national programme which, in Durham, works in partnership with the YEP, by providing those already engaged in project work with a broader forum within which to articulate their social, economic, and environmental concerns. It offers links to Durham’s Local Agenda 21 team, and to its Children and Young People’s Council. Through these means, local sustainability strategies are added to, and new opportunities are provided for environmental and regeneration project work. For example, in Cornforth, young people identified recycling as an issue, and worked

with the District Council to provide information sheets and collection points. In Horden, a group of teenagers raised money and worked with the parish council to renovate a bandstand in the local park. In Stanhope, contact with the Durham Wildlife Trust led to a riverbank clean-up.

In South Yorkshire, *Young Voices in Regeneration* is being run as a youth action programme – getting young people involved through positive action on short, well-supported, themed projects of relevance to them and their communities. When the programme was first conceived, it was thought that youth forums would provide the starting point for the integration of young people’s views into local decision-making. However, through consultation with local young people it was soon realised that an alternative strategy was needed. Young people were apprehensive that forums of this kind were too bureaucratic, delayed action and were not sufficiently task oriented. As a result, it was decided to involve young people in meetings only when they felt that they had a specific issue to discuss. Equally, encouragement was given to local town and parish councils to use groups of young people as consultants when engaging in community planning. A range of positive outcomes has subsequently been achieved. In South Emsall, for example, young people worked with the tenants and residents group, the local council, and professional organisations on schemes that improved local street lighting, traffic calming and environmental renewal.

Local SRB and RECHAR funding provided a further opportunity to link young people to a raft

of regeneration projects, through a community structure known as SESKU (South Emsal, South Kirby and Upton Environment Group). Among the projects encouraged by the local SRB Board was the environmental upgrading of the main shopping street in South Emsall. As part of this scheme, young people provided a significant input into the development of a new open space within the town centre, to act as a daily meeting point, and as a place for the staging of events on special occasions. Using an approach known as “GreenIT” – which involved groups of children linking with a landscape architect; collecting site data; consulting with local people; exploring needs; designing a solution; building models; and presenting their findings to the Town Centre Management Committee – not only was a new feature of considerable merit added to the local landscape, but significant intergenerational barriers were eased.

A particularly imaginative project is that which became known as Emmizone – derived from Emmiz, the name that a group of young people from South Emsall called themselves. These teenagers came from a socially and environmentally decaying estate, itself known as the Bronx. As part of a general environmental facelift, young people targeted an old allotment site for improvement. The project worked within financial constraints, and with a restriction that no monies could be spent on play equipment. An air of realism prevailed at all times. For example, suggestions that the area should be converted into a motorbike track were rejected, on grounds that it would not be acceptable to the community at large. Although this led to the withdrawal of a



Derelict housing on the ‘Bronx’ estate, South Emsall, Yorkshire

group of young boys, there was sufficient commitment to push ahead. Working with local residents, the group cleared the area of debris from years of fly-tipping; applied for and received additional funding from the English Basketball Association, Adidas and the National Lottery to make a hardstanding area; and worked with a local artist to convert a large fallen tree into a carved bench and a natural climbing-frame. The bench ended up as a pair of folded arms, covered in tattoos that depicted the life and history of the area. As a result, the community now has a safe play area, away from the streets, that is both owned and maintained by young people.



The Emmizone bench

Box 4.13: More to Life

More to Life was run by Groundwork in Durham and West Cumbria, and supported by the Rural Development Commission. It targeted disadvantaged young people, aged 14–20, in rural areas, encouraging them to take action to improve their lives, and to become integrated members of their communities.

The project recognised that young people in the countryside faced restricted opportunities for training, employment and social activities. These deficiencies often encouraged boredom and frustration, and in some cases led to crime, drug-taking, and other anti-social behaviour. *More to Life* attempted to tackle these issues head-on, by getting young people to campaign for change, and to work alongside adults in programmes to break this downward social spiral.

In Craghead, for example, young people got involved in local decision-making activities, working with district councillors. They felt able to challenge decisions, and to take a full part in discussions about local planning, and the development of sports and leisure facilities. The success of the project can be judged by the comments of some of the young people themselves (End-of-Year 1 Report):

- “The best thing has been how it makes other adults now see us as sensible and capable people.”
- “It’s good, because usually adults judge you but in the project they don’t – everyone takes you seriously.”
- “It has made us all feel more grown-up and wanted.”

Conclusion

This chapter has drawn attention to the range and diversity of ways in which young people are being engaged in activities that assist community regeneration. In a fundamental sense, these approaches are challenging the manner in which many adults and adult-led institutions view the competence and capability of children. Through these initiatives, it is becoming abundantly clear that, by involving children, new and often unique insights are being gained into community needs. If heeded, these insights provide enormous potential for community development. Among the immediate gains for young people is a greater sense of belonging and social worth, while for adults, the prospect of genuine neighbourhood renewal becomes more tangible.

Yet participation comes neither easily, nor automatically. It requires time, effort and organisation – especially if it is to be truly inclusive. As Henderson (1997) suggests, it will also involve compromise, by both young people and adults. Neither children nor adults are right all of the time; nor can any group expect to get what they want on every occasion.

Being clear at the outset about the nature and purpose of involvement is essential, if accusations of tokenism are to be avoided. There needs to be recognition, too, that there is not an authentic voice of youth waiting to be discovered: like adults, children are drawn from all sorts of social backgrounds, and there are likely to be many voices of childhood. Unless sufficient attention is given to the importance of difference and diversity, local decision-makers may find that,

despite their efforts to consult and involve, their policies will still marginalise a significant proportion of young people. Sensitivity to issues of gender, age, experience, ability, culture, religion, class and income is vital. Also, adults need to be clear about whether they are consulting children as individuals, or whether they are regarding the group as representative of a broader constituency. In a similar vein, young people taking part need to be sure about whose views they are representing.

Participation does not just come about, without effort on the part of young people. Simply being young does not equate with being an expert on youth issues. For participation to be successful, and for young people to be able to articulate their ideas in a meaningful and constructive manner, training is essential. Equally, just as we would not expect all adults to be knowledgeable about all community issues, so young people will only be able to make worthwhile contributions if given the opportunity to develop their skills and understanding.

Finally, although this chapter describes a broad range of projects from many different spheres, at present participation by young people is still the exception, not the rule. Even within neighbourhoods where vibrant programmes of activity are taking place, only a minority of young people are likely to be engaged. Despite new agendas that are opening doors to fuller community involvement in decision-making, the active participation of children in their communities requires a considerable societal shift in young people's relationship with adults. For this to be achieved, it makes sense to encourage children's participation in as many situations as possible.

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5 Working with children

Summary of Chapter 5

- The “Big Idea” identified in the recent Urban Forum Report on the Social Exclusion Unit’s National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal (NSNR) – which was based on consultation with over 1,000 community and voluntary groups – is that to get communities working, joined-up strategies that engage different “communities of interest”, such as young people, need to be efficiently and effectively set in place.
- Implicit throughout the NSNR is a view that young people are important local stakeholders, and that their ideas and opinions matter if neighbourhood renewal is to take off and be sustained.
- Effective participation depends on good ethical practice, and the use of appropriate methodologies designed to take account of issues from the way that young people see them.
- Ethics involves much more than raising awareness. It should encourage the refinement of procedures, and the honing of skills. Ethical guidelines are needed to ensure appropriate practice in relation to matters such as recruitment, consent, confidentiality, safety and feedback.
- There are many different ways of consulting and involving children – including observational, oral, visual, and written techniques – each with their own strengths and weaknesses. The choice of consultation method will depend on: the issue to be addressed; the kind of information needed; the time and resources available; the number of young people to be consulted; the venue where the consultation will take place; and the skills and expertise of the project team
- Evidence suggests that there are three main barriers to the full participation of young people in regeneration programmes. These relate to the nature of the schemes; the attitudes of adults; and the characteristics of young people. Each of these poses particular ethical and methodological challenges that need to be addressed if successful partnership working is to be achieved. To date, young people’s impact on regeneration initiatives and projects has, for the most part, been minor, and limited to youth-specific issues, rather than matters affecting the community as a whole.
- However, changing local decision-making structures without changing social and political values will achieve little.



Introduction

“The strongest message from consultation on the NSNR... was that children and young people need to be more involved in neighbourhood renewal if their unique talents and knowledge are to be harnessed and if renewal is to touch our future generations.” (Urban Forum, 2000, p. 25)

The “Big Idea” identified in the recent Urban Forum Report on the Social Exclusion Unit’s NSNR is that, to get communities working, joined-up strategies that engage different “communities of interest” – such as young people – need to be efficiently and effectively set in place. The report was based upon consultation with over 1,000 community and voluntary groups. Implicit throughout the NSNR is the view that young people are important local stakeholders, and that their ideas and opinions matter if neighbourhood renewal is to take off and be sustained. However, although the NSNR keenly identifies the need to reach out and draw in young people living within deprived neighbourhoods – many of whom will be disaffected, alienated or isolated from their communities – it is seemingly taken for granted that once recommendations are adopted by local partnerships, policy objectives will be readily achieved. The evidence suggests otherwise. Chapter 4 highlights some of the difficulties that experienced youth workers and community development organisations encounter when attempting outreach and detached youth work. Questions of inclusion become further compounded by issues of gender, race and ethnicity, and (dis)ability. There is growing evidence that post-industrial, Western society

is underpinned by sets of hegemonic values that disadvantage any group who are not white, ableist, male, adult and middle-class (Sibley, 1995). Accordingly, in the UK, urban regeneration has typically paid scant regard to the needs of young girls, young blacks, and the young disabled. Ensuring that all young people are included and involved is not easy, especially as many agencies and organisations from across the public, private and voluntary sectors have little experience of working in this way. The recent testimonies of a group of children aged 10–19 years, and involved in 14 separate Children’s Society projects, affirm that, as we move into the new millennium there is still a long way to go before participation becomes either inclusive or routine (Box 5.1):

“The overwhelming message from young people was that they have few real opportunities to express their views and have them taken into consideration when decisions are made that affect them – in the family or alternative care, at school, in their local community, and in politics and the media.” (Willow and Dugdale, 2000, p. 34)

As momentum towards giving young people a voice gathers pace, there is a need to highlight good practice in relation to ethical and methodological considerations that are important when working *with* children, and to highlight those barriers that inhibit many young people from taking part. This chapter draws attention to recent literature that helps to establish important guidelines to enable effective participation and especially *consultation*. Some specific issues such as involving children in management structures

Box 5.1: A “thermometer of rights”: how much do adults respect children’s rights?



Source: based on Willow and Dugdale (2000, p. 18).

and decisions cannot be fully developed here, but will be the subject of a forthcoming study by Kirby for Groundwork and Save the Children.

Taking part, getting involved: ethical and methodological issues

Effective participation depends on young people being responsive and fully engaged in the regeneration process. While adults following top-down agendas may exude enthusiasm, ambition and good intent, unless the work resonates with the experiences and lifeworlds of those taking part, young people will have little incentive or motivation to get involved. Successful projects are likely to be those that take account of the issues from the way that young people see them. Fitzpatrick et al. (1998) emphasise this point by drawing attention to the disjunction of views between adults and young people when assessing regeneration objectives (Table 5.1). For example, young people’s concerns about “somewhere to go” were devalued; “the need for respect was approached only indirectly, the issue of police harassment almost ignored and education given more emphasis than young people would give to it” (Fitzpatrick et al., 1998, p. 13).

Table 5.1 The “Top Five” needs for young people in order of priority

What young people want	What decision-makers want for young people
1 Affordable, accessible and appropriate leisure facilities	1 Jobs, training qualifications
2 Job opportunities	2 Developed capacities/self-esteem
3 To stop police harassment	3 Alternatives to anti-social and criminal behaviour
4 To gain adult respect	4 Improved youth facilities
5 To change outsiders’ perceptions of them and where they live	5 Youth involvement in the regeneration process

Source: Fitzpatrick et al. (1998, p. 6)

With these concerns in mind, Kitchin (2000) reasserts the advice provided initially by Willow (1997) to construct a set of principles and guidelines for promoting young people's participation in local decision-making. These precepts are based upon the conviction that all children – regardless of ability, age, ethnicity, religion or social background – have the right to be involved and to contribute to society; and that local councils have a responsibility to involve, engage and listen to young people, and to take actions that show respect for their views, feelings and perspectives (Table 5.2).

Table 5.2 Guidelines for increasing children and young people's participation

- 1 Be clear about what you want as an organisation, and be open about the extent and possibility of shared power and decision-making.
- 2 Once you have set your objectives, consider and experiment with a range of options and methods.
- 3 Use information to raise awareness and encourage support – do not do anything without publicity within the organisation, and externally if possible.
- 4 Try to include everybody: do not assume that children and young people are a homogeneous group.
- 5 Consider what resources your organisation has to offer.
- 6 Ask children and young people where and when they want to meet – ask them to advise you.
- 7 Remember that children have busy lives too.
- 8 Take into account children and young people's previous and current relationships with your organisation.
- 9 Be prepared for mistakes; acknowledge that you are learning, and accept criticism.
- 10 Acknowledge that initiatives and projects can be established by children and young people themselves.

Source: Kitchin (2000).

These guidelines raise a series of ethical and methodological issues that should be considered by any organisation seeking to engage with children.

The ethics of working with children

Ethics involves much more than raising awareness: it also should encourage the refinement of procedures and the honing of skills (Hay and Foley, 1998). In the context of local authorities and related project workers working with children, a number of issues need to be resolved. As ethics involves challenging values (Holman, 1987; Taylor, 1996), these issues are raised as a set of questions, and posed as a range of moral dilemmas. Wherever possible, outcomes are suggested that have been identified by others as “good practice”. Alderson (1995), on behalf of Barnardo's, and Kirby (1999), for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, consider many of these points in reviews on children, ethics and social research. They are developed and extended here in the context of involving children in neighbourhood regeneration.

Relationships with institutional ethics committees

- Should formal ethical approval be sought?

In medical research, ethics committees have well-established protocols. This is not yet the case with social research, although many organisations are now setting in place ethics committees to advise, monitor and assess projects. Projects undertaken under the premise of neighbourhood regeneration should not necessarily by-pass these structures. Indeed, organisations should familiarise themselves with the procedures, standards, safeguards and checks demanded by these panels.

If there is any doubt about the validity of the nature of a project, careful scrutiny must be undertaken, and formal ethical approval sought. The timescale involved in such vetting may mean that the project is inappropriate as part of a community scheme in the first place.

Involving children

- How will the subjects be chosen?
- Will children have any say in the terms of their involvement in the project?
- Will children be made aware of their selection?
- Do children have the right to refuse?

Many organisations turn to formal settings (for example, schools), or semi-formal settings (for example, youth clubs), in order to recruit children for project work. At this point, convenience may override some ethical considerations. All children have the right to know why they have been invited or selected. Care and sensitivity are needed, especially when talking to those not included. Reasons for involvement or non-involvement need to be clear and reasonable. If other professionals are involved in helping to devise a sample (for example, teachers, youth leaders), criteria for involvement need to be explicit, and not based on judgement of co-operation and perceived intelligence (Holman, 1987). Involving children from less secure backgrounds, or those who are traditionally hard to reach, may be difficult, but this should not be used as an excuse for ignoring their views (Box 5.2). Think about how groups who have little opportunity to express their ideas may be engaged, and how a project could be extended to enable a range of children to be involved. Focusing on difference and diversity may help

to develop projects that involve different groups of children (Kitchen, 2000).

Project workers should attempt to answer all of the children's questions about the project, in terms appropriate to their level of comprehension. Children's right not to take part should be respected. No matter how young, the child's rights supersede those of the investigator. Alderson (1995, p. 21) draws attention to three responses that reflect "good practice" when children ask "do I have to say 'yes'?":

"No. It is up to you whether you take part in this project. No one should feel forced to agree. You do not have to give a reason for saying 'no', although giving a reason may help the project."

"Before you agree you need to feel that the project is worthwhile. If you are not sure what to decide, take time to think. You may want to talk to other people before you decide."

"You can also change your mind, and withdraw from the project at any time. Please tell us if you do so, but again you do not have to say why."

Consent

- Has permission been given for children to take part in the project?

The source of the consent will depend on the project's setting. The informed consent of parents, guardians or those who act in *loco parentis* (for example, teachers, youth leaders) should be obtained before the start of the project and,

ideally, in writing. Informed consent requires the responsible adult to be told about all features of the project that may affect a willingness to participate, and the right of refusal should be respected. The time taken to gain consent and permission should not be underestimated in relation to participation.

Confidentiality

- Will confidentiality be guaranteed?
- Should children be warned about the limits of confidentiality?

Children should be assured that they can express their views and opinions in confidence, without

Box 5.2: Equal opportunities and anti-discriminatory practices

Cohen and Emanuel (1998, p. 16) suggest that equal opportunities and anti-discriminatory practices are about making sure that all young people have opportunities to get involved. "Unless effective policies and practices are developed and used young people from disadvantaged groups will find it difficult to participate actively." In order to ensure inclusiveness, appropriate practices and procedures need to be in place at the outset of a project. Particular groups of people commonly under-represented in regeneration consultation are:

- younger children, particularly those aged under ten
- young girls
- young carers
- young people from black and ethnic minority groups
- young people from particular religious backgrounds
- young people who have had mental health problems
- young people who have difficulty in reading and writing, or with low educational attainment
- young people with a physical or sensory disability, or with learning impairments
- young gay men and lesbian women
- young looked-after people

- young people who have recently left care
- young refugees
- young Travellers
- young people who have been in trouble with the police
- young people who truant, or have been excluded from school
- young people who are homeless
- young people who do not attend youth clubs or projects.

Young people with a disability are often faced with hidden barriers that exclude their participation. For example, young people who are deaf are often prevented from taking part if there is no sign language support. Inappropriate physical settings – such as meetings in buildings with steps, or with no toilet facilities for people who have a physical disability – often prevent the participation of young people who use wheelchairs. Young people who are blind cannot be expected to get their views across without the support of a carer to get them to and from a venue. Beresford (1997) provides a detailed discussion on consulting children with disabilities.

prejudice, and without fear of recourse to parents, guardians or significant professionals. Names and addresses should be protected. Children's permission should be gained before discussions are tape-recorded, and assurance should be given that all transcriptions will be made anonymous. Moore (1986, p. 241) notes the ethical question raised by delving into children's special places, which may be construed as an invasion of privacy: "The investigator runs a risk of breaking an implied trust, inadvertently betraying secret information to siblings, parents and acquaintance."

However, Alderson (1995) points out that no one has an absolute right to confidentiality; and sometimes a breach is justified when a child is considered to be in danger, or at risk of being exploited or abused. Cohen and Emanuel (1998, p. 47) suggest that "the right of confidentiality needs to be balanced against protecting particularly vulnerable people from seriously harming themselves, harming other people or being harmed by other people". In rare circumstances, breach of confidentiality may be justified if a person cannot be persuaded to make voluntary disclosure. "If so the researcher should first try to get the young person to talk to adults who could help or else to agree that the researcher should talk to them" (Alderson, 1995). To breach confidentiality without prior notification is an ethical misjudgment: it may damage trust irreparably, and result in a future denial by the young person.

The nature of the project

- Will the aims of the project be explained to children, and in terms that they can understand?
- Will children be clear about the purpose of the project?

There is a danger that organisations may treat children as objects of research, and not give them sufficient respect and regard when undertaking an investigation (Hammersley, 1995). Time should be taken to explain the basic issues that the project is tackling, and why these issues are important locally.

Practice and commitment

- Will children be clear about the terms and reference of their commitment to the project?
- Is there an acceptable exit strategy?

The length of the project, the amount of time it will involve, the number of sessions, and its methods, all need to be explained. From the outset, there should be a clear agreement between project worker and participant that defines the responsibility of each. If children feel they cannot, or do not want, to commit themselves to the work, their views should be respected. The freedom of the child outweighs the power of the organisation. No pressure should be placed upon a child to participate, and during the course of a project, if a child wishes to disengage, such views should be respected at all times. An acceptable exit strategy should be in place to ensure that those who choose not to continue are not placed in positions of disadvantage.

Safety issues and complaints procedures

- Are there any risks?

No project should involve procedures likely to cause harm of any kind. People carrying out the consultation should have regard to the prevention of accidents, and abusive situations. It is often easy to anticipate physical harm; other kinds of harm may be less easy to predict, and care should be taken to guard against harm of, for example, a psychological nature (including distress; embarrassment; intrusion; loss of esteem). When harm seems a possibility, the project worker must find another means, or abandon the procedure. It is imperative for any organisation to establish child protection procedures in advance of working with young people, or to work with agencies that have them.

Dyk and Kearns (1995) draw attention to the absolute right of “cultural safety”. By this they mean that all children (groups) taking part in a project should not feel threatened or challenged by a project worker who, through inadequate preparation, insensitivity or simple ignorance, may comment unwisely on implicit cultural, ethnic or religious beliefs. All participants need to be aware that if they are unhappy about the way in which the project is being conducted, they have the right to complain. Project workers need to have a clear procedure for fielding and responding to complaints.

Setting of the project

- Where will the project be undertaken?
- Will all children (and adults) be able to formally identify the investigator?

Children should be asked where and when they would like to meet. One-to-one interviews may be difficult or uncomfortable for a young person; similarly, a single project worker working with a group of children may wish to consider pairing. Adult venues and settings may be off-putting to many children, and discourage their involvement. Also, project workers should recognise that children have many other activities and interests they want to pursue, and their co-operation should not be taken for granted. Many projects may involve project workers working with young people in informal settings in public places, away from the home, club and classroom. Valentine (1997) draws attention to a growing societal concern about children’s safety, and the stranger-danger discourse that has heightened (exaggerated) parents’ awareness of risks and dangers to children in the public arena. Many parents consider abduction to be the greatest danger facing primary school-aged children – exceeding traffic accidents, drugs and intimidation by gangs. Project workers should not underestimate the scale and extent of these public anxieties and moral panics. While organisations experienced in working with children provide mandatory guidelines that insist their workers carry with them authenticated means of identification at all times, other agencies, with less day-to-day involvement, may overlook the importance of this matter. Equally, any worker having unsupervised access to children or young people should be police-checked, and have

references taken up. This is not a guaranteed safety net, but it is good practice.

The benefits of the project

- Will the project have direct or indirect outcomes of benefit to children?
- Who owns the results?

With any project, there is a need to ensure that children's expectations are not unduly raised. Organisations should be clear about what resources and support are being offered. At the outset, project workers should make clear the purpose and likely outcome of children's involvement. Openness and honesty with children is vital, so that their hopes are not eventually dashed. The difference between consultation and action needs to be explained, and one-off events – where children are listened to and their opinions valued – differentiated from longer-term commitments to include children. Unless children are provided with a sense of ownership that is real, and not tokenised, they will have little incentive to take the project seriously.

Feedback

- How will the findings and outcomes of the project be given back to the children?

Children who take part in any project deserve to be informed about the results. A common mistake is for an organisation to involve children; raise their interest and expectation, and give no feedback whatsoever. This can be likened to “intellectual rape”: the project worker moves in – often without children's full control – plunders their ideas, and swiftly moves out. In this process,

children are downgraded to little more than tokens.

Care needs to be taken over the manner, form and detail in which information is given back. Children will benefit from being able to understand the results in a form appropriate to their level of comprehension, ability and interest, rather than being presented with a list of indigestible tables and statistics.

Context

- Will the organisation be sufficiently mindful of the social, political and human context of the project when interpreting, or making use of, the results?

Care should be taken to recognise the danger of conceptually homogenising children and their diverse views. There is neither such a thing as “the child”, nor a uniform social category of “children”. There may be convenience in the notion of commonality, but it will bear little resemblance to the experiences and engagement of children with their lifeworlds. Children have divergent childhoods, both in composition and context (Jenks, 1996), and may be distinguished along various axes of gender, race, ethnicity, ability, health, and age. Such differences will have an important bearing on their experiences, and should not be overlooked in an attempt to create a coherent framework for discourse (Saparotti, 1994). When drawing up results, it is important to be clear about what is meant by “children and young people”, and which groups are being, or not being, represented.

These ideas are summarised in Box 5.3.

Box 5.3 Ethical considerations when working with children

- Provide a clear explanation of the purpose of your study, and the reasons for consultation.
- Offer a choice of involvement. Young people should be given an opportunity not to take part. They should be able to decide in private, without peer pressure, or pressure from you or others (for example, parents, teachers, youth workers, etc).
- Establish how information will be collected, and how it will be used.
- Be clear about the terms of reference of children's commitment to the project.
- Guarantee that all views will be respected and taken seriously.
- Do not raise expectations about outcomes that you cannot deliver.
- Assure confidentiality, and be clear about the limits of confidences: for example, that names and addresses will not be used in any reports, and that information given in confidence will not be passed on to others.
- Show appreciation for any participation, and ensure that young people's contributions are fully acknowledged.
- Establish procedures for feedback, paying particular attention to how and when this will happen.

Good practice when working with children

The ethics of project work extends to establishing good methodological practice. When working with children, project workers need to be sensitive to children's powerlessness and vulnerability. Any relationship is bound by power, and this is all the more real when the child is small and the project worker is larger. This section identifies practices and techniques that mitigate the likelihood of there being an unproductive superordinate (project worker)–subordinate (child) relationship, and procedures that will assist in ensuring respect for the rights of children as autonomous people. These ideas are presented as a set of guidelines:

- **Getting the balance right.** Much has been written about the power imbalance in the adult–child relationship in project work (Alcock, 1996; Mayall, 1994; Qvortrup et al., 1994). Not only is there a gap in age, and often a difference in bodily size – there is also an undeniable difference in status. The generational division overarches differences in gender, ethnicity and class. Organisations should be careful not to exploit this delicate relationship. Effective involvement and participation will occur only if children believe in their ability to be heard. Kitchin (2000, p. 40) reminds us that a child's previous relationship with an organisation may not always have been good. Bad experiences with officials in the past may be generalised into an experience with the organisation as a whole. In this context, it is important to provide reassurances about the benefits of taking part, and to explain why children's views are important.

- **Establishing ground rules.** Be clear about what is, and what is not, acceptable behaviour. Emphasise that there is no obligation to take part, and that everyone has the right to withdraw. There are no sanctions for not getting involved. Explain what is to be covered. In a group discussion, point out that each person should respect the views of others; there should be no interrupting; and everyone has the right to express a view. Be sensitive to what it feels like to be in a position where you have little or no power. Keep in mind the effect that these different positions and roles have upon a young person's ability to express themselves. Try to see things from their point of view.
- **Providing a comfortable setting.** The context of the setting in which young people are to be met will have a significant bearing on communication. To maximise the possibility of effective communication, pay attention not only to what is said, but to where the meeting will take place. When working with children (for example, one-to-one interview; focus group), try to sit at their level – not too close, and not too distant – in a quiet and comfortable place. If working in a group, arrange the chairs in a close circle. Ask permission before taking notes or tape-recording. Let children see or hear what has been recorded.
- **Communicating clearly.** Good communication is a skill, and is something that can be worked on. It includes more than just verbalisation. Think carefully beforehand how to manage social interaction with young people (Coleman et al., 1997). Messages sent through gestures, eye contact and posture all have a bearing. Speak clearly, fairly slowly, and not too loudly. Use a lot of eye contact and look interested (Alderson, 1995, p. 31). Avoid jargon, and do not be patronising.
- **Listening and responding.** Respect what children say. When children have misinterpreted the question, or seem to be giving inappropriate answers, do not correct them, or belittle what they say. Respond to what they have been talking about before reintroducing the question or topic. Be willing for there to be give and take in the rhythm of the conversation, and be prepared to give way, even though you may want to move the agenda on.

Box 5.4 sets out some of the basic communication skills needed to work effectively with young people in a collaborative way. These ideas are based on the comments of young people themselves.

Box 5.4: Children's views on communication skills**You should:**

- listen
- have credibility
- have time
- be patient
- share power
- be clear what you are asking of children
- encourage
- be open
- take young people seriously
- be committed to equal opportunities
- recognise that all young people are different
- show respect
- have a sense of humour
- be truthful and honest
- keep confidences
- be approachable
- understand a young person's point of view
- know what you are talking about
- allow children to speak freely
- invite opinions
- give feedback
- be down to earth
- be willing to talk *with* children
- treat children as equals
- be polite
- encourage ownership by children

You should not:

- pretend to be someone you are not
- be aggressive
- nag
- patronise
- use long words and jargon
- be a know-all
- go over the top
- criticise other workers or teachers
- be judgemental
- treat children as if they don't know anything
- be unshockable
- dictate what to do
- ask loads of questions
- pressurise
- get embarrassed
- be a snob
- be competitive
- put people down
- have favourites
- preach at children
- talk down to children
- shout
- rush
- invite your own answers

Source: based on Cohen and Emmanuel (1998); Johnson et al. (1998).

- **Encouraging openness.** Encourage children to ask questions about any aspect of the project. Take time to give them full answers. Remember that each child is doing you a favour.
- **Being flexible.** Children have many things to do in their busy lives. You cannot expect a group of children to give up all of these other activities to immerse themselves fully in your project. Anticipate some lack of interest. Arrange the meeting around a number of different activities or topics, rather than one lengthy exercise. Be prepared to adjust the length of time you spend on each of these. As a rule of thumb, the younger the group of children, the shorter the attention span.
- **Dealing with distress.** In any project, it is possible for a project worker to be faced with a distressed participant. When the participant is a child, the situation (and responsibility) can be all the more challenging. Anticipate the need for dealing with distress.
- **Being prepared to make mistakes.** Not everything will work out as planned. Some things will go wrong. “Honesty is the key – children and young people are remarkably tolerant when *adults* start apologising for making mistakes” (Kitchin, 2000). Box 5.5 provides an example of where good practice resulted, but only as consequence of some initial misjudgement (Matthews et al., 1998).
- **Ending positively.** At the end of a meeting, finish on a positive note. Thank the children for their participation, and stress that without their assistance there would be no project.

Be prepared to spend time with the group, celebrating their input and hard work. Show appreciation for any participation, and ensure that young people’s contributions are fully acknowledged.

Box 5.5: Making mistakes: getting it right in the end

The aim of the project was to investigate where a group of 9–11-year-olds, living in an edge-of-town, public-sector housing estate spent their free time outside their homes, and what they thought about their local area as a place to live. Contact was made with an after-school club (open between 4pm and 6pm) in the locality; all of the children who attended the club (15 members) were invited, and agreed, to take part in the project. The aim was to use in-depth discussion groups as the principal means for uncovering children’s patterns of place use, and their place feelings. Rather than disappoint any of the children – and given the constraint of limited time – it was decided to include all members in one large forum. The intention was that a series of visits would be made over several weeks, and different topics would be explored. After the first week, it was recognised that sessions were not going well. The children found it difficult to articulate their ideas; many were intimidated by the tape recorder, when asked to give their point of view, and others simply wanted to make distracting noises “on air”. The forum was too large to keep everyone involved, and despite all attempts to set clear ground rules, the

Methodological issues when working with children

If young people's perspectives about their neighbourhoods and community needs are to be accurately and keenly appreciated, any

consultation must be young-people-friendly. Cohen and Emanuel (1998) suggest that good practice of this kind is based upon:

- effective two-way communication
- interesting activities

group quickly broke up. An alternative strategy was clearly needed.

This case study draws attention to the importance of getting the methodology right. Giving children a "voice" is deemed to represent a high level of empowerment (Croft & Beresford, 1990; 1993), but this form of expression has an adultist emphasis. Its manifestation in the form of qualitative methods – such as semi-structured interviews or in-depth discussion groups – neglects other aspects of children's communication (art, drama, music, activity). There is a sense in which children need to be seen to be understood, and investigators need to be sensitive to the disparate ways in which children express themselves. In this case, it was decided to use children's own photographs as an alternative way of getting children to express their place feelings (Aitken, 1994; Cunningham et al., 1996). Each child was given a disposable camera and asked to take photographs of places that they liked, disliked, or found scary in the locality. The next week, all cameras were returned (counter to many adult predictions!). At this session, we asked the children to draw pictures of the places they had photographed, and to write

down comments about each place. The following week, the photographs were given back, and each child selected a set of their own photographs to place on posters depicting different aspects of the local area (eg, "places where I like to be alone"; "places where I like to be with friends"). Comments were pinned under each photograph, and a "graffiti wall" (a large poster sheet) enabled children to add other remarks about what it was like to live in the area. The children embraced all of these activities with enthusiasm, and no longer deemed that they were working. Now they were having fun!

Choosing an appropriate methodology is critical to working with children. In this example, by adjusting the methodology and confessing to the children that we had got things wrong(!), our relationship with the children was changed for the better. Children, too, were empowered, and were provided with opportunities to express themselves in ways they found interesting, and which were appropriate to their level of competence.

Source: Matthews, Limb and Taylor (1998).

- activities that tell you what you want to know, but in ways that resonate with the participants
- methods that are sensitive to the ability and experiences of the group
- the right sort of language for the people being consulted
- monitoring that takes visual and verbal cues into account
- checking that questions and responses have been understood.

There are many different ways of consulting and involving children (see, for example, Miller, 1996; Treseder, 1997). Many of these approaches are

encapsulated in the case studies discussed in Chapter 4. This section considers the nature, strengths and weakness of some of these approaches (Table 5.3).

The choice of consultation method will depend on:

- the issue to be addressed
- the kind of information needed
- the time and resources available
- the number of young people to be consulted
- the venue where the consultation is to take place
- the skills and expertise of the project team.

Table 5.3 Methods of consulting with children

Method	Individual	Either individual or group	Group
Observation		Unstructured/structured Interactive/non-interactive	
Oral	Recall of events Oral history Interview	Role-play Street theatre/drama	Focus group In-depth discussions Conferences Citizens' juries Youth forums
Visual	Mapping	Drawing/painting Poster Photography Video Model-building	
Written	Essays Diaries Questionnaires/surveys	Ranking	

Source: based on Boyden and Ennew (1997); Johnson et al. (1998); Fitzpatrick et al. (1998); Kirby (1999); Matthews and Tucker (2000).

Observation

Observation provides a useful way of understanding what is happening in children's lives – for example, where they hang out; what they do there; for how long; with whom.

It also provides insight into important informal social arrangements – for example, whether children hang out in gangs; the nature of local “turf politics”; the distribution of “safe” or “no-go” areas.

Observations are usually kept in a research diary. Before undertaking observations of any kind, the agreement of the children taking part in the project should be gained. There are four common ways of undertaking observations, depending on the nature of interaction and the level of structure:

- **Unstructured observation** depends upon keeping a continuous record of children's activities, conversations, and other forms of communication (such as body language, gesture) throughout the course of a project.
- **Structured observation** is where a record of events and activities is kept, but at set intervals over a given period (for example, where children hang out after school each weekday evening, at hourly intervals).
- **Interactive or participant observation** is where the observer becomes part of the events being studied. The aim is to become “invisible”, so that the observer does not shape events, activities and feelings.
- **Non-interactive observation** is where an observer does not attempt to participate in events, and only records and monitors.

Strengths:

- Can be used to generate initial research questions.
- Can be combined with other methods, to provide a rich inventory of children's feelings, activities, interactions.
- Can be used to verify information derived by other methods.
- Enables children to be observed in “real” settings.
- Does not require children to provide oral, verbal or written information.

Disadvantages:

- Doubt as to whether (an adult) observer can ever be a participant observer in children's lives?
- When adults participate, this may distort children's “normal” behaviour.
- When adults participate, this may distort how they “see” and record events.
- What to record, in how much detail, and in what way – eg, spoken (taped) observations, written notes (at time of the event or after the event).

Oral methods

Role play and **street theatre/drama** include individual or group mimes and improvisations, as well as plays written by, and for performance by, children themselves. Project workers will need to prime the children about the issue to be investigated, and discuss with them what they will need to do in preparation. For example, in Hackney the Children in Neighbourhoods in London team encouraged local children from three estates to set their day-to-day experiences of

community life into a play that they presented to their peers, parents and other interested adults. Activities of this kind can stimulate considerable interest; heighten awareness about how children see their everyday worlds; and provide impetus for further project work, such as focus groups.

Strengths:

- Enjoyment and fun.
- Empowering for children.
- Enables children to talk in their words, and on their own terms, about “sensitive” issues.
- May reveal “unconscious” or deep feelings about issues.
- Can be used in the initial stages of research to fuel interest and provide the basis for other research methods.

Disadvantages:

- Not all children will want to perform in these ways.
- Overacting and self-consciousness.
- Needs space and time.
- Needs clear guidance and instruction.
- When setting up the project, care needs to be taken not to determine children’s responses.
- May uncover disturbing or uncomfortable realities.

Recall methods – such as oral histories and interviews – depend upon children being asked to remember past events, feelings, situations and activities through telling. There are three main categories of recall:

- instant recall, whereby children discuss their immediate responses;

- period recall, whereby children are asked to consider particular periods, usually from 24 hours up to a year;
- time line recall, whereby children are asked to recall events of significance to them, which are then arranged in chronological order along a line. This can be a useful way of placing an individual’s personal history within a community setting, and of providing the basis for future discussion.

Strengths:

- Fun and enjoyment.
- Selective and purposeful.
- Flexibility.
- Useful for recording routine events and sequential activities – for example, where children are allowed to play as they get older.
- Provides insight into feelings and sensibilities.

Disadvantages:

- Memories can be flawed.
- Difficulty in recalling sequencing of events and feelings over a long period of time.
- Over a longer period of time, only major events are remembered.
- Takes time, patience and commitment to do well.

Face-to-face interviews with children can be very good for obtaining detailed information. These conversations can take various forms, with their nature and structure variously controlled by the project worker. Table 5.4 provides a scheme of types and styles of interviews.

Table 5.4: Types and styles of research interviews

		Types		
		Life story	Testimony	Key informant
Styles	Structured	a	b	c
	Semi-structured	d	e	f
	Open	g	h	i

Source: Matthews and Tucker (2000).

In *structured* interviews (a, b, c), everyone is asked the same question; in *semi-structured* interviews (d, e, f), a flexible list of questions is used; and in *open* interviews (g, h, i), the person being interviewed has the greatest control over the range of topics and issues discussed.

Each of these styles of interview can take a different form. *Life-story* interviews (a, d, g) provide a wealth of information on the personal circumstances of an individual child, their family background and friends. Attention can splay across a range of areas, depending on the nature of the consultation, including every-day life; special occasions; social and cultural life; education; leisure and recreation; aspirations; needs and wants; and decision-making.

Testimony interviews (b, e, h) are more focused, and explore a specific aspect of a child's life. These are usually more detailed than life-story interviews, but because they are specific they take less time, and so it is possible to conduct single-issue discussions with a larger number of children.

Key informant interviews (c, f, i) are conducted with children deemed to be knowledgeable (often opinion-leaders), or central to a particular issue. For example, interest may focus on the behaviour of a particular gang of children whose leader may be readily identified; or information may be wanted about a particular youth club or organisation, and a key member is consulted for an informed insight. Key informants may be “key” in opening access to others. Although perceived as “key” people, their ideas may be of interest for the stereotyped ideas they may present, rather than the credibility of the information. Whatever method is used, ideally, the record made of an interview should be played or read back to the participant.

Strengths:

- Provides detailed information.
- One-to-one interviews are often very revealing about thoughts and feelings that children would not be able to express in a group.
- Children can express themselves in their own words.
- Not dependent on literacy, dramatic or artistic skills.
- Children can control the flow of the conversation.
- If conducted in a supportive and respectful manner, interviews can be empowering experiences for children.

Disadvantages:

- Detailed interviews take a lot of time, skill and patience to carry out.
- Children may find it difficult to relax during an interview.

- The process of recording is often difficult. A decision has to be made as to whether to record the interview as it proceeds, through written or taped accounting, or to write it up after the event. In the former case, care must be taken to ensure the naturalness of the responses; whereas in the latter instance, inevitably memory will be flawed.
- Bias can be caused in various ways. For example, children may give answers that they think the interviewer wants to hear; an interviewer may be tempted to give clues as to the preferred answers; it is difficult to treat every child in the same way; and what has been said may be embellished.

A variant of interviewing is to get children to interview themselves. This involves training a number of volunteers, by talking through the purpose of the inquiry. The advantage of this method is that children often find it easier to talk to someone of their own age about an issue; although this needs to be weighed against issues of consistency and reliability. However, Kirby (1999) points out that if the issue is of a very sensitive nature, children may find difficulty in sharing their concerns with their peers. Kirby (1999) provides a full account of involving children as researchers.

Focus groups differ from in-depth discussion groups in that they are held only once. Both settings enable purposeful, facilitated discussion on a specified set of topics between a group of children, within a fixed time frame. These discussions should be tape-recorded or videotaped for later transcription. Seating and venue arrange-

ments are particularly important. Children should be seated comfortably, and the group should not be separated by distances that create power imbalances between them and the project worker. A circle of chairs is often suggested, although children may be happier on cushions, or on the floor. Quiet, well-lit space, where uninterrupted discussion can take place is ideal. The social composition of the group should also be considered. For example, in a mixed-aged group, younger children may feel intimidated and less inclined to speak. The gender balance of the group should also be taken into account, so that the voices of all participants are both heard and valued.

Strengths:

- Informal atmosphere that enables and encourages children to speak out.
- Members can build upon each other's ideas and contribute to mutual learning.
- Helpful for exploring controversial issues.
- Useful for identifying community or shared knowledge about feelings, attitudes and behaviour.

Disadvantages:

- Recruitment is often fraught with difficulties. Reaching disaffected groups of children is problematic.
- Children who volunteer to be involved may hold different views to those who have chosen not to be involved.
- In a group setting, peer pressure may lead children to give answers that they think other members of the group would like to hear, rather than what they, as individuals, truly think.

- Some children may find it difficult to talk in a group, whereas others may try to dominate discussion.
- With a group meeting, confidentiality cannot be assured.

Conferences and citizens' juries provide valuable forums in which young people can get together to express their views. Citizens' juries involve panels or groups of young people posing questions to adult decision-makers about issues of local concern. Such hearings provide an opportunity for genuine dialogue between young people and local politicians. The primary characteristic that distinguishes these hearings from adult-led conferences involving young people, is that young people determine the agenda with questions that they consider as important. Examples of citizens' juries are discussed in Chapter 4.

Strengths:

- Furnish opportunities for personal interaction and mutual learning among participants.
- Encourage capacity-building through young people's involvement in planning and organisation.
- Enable young people's ideas to be heard in a public setting, where their views are more difficult to ignore.
- Provide momentum for longer-term strategies for youth participation.

Disadvantages:

- Participants may not represent the interests of many groups of young people. Likely that only those already linked to youth organisations will take part.

- Public forums are sometimes daunting for those with little prior experience.
- Ensuring that the most appropriate mix of local professionals attend is fraught with difficulty.
- One-off events are sometimes seen as a goal in themselves, and do not necessarily lead to change.

Youth forums are a favoured means for encouraging youth participation in urban regeneration (Fitzpatrick et al, 1998). They take many forms, usually describing groups of young people who come together – often in loosely constituted committees – to discuss issues relating to their communities. Chapter 3 provides an extended discussion on the history of various types of youth forum. Often paralleling adult representative structures, most youth forums comprise young people aged 16 years and above, although there is no reason why younger children should not be encouraged to participate. Adults often establish youth forums because they are perceived to provide real opportunities for participation rather than because of demand from young people themselves. Nevertheless, youth forums provide a chance for continuing involvement by a group of young people, and are especially valuable if democratic principles of representation and accountability are set in place at the outset. Successful forums depend, too, upon the provision of appropriate training for the delegates, as well as objectives that define a clear purpose, and facilitate a sustained momentum (Box 5.6)

Box 5.6: Factors contributing to successful youth forums: evidence from studies of neighbourhood regeneration

- A clear agenda, with specific sets of objectives.
- Opportunities for participants to have fun alongside their forum responsibilities.
- Arrangements for young people to feed their views into the local regeneration scheme on a regular basis.
- Provision of appropriate resources and support.

Source: Fitzpatrick et al. (1998, p. 20).

Strengths:

- Provide a visible structure that enables the ongoing participation of young people.
- Parallel organisations provide opportunities to mimic adult representative structures, and to feed ideas to existing decision-making bodies or committees.
- Enable focused discussion by young people on issues that have direct bearing on their day-to-day lives.

Disadvantages:

- Membership is difficult to sustain. Young people lead busy lives, and youth forums demand a long-term commitment.
- Young people who willingly give up their time to be members may not represent the diversity of the community at large. Often, young people involved in youth forums are selected, or self-selected, rather than elected.

Accusations of a lack accountability and of a lack of democracy need to be addressed.

“Youth forums can actually *disempower* young people in an area if they only represent a certain section of the young population, for example, those from a particular neighbourhood” (Fitzpatrick et al, 1998, p. 20).

- The tendency for youth forums to develop into a close-knit group of friends poses significant barriers to the involvement of other young people.
- Without a strong sense of purpose, or clear sets of values and objectives, momentum can be lost very quickly.
- “Members of a high profile youth forum may receive a disproportionate share of youth work resources in their area” (Fitzpatrick et al, 1998, p. 20).
- Youth forums may be used by adults to legitimise their decision-making, obviating recourse to a wider youth audience.
- There is a concern that youth forums become the only means by which young people’s ideas are fed into regeneration programmes, so excluding other routes and the participation of a broader youth constituency.
- Problems may arise if insufficient attention is given to issues of initiation, process and outcome (Chapter 3).

Visual methods

Visual methods include a range of techniques. *Mapping* is useful, both as source of information, and as a trigger for discussion. For example, children could be asked to draw a map of where they play or hang out; which places they regard as safe or dangerous; and which places they

particularly like or dislike. Alternatively, a large-scale map could be used to get children to reveal this information. Other techniques – such as *drawing*, *making a poster* and *children's own videos* and *photographs* – provide useful insights into how children see and experience their localities. A Polaroid camera provides instant results; disposable cameras provide cheap and reliable alternatives. A careful look at the content (nature, form and scope), and consideration of what is *not* shown, will give glimpses into some of the ways that children make sense of their neighbourhoods. Simple *model-making* is a method that encourages children to think about how local places could be changed, as exemplified through “Planning for Real” (Gibson, 1993).

Strengths:

- Puts young people in control.
- Encourages involvement, engagement and sustained interest.
- Visual stimuli provide triggers for thought and reflection.
- Images are easily shared, creating a common base for discussion.
- Not dependent on verbal skills.
- Issues can be tackled from a young person's perspective.
- Photographs and video capture events and situations that may be overlooked by other forms of recording.
- Pictures often speak louder than words.
- The results are highly portable, and can be used to stage exhibitions for other children, local communities, or professionals (eg, councillors, planners).

Disadvantages:

- Although mapping, drawing and poster-making are quick and easy to do, other techniques are more costly in both time and outlay.
- Training will need to be given in all photographic techniques.
- Without voice-overs, or verbal comments, there is a danger of incorrectly inferring what young people are thinking.
- Utmost care should to be taken to ensure that children are not put at risk when taking photographic records.

Written techniques

These are useful techniques with which to tackle particular information on a defined issue or issues. When using a *questionnaire*, only questions that are immediate and relevant should be asked. Avoid the temptation of asking something just in case! All wording should be kept simple and straightforward. Consider the relative merits of “closed” and “open” questions. Closed questions provide defined sets of criteria for respondents, but there is a danger that the lists or alternatives do not sufficiently mirror children's experiences. Open questions allow children to complete answers in their own words, but subsequent analysis may be coloured by the researcher's own interpretation or bias. Piloting a questionnaire with young people from the same social background as the target group is essential. (Examples of questionnaires recently used by project teams working on the Children 5–16 programme (2000) can be viewed on the searchable bibliographic database at <http://www.regard.ac.uk>). *Diaries* provide an

opportunity to keep an ongoing record of events, and for children to record their views and feelings at the time of entry. *Ranking* is where young people are asked to arrange sets of local issues in order of importance to them. These issues may either have been presented by local organisations, or developed by groups of young people in workshops.

Strengths:

- Can get information from large numbers of children.
- By asking the same questions in the same way, consistency of approach is assured.
- Enables collection of detailed information.
- Can focus on issues that you want to know more about.
- Open questions enable children to express their views in their own words.

Disadvantages:

- Children may feel disempowered by not being in control of the process.
- May not be able to reach those children most wanted for interview.
- Children may not have the reading or writing skills needed to take part.
- Cannot explore issues in depth.
- May be difficult to get reliable answers, particularly if sensitive or personal issues are being addressed.
- Closed questions may not provide sufficient alternatives.

Presenting and feeding back

Whichever method of consultation is decided upon, the way in which feedback is given to participants needs to be thought through. This is more than just a matter of courtesy. Consideration needs to be given to how best to report the findings, and to the most appropriate ways in which to summarise and represent the results.

In some circumstances, a copy of a report may be an acceptable outcome, but most children or interested professionals will not want such detail. A one-page, bullet-point summary of the results is more likely to be of interest. For most young people, a meeting will be the best means and most welcome form of feedback. Where parental permission has been sought, it is often appropriate to provide parents with a summary sheet as well.

Children will want to see and hear about how their contributions have been included in the survey. If drawings or photographs have been used, for example, it may be possible to display many of these images when giving feedback. If data collection took the form of interviews or discussions, direct quotes from these sources will enhance any presentation, particularly if many “voices” are heard. Remember, however, that confidentiality should not be breached, and sensitivity should be shown about what material to use or not use in public meetings. Also, care should be given to protecting contributors’ anonymity – unless permission has been gained from everyone taking part. Some tips for running feedback events are provided in Box 5.7.

Box 5.7: Tips when giving feedback

- Give feedback as soon as possible following data collection – children may forget what the project is about, and will lose interest as time passes.
- Get children involved in helping you to run the event.
- Ensure that all children with whom you consulted are informed about the event.
- Choose a place and time that is convenient and accessible.
- Present your findings in a clear and interesting way – think about your target audience, and make your report accessible (for example, avoid jargon and use plain English).
- Use visual cues – such as photographs or graphics – to illustrate key points.
- Do not read out a long written report.
- Avoid complex tables.
- Ask children to comment on your report.
- Involve children in presenting some of the findings.
- “Active feedback” – where children can further consider the data within an open context – not only sustains attention, but could provide additional insight that might otherwise have been overlooked.
- Ensure that the event is focused, and does not take too much time. (An hour would be a long meeting.)
- Allow the audience to ask questions, or discuss issues.
- Consider ways of keeping interested children engaged in the issue after the event.
- Be prepared to give up your time in order to make the event successful, for the audience has already given up their time to help you.

Continuing barriers to young people’s participation

Fitzpatrick et al. (1998) suggest three main barriers to the full participation of young people in regeneration programmes. These relate to the nature of the schemes; the attitudes of adults; and the characteristics of young people. Each of these poses particular ethical and methodological challenges that need to be addressed if successful partnership working is to be achieved.

The nature of regeneration programmes

Most community renewal schemes are complex and multifaceted, and involve a wide range of agencies from different sectors. These partnerships are commonly meshed together by a bureaucracy of boards and committees. Reporting and monitoring arrangements – particularly those funded through SRB – are intricate, time-consuming, and riddled by jargon and paperwork. Accordingly, decision-making follows formal channels, and is often slow, indulgent, and bound by internal politics. For many young people, processes such as these are perceived as cumbersome

and opaque. Lack of immediacy, and the circuitous nature of management, provide little incentive to get involved.

Also, Fitzpatrick et al. (1998, p. 24) note how “red-tape” and “invisible networks” contribute to the sidelining of young people: “the evidence from the case studies [SRB projects] suggests the danger that young people appear to be offered power, but then find themselves with very little, as negotiation and decision-making takes place behind the scenes”. With little experience of political expediency, partisan mutual adjustment and incrementalism, disillusionment among many young delegates was rife.

Freeman et al. (1999) warn that, to achieve anything like the levels of participation on the upper rungs of Hart’s ladder, future programmes should establish transparent procedures to anticipate the obstacles and barriers that inhibit young people’s involvement. There is now sufficient evidence to suggest what does not work, and it is not acceptable to continue to replicate structures that set up opportunities within which young people will fail. Henderson (1997) contends that being clear from the outset why regeneration partnerships wish to involve young people, and in what ways, is of fundamental importance. Resources of staff time for community work will always be limited, yet knowing how to use them effectively, with realistic and achievable objectives, is key to a successful strategy.

Attitudes of adults

In Chapter 1, some of the major reservations that adults commonly express about children’s participation were discussed in detail. Typically, these revolve around children’s lack of competency and perceived disinterest, and adults’ views that children should be sheltered from adult pressures. Finding ways in which adults and young people can work together is not easy, and to many people may still seem like a radical solution. Part of the difficulty is that many adults find it hard to let go of the power that places them in positions of advantage. Even where adults have attempted to include young people in local decision-making, many mistakes have been made. Inviting young people to the boardroom, or on to a committee, does not equate to full and equitable partnership. In these contexts, adults often expect young people to adopt their practice, language and custom, and are often surprised when many choose to disengage.

Like young people, adults need training in order to understand the potential of others as equal and mutual actors in local decision-making. Davies and Marken (2000) suggest that agencies and professionals need to apply lessons from partnership working in order to develop a shared agenda based on mutual trust. At the very least, training of this kind should address the difficulties posed by lack of understanding of each other’s aspirations, culture, ways of working, constraints and timescales; and the structural inequalities that can create disillusionment, and even withdrawal, among the less powerful players of a partnership.

Box 5.8 Youth of Today

By Becky Povey, Katrina Curley, Preena Mistry,
Amber Timbrell – Birmingham Young People's
Consultation Project

People don't listen to us
They always make a fuss
Why don't they hear
They only interfere
Why don't they listen to us

They don't seem to care
It doesn't seem fair
We don't get a say
Or get our own way
Why don't they seem to care?

Nobody hears our voices
We never have any choices
People make up these rules
To us it seems so cruel
Why doesn't anyone care?

We're the youth of today
We came here especially to say
Please hear our view
Because we're important too

Please will you listen to us!

presented. Patterns of behaviour, and of social opportunity, that confine young people to their immediate neighbourhoods may also restrict their vision, and sense of community spirit (Fitzpatrick et al., 1998).

Wyllie (1999, p. 30) notes how reaching out to those who are the hardest to reach poses a significant challenge if participation is to become truly inclusive. He points out that disaffection and exclusion are social pathogens that arise when “social institutions behave in ways which discourage full integration and young people make choices, however ill-informed. They risk building for themselves a particular kind of lifestyle that compounds their disadvantage”. Good youth work attempts to move these young people away from this destructive spiral, and to provide them with choices that better match their aspirations. Promoting self-esteem, and a sense of greater control over their lives by enabling participation, is part of this developing agenda. Capacity-building of this order takes time, however, and so often falls outside the scope of many current neighbourhood renewal programmes. For Hurley and Duxbury (2000), the way forward is to encourage NGOs with experience of working with disaffected young people to act as “honest brokers” in this process; but this requires new funding packages.

Characteristics of young people

Young people also have characteristics that inhibit their willingness to participate. Not everyone will choose to engage with political processes at a local level – some because of a lack of interest; others because of a lack of confidence; and many through cynicism about the opportunities

Flexible approaches, together with responsive frontline staff, are essential ingredients to effective regeneration strategies. Looking for lessons to improve practice, Duncan and Thomas (2000) suggest that putting young people into the driving seat requires both an early start to build up their confidence, understanding and capacity; and

Box 5.9: Good and bad at partnership working

These ideas do not relate specifically to involving young people, but their sentiments resonate with many of the problems that young people frequently express.

Factors likely to undermine or inhibit partnership working

- Pressure on partner organisations to perform with insufficient or diminishing resources
- Insufficient reward to participants in relation to effort
- Not sharing credit for achievements
- Competition between partners to perform: output-driven nature of contract culture
- Agencies with centralised structures that do not respond well to local needs
- Time-limited nature of most regeneration resources
- *Modus operandi* that preclude newcomers and encourage cliquish behaviour:

Factors likely to encourage partnership working

- Clear vision and commonality of purpose among all partners
- Integrated, comprehensive approach
- Ensuring that all partners and community groups are treated equitably, and provided with appropriate opportunities to respond, according to their needs and volition
- Continuity of policy and of key personnel
- Clear leadership and shared commitment.

Source: based on DETR (2000) and CDF (1999).

community support at all levels, before investment in major resources. Also, as every group of young people is different, it is important to work at that group's own pace, and to recognise the importance of diversity. Experience suggests that the most successful schemes are those that allow a continuous flow of different children to join in, as others pass through and move on.

Conclusion

With the advent of the National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal, there is an increasing onus on local authorities to establish plans that will draw young people into joined-up community regeneration programmes. This is a significant challenge, especially given the recent findings of Fitzpatrick et al. (1998, p. 27) that, to date, "young people's impact on regeneration initiatives and projects has, on the whole, been minor and limited to youth-specific issues

rather than matters affecting the community as a whole” (Box 5.10). Getting young people involved depends on using methodologies guided by sound ethical principles, appropriate and sensitive to their needs, and which recognise their diversity of interests, backgrounds and experiences. Enabling participation in community planning also involves some adults relinquishing power and opening up structures in ways that are challenging to current practice. Willow and Dugdale (2000) suggest that for some professionals these moves will not be easy. Youth workers and community development workers may already be ahead of the process, but there

are many others who have yet to be won over, and who may be highly resistant to change. Johnson et al. (1998, p. 247) warn that “those who work in institutions where they have authority over children (eg, teachers; residential care staff) will not easily give up any power because they fear it will be at their expense”. Many local government officers, too, have little experience of working with young people in this way, and may be slow “to understand children’s needs and concerns or understand the barriers that impede their involvement” (Johnson et al. (1998) (Box 5.10).

Box 5.10: Assessing young people’s impact on regeneration programmes

Fitzpatrick et al. (1998, pp. 28–29) suggest that young people’s impact on regeneration programmes can be assessed by using a simple schema, shown below as a checklist for future planning. It is based on three dimensions: a) the importance of issues over which control is exerted; b) whether or not established

practice is changed; and c) the degree of change that is achieved through youth participation. Points a) and b) define a hierarchy of impact, ranging from changing a regeneration strategy (most impact) to influencing the development of non-strategic minor projects (least impact).

	Development of minor projects (least impact)	Development of new projects	Changing existing projects (moderate impact)	Influencing the development of a new strategy	Changing an existing strategy (most impact)
Major influence					
Moderate influence					
Minor influence					

However, changing local decision-making structures, without changing social and political values, will achieve little. For, as Johnson et al. (1998, p. 247) suggest, a new structure comprising the same people with unchanged attitudes does not constitute progress. Yet a

current structure involving professionals with changed perceptions of young people can be made to work. Inglis (1998) contends that such value changes will need to permeate all levels of an institution before children's participation becomes an unquestionable matter of routine practice.

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6 Ways forward: strengthening the active participation of children and young people

Summary of Recommendations

- 1 The UK Government and devolved administrations in Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland should develop concerted initiatives for young people's civic and political participation at national, regional and local levels.
- 2 To ensure children's civil, political, cultural, economic and social rights, the UK should be fully compliant with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). This will change children's right to participate in democratic processes – particularly at a local level through community participation – from being a privilege bestowed by enlightened adults to an entitlement, as equal members of society.
- 3 Enhanced opportunities for the routine involvement of young people to work alongside adults, as equal partners in Local Strategic Partnerships should be developed as a matter of course.
- 4 Local regeneration partnerships should ensure that regeneration packages are based upon a variety of approaches to consultation, in order to ensure inclusiveness and young people's involvement at all stages, including bid preparation, delivery and succession. Before investment in major resources takes place, sufficient time should be allowed to build up confidence, understanding and capacity among diverse groups of young people.
- 5 Flexible training programmes for professionals and residents should be developed, which encompass the basic principles of young people's participation; provide information on the UNCRC; and address local obstacles and barriers to empowerment. Young people should be supported and trained in how to engage with and negotiate with adults.
- 6 Practices should be established that ensure the active participation of all young people, not just the most articulate, or the most experienced at joining in.
- 7 For effective community development, local regeneration strategies should entrust NGOs with sufficient delegated responsibility to support and broker the development and implementation of locally joined-up plans.
- 8 An independent Commissioner for Children's Rights in England should be established, with the aims of influencing law, policy and practice; advising government, public authorities and NGOs; conducting enquiries; and monitoring progress.
- 9 Best practice should be shared between England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland in the development of effective government structures and processes for children



Introduction

“To wish is little: we must long with the utmost eagerness to gain our end.” (Ovid)

Children comprise a subaltern class within society; they have neither chance nor opportunity to challenge the conventions of dominant ideology from within, or the practices and processes that lead to their marginalisation (Oakley, 1994). Unlike other outsider groups (women; people with disabilities; minority ethnic groups), who have mobilised their own social movements to assert their political identity, children need allies.

However, for many adults, promoting children’s rights – especially beyond the home – fundamentally challenges what the Stainton-Rogers have termed the “masonry of the mature” (1992, p. 146). Wyness (2000, p. 24) describes how adult conceptions rest on “the notion of a child as a fixed material object with little or no social status”. From this viewpoint, the child is invisible, and “childhood is a transitional phase which is only complete once children enter adulthood”. In effect, children are “not part of the social world that counts”.

Despite the UNCRC (1989), children form a structurally disenfranchised group within UK society – especially given that “institutions and politicians are by and large not accountable to children” (Wyness, 2000, p. 25). Accordingly, children are rarely provided with opportunities to make their voices heard as a matter of course, and they are not expected to have a claim within the

public realm (Matthews and Limb, 1998; Matthews et al., 1998; 1999).

Against this background, the involvement of children and young people in decision-making in their neighbourhoods, and their involvement in community regeneration, is inevitably limited. Despite the proclaimed wish of government and local authorities to involve them, attempts to do so are fraught with difficulties, and are in many cases half-hearted. The societal tendency to view children simultaneously as demon and angel, demeaned and ennobled, is clearly seen in neighbourhood strategy where efforts to provide for children (often without meaningful consultation with the children themselves) are counter-balanced by containment strategies for controlling the “delinquency” of children and young people.

This chapter offers a set of recommendations that, if taken up, provide an agenda that will strengthen the active social commitment of young people. Implicit is an assumption that participation delivers “a way out of the problem of the ‘problematization’ of young people” (de Winter, 1997, p. 159), and sets in place a strategy that shifts attention towards their potential. For this reason, a participation policy targeted exclusively at disaffected young people is undesirable; for if society is to be truly integrative, and citizenship is to become both an achievable and a desirable goal for all, it is important that participation is regarded as an indispensable condition. There is no denying, however, that if highly marginalised young people are to take part, and their voices are to contribute to

neighbourhood regeneration, careful consideration and investment needs to be given by decision-makers concerned with community development (Chapter 5).

The proposed agenda depends upon the contribution and joint working of government departments; public authorities; local communities, and children themselves, brokered through the mediation of NGOs with substantial experience of working with children. Only through an alliance of this kind will children be repositioned within society.

At the Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers on Youth Participation and the Future of Civil Society (1997), member states were reminded of their commitment to enabling participation, and fostering a resolutely positive perception of young people as a resource for the constant renewal of democratic society. It was stressed that, through the implementation of integrated youth policies at a national level – that engage all young people, including those most disadvantaged – there would be outcomes that would ensure social cohesion and secure the values of multiculturalism. Alarm was expressed at recent trends in non-participation – to such an extent that it was felt that community life in Europe was undergoing a genuine crisis. Among its many recommendations, the Council suggested that Governments of member states should work harder to promote appropriate structures for young people's civic and political participation at national, regional and local levels, in accordance with the articles of the UNCRC.

Recommendation

The UK Government and devolved administrations in Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland should develop concerted initiatives for young people's civic and political participation at national, regional and local levels.

A strategy for young people's civic and political participation

Within the UK, moves toward young people's participation are hesitant. However, the devolved governments of Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland are taking some steps toward consulting children and young people in matters of political decision-making, for example through one-off consultations on specific pieces of legislation, and through the setting up of consultative bodies of young people to which the new institutions can refer. In England similar experiments are taking place and the Children and Young People's Unit in the Department for Education and Employment will be consulting with children and young people.

Through its commitment to the notion of "democratic renewal", Whitehall has worked with local authorities in an attempt to revitalise popular engagement with democratic processes at the local level. Although democratic renewal has provided a considerable impetus for local authorities to develop consultation and direct engagement with young people, it stops well short of providing an overall societal framework for children's participation, even at local level.

It is unlikely, too, that such a framework will be developed through the recent historic decision to incorporate the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) into UK law. While setting in place a legislative framework that establishes a culture of human rights in UK society, it does not, as a matter of course, establish a comprehensive platform for the full recognition of children rights. Ruxton (1998, p. 63) suggests an alternative way forward, building on the model of the incorporation of the ECHR. He contends that, in order to ensure children's civil, political,

cultural, economic and social rights, consideration should be given to the incorporation of the UNCRC into UK law. Only in this way will children be raised on to the political stage as equal partners. At the very least the UK should be fully compliant with the principles of the UNCRC.

The active involvement of young people in democratic processes – particularly at a local level through community participation – is seemingly fuelled by a range of principles. Chapter 1 presented three alternative arguments. These are:

Box 6.1: Benefits of empowerment through participation

- **A voice and an influence.** Empowerment offers young people a level of influence and an element of choice about the kind of provision offered by a service. It helps them be clear about and understand their own wants and needs.
- **Updated services.** The process of empowerment impels services to meet changing needs that arise from the everyday interests and problems defined by young people.
- **Child development.** By being empowered, young people experience many new aspects of their own potential, including the dilemma of responsibility, and the ability to prioritise.
- **Social and political development.** Empowerment provides opportunities to acquire the skills of debate, communication, negotiation, and individual or group decision-making. In itself it represents the first steps in learning about how individual, group and even national politics works.
- **Creators not consumers.** Through empowerment, young people are encouraged to be active in creating services that they use, rather than being passive consumers of services provided for them. It follows that any such service must be an agent for social change, and not one for social control.
- **Participation in wider society.** Young people with experience of participation in a safe environment will understand the process of empowerment and be better prepared to participate in decision-making as they enter into wider society.
- **Democracy.** The promotion and practice of a service that is open and accountable to its users encourages democratic procedures and respect for the principles of democratic life.

Source: based on Tansey (1997).

participation as a means for education for citizenship; participation as a strategy for fitting young people into society; and participation as a way of strengthening young people's status in relation to adults. Whichever view is taken, all suggest that participation is an essential and moral ingredient of any democratic society – enhancing quality of life; enabling empowerment; encouraging psycho-social well-being; and providing a sense of inclusiveness. Tansey (1997) identifies seven benefits when young people get involved (Box 6.1)

Recommendation

To ensure children's civil, political, cultural, economic and social rights, the UK should be fully compliant with the UNCRC. This would change children's right to participate in democratic processes – particularly at a local level through community participation – from being a privilege bestowed by enlightened adults to an entitlement, as equal members of society.

Developing strong Local Strategic Partnerships

With the advent of the National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal (NSNR), new opportunities are being set in place with the aim of enabling Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) to tackle social exclusion – including that experienced by young people – through multi-layered, joined-up activities. Each LSP is envisaged as an equal partnership of many players.

However, Taylor (2000) suggests that unless the lessons of experience are fully taken into account, the NSNR will flounder in the same way as many other 'big ideas' of the past. She puts forward a series of recommendations that if adopted would provide a set of guiding principles to assist this new round of community action, some of which are shown in Box 6.2.

Young people are increasingly regarded as important players in any neighbourhood management plan and the NSNR provides real opportunities to strengthen their active participation. Yet, recent evidence suggests that the current enthusiasm for listening to young people has not been effectively translated into procedures that enable young people to take a full and active part in regeneration decision-making within their communities. Often young people are only "bit-part players", frequently sidelined through the insensitive actions of local bureaucracies (see Chapter 5). Cronin and Smith (1999) suggest that, for many regeneration programmes, it is deemed both sufficient and successful if children are the indirect beneficiaries of community action – for example, benefiting through their parents achieving employment, or through improved childcare services. In this scenario children are relegated to little more than passive recipients of remedial actions designed to counter their growing problems as they get older. Typically, too, when young people are involved in regeneration programmes, they are often engaged in one-off projects that involve only a small number of their peers, and which are only loosely connected to other local strategies (see Chapter 4). Although worthwhile in their own

Box 6.2: Effective neighbourhood management

- Joined-up strategy and action must be driven through all levels of public policy-making and provision – from top to bottom, from back room to front line – with transparency and multi-layered accountability as the guiding principles.
- A strong infrastructure is required, in order to spread rather than protect knowledge, resources, skills and learning.
- Frameworks for performance measurement, regulation and audit, must be broad enough to allow local autonomy.
- There will be no sustainable change unless communities themselves are given the power and responsibility to take action.
- A long-term perspective is essential if integrated approaches to social inclusion are to be sustainable: enough time must be allowed to develop capacity and commitment in both communities and local authorities.
- A strong and unequivocal message from central Government is required, if past barriers to change are to be overcome.

Source: Taylor (2000).

right, fragmentation and short-termism of this kind neither contributes to a sustainable culture of participation, nor provides the basis for the development of a holistic, well-integrated local plan.

To date the extent of young people's involvement in regeneration programmes, and the range of their achievements, are modest. Where young people are engaged there is often a sense that their participation represents activity that is both novel and radical, and beyond the mainstream (see Chapter 3). Yet, as we saw in Chapter 2, young people's strong socio-spatial dependency on their immediate localities – a function of limited income, constrained transport opportunities, and social control – means that their well-being is

more closely tied to the condition of their neighbourhoods than that of many adults. Accordingly, within areas of profound social disadvantage, young people routinely encounter the vicissitudes of multiple deprivation more acutely than many of their elders. Without opportunities to set their own priorities, it is unlikely that young people's needs will be met.

Recommendation

Enhanced opportunities for the routine involvement of young people to work alongside adults, as equal partners in Local Strategic Partnerships should be developed as a matter of course.

Fitzpatrick et al. (1998, p. 33) propose several other reasons for young people's lack of influence and marginality:

- *Insufficient channels of communication.* Youth councils are commonly perceived as the panacea to the problem of enabling young people to have a voice. Although, if appropriately convened, managed and resourced, youth councils provide an effective channel of communication for some young people, they should not be used to restrict other means of interaction. Yet, in many cases, youth councils are the only means for accessing young people's views. There is a danger too, that youth councils separate rather than integrate young people – isolating their perspectives from those of others (see Chapters 3 and 5).
- *Lack of clarity of purpose/lack of sustainability.* Many schemes are not sufficiently clear as to why and in what way they want to involve young people. Lack of clarity of purpose opens the way for the development of competing agendas. For example, for many youth workers, the self-development of young people is seen as a sufficient goal. For regeneration professionals, however, transferable skills and employability are often seen as more virtuous. Top-down strategies of either kind obfuscate the real needs of young people, creating opportunities that are perceived to be unattractive and thus, seldom sustainable.
- *Under-resourcing and the performance-indicator culture.* In most cases, insufficient resources are provided to ensure the full participation of young people. Getting young people to take part requires time, and cannot be achieved “on the cheap”. The problem is compounded

by a performance culture that monitors success through the “ticking” of indicators. If young people can be shown to have been consulted – no matter how few or to what effect – this is often sufficient as a quality assurance measure. Lack of sustainability is an almost inevitable outcome.

- *Failure to disseminate “good practice”.* Despite a growing body of evidence about what works or does not work in relation to young people's participation in regeneration programmes, many of the same mistakes are made repeatedly (see Chapters 4 and 5). There needs to be a greater openness and transparency among regeneration partnerships, so that “good practice” can be identified readily, and lessons transferred effectively. Duncan and Thomas (2000) suggest that, without major shifts in institutional cultures, it is likely that young people's participation will continue to be largely tokenistic. They contend that, if strong local partnerships are to be set in place, new forms of local management are needed, imbued with the values of participation, and reinforced by language and behaviour that does not disadvantage the less powerful.

Recommendation

Local regeneration partnerships should ensure that regeneration packages are based upon a variety of approaches to consultation, in order to ensure inclusiveness and young people's involvement at all stages, including bid preparation, delivery and succession. Before investment in major resources takes place, sufficient time should be allowed to build up confidence, understanding and capacity among diverse groups of young people.

Enhancing co-operation between children, young people and adults

Recognising difference and diversity are important aspects of any neighbourhood regeneration programme, including the various needs and wants of children, young people and adults. In Chapters 2 and 3 we discussed how conflicts of interest may arise, particularly over the way in which neighbourhood space is designated and used. For many groups of children and young people 'the street' provides an important social venue where they can mix and meet with friends and where things happen. For many adults, however, gatherings of young people out-of-doors

are often perceived as threatening and discrepant, especially so as the public domain has been redefined and increasingly (re)presented as an extension of adults' own private space. Without opportunities for dialogue, misunderstandings and contrariety are likely to persist.

Fitzpatrick et al. (1998, pp. 32-33) draw attention to the needs and concerns most often mentioned by young people, many of which are being addressed only partially through the current round of regeneration programmes (Box 6.3). Essentially, what many young people are saying, is that they want to be considered as citizens now, and not treated as future adults.



Box 6.3 What young people want from regeneration programmes

- **Better leisure opportunities.** Priority given to improving the quality of local leisure facilities.
- **Enhanced intergenerational understanding.** Greater emphasis on improving relationships with local adults.
- **Improved job opportunities.** A shift from projects designed to improve employability to a focus on job creation.
- **More attention given to over 20s.** Greater consideration given to young people over 20 years, who are frequently written off as a “lost cause”.
- **A focus on policing practice.** Less emphasis on projects designed to contain or divert young people, and more consideration given to policing practice.
- **Projects for today.** More focus on addressing young people’s needs in the here and now, rather than seeing them as future adults.

Source: based on Fitzpatrick et al. (1998).

These are important priorities. The fact that they do not include issues like health, homelessness and education also indicates the need to consult with young people on adult-led priorities too, and to balance these differing priorities into a well-integrated holistic strategy.

Both adults and young people need to learn how to co-operate better together. To achieve this, training is one of the most important elements of local capacity-building (Henderson and Mayo, 1998). Although good work is already in place, much more could be achieved to strengthen community action. For example, in order to foster a culture where the participation of children is regarded as normal and routine, it is important that information on the spirit and purpose of the UNCRC is given greater priority in the training of all professionals, not just those who interface

with young people. Ruxton (1998) recognises that, while it would be impractical to translate the UNCRC into all of the 200 languages spoken by minority ethnic groups in the UK, further steps could be taken to ensure its availability in the languages of the larger minority communities. To date, few programmes appear to recognise that residents will be starting at different levels; learning in different ways; and looking for different skills. Diversity of this kind means that a range of different training programmes is needed within a locality. Residents would also benefit from social education programmes that proselytise the virtues of inclusiveness and integration. Equally children and young people require support and training in negotiating with adults who may range from local residents committees to officials from the local council.

Recommendation

Flexible training programmes for professionals and residents should be developed, which encompass the basic principles of young people's participation; provide information on the UNCRC; and address local obstacles and barriers to empowerment. Young people should be supported and trained in how to engage with and negotiate with adults.

If young people are to be seen as active agents in their own right, they too have responsibilities in terms of getting connected. For example, young people should consider the kinds of barrier that they commonly present to adults, particularly through language (Fitzpatrick et al. 1998). In addition, they should be sensitive to notions of difference and diversity, and recognise that there is not one voice of youth waiting to be heard. Similarly, in their attempts to get adults to listen, contact with their own peers should not be lost.

Developing effective strategies for young people's participation depends on ensuring that all young people are provided with an opportunity to have a say – not just those who are the most articulate, or the most experienced at joining in. Reaching out to those who are the hardest to reach – regardless of age, sex, (dis)ability and social background – is not going to be easy, but it is a challenge that should not be dismissed as too difficult. There is now sufficient evidence of successful practice (see Chapter 4) whereby adults, through appropriate methodologies (see Chapter 5), have engaged groups with little or no previous experience of taking part. The work of the statutory youth service, and of NGOs, demonstrate what can be achieved through

outreach youth work in non-conventional settings. Strengthening the active social commitment of all young people not only provides a way out of the problem of problematising young people (de Winter, 1997), but also offers a way forward towards building healthier communities.

Recommendation:

Practices should be established that ensure the active participation of all young people, not just the most articulate, or the most experienced at joining in.

The role of NGOs in community regeneration

NGOs in the UK are well placed to perform a range of roles in enabling effective community regeneration. Their independence from local bureaucracies and central Government, together with their extensive experience of working directly with children and other community groups, sets them in a strong mediating position. The Council of Europe (1997) suggests that NGOs have an important part to play in opening the way for real dialogue between political authorities and citizens, by exerting democratic influence on the processes of civic life, and rebuilding social cohesion within communities.

Recent reviews of community regeneration programmes lend weight to these suggestions.

Taylor (2000) points out that, to date, there are few examples of the kind of comprehensive approach to neighbourhood management

envisaged by the NSNR. Most strategies are either service-led (top-down) – whereby local providers come together through various means in order to join up their service delivery, with the hope of triggering community regeneration – or community-led (bottom-up) – a scenario in which community organisations are the driving force for change. Taylor argues that these two approaches need not be mutually exclusive: instead, the most effective action is likely when both approaches are combined. Here, NGOs are ideally placed to act as “honest brokers”, as envisaged by Hurley and Duxbury (2000). Their independence assures accountability to a range of different stakeholders, without political strings, and their front-line workers are already highly skilled in roles of “mediation, negotiation, brokerage, networking, conflict resolution and problem-solving” (Taylor, 2000, p. 6). Furthermore, as Willow and Dugdale (2000) have shown, for the most part they also have the trust and respect of young people (see Chapter 4).

Recommendation:

For effective community development, local regeneration strategies should entrust NGOs with sufficient delegated responsibility to support and broker the development and implementation of locally joined-up plans.

Effective government structures

There is still much to be done to institute democratic structures that would open the way to real dialogue between political authorities and young people. The context for local regeneration strategies is closely related to overall governmental structures for children and young people. For example, an independent children’s rights commissioner for each of the four countries of the UK and better governmental structures for better co-ordination of children’s policy are much needed.

Wales has now established a Child Rights Commissioner and Commissioners are on the agenda in Scotland and Northern Ireland. However, in England, this is not the case. Despite the publication of Sir Ronald Waterhouse’s report (2000) on abuse in Welsh children’s homes – which raised hopes that the Labour administration, with a manifesto committed to building a human rights culture and modernising government, would appoint a children’s commissioner for England – the office has not materialised. Instead, under the new Care Standards Act, England will have a Children’s Rights Director, with a portfolio that focuses on the 200,000 children living away from home, including those in residential care and boarding schools. This means, however, that the other 11 million children aged under 18 years and living in England will remain without an equivalent representative voice (Roberts, 2000). Initially, the Government encouraged the Welsh Assembly to follow the same route, but this proposal was rejected in favour of a Welsh

Commissioner with a broader role relating to all children. However, the Commissioner will not deal with all policy areas affecting children and there are lingering concerns that the office will lack the power to go to the heart of children's welfare. This is because the Commissioner will report to the devolved Assembly, which has limited powers, rather than to national policy makers in Westminster.

Pressure for a Commissioner with strong statutory powers for England is being kept up through the newly created Office of Children's Rights Commissioner for London. Its new Director is currently preparing a report on the state of London's 1.74m children and, together with the new office of the mayor, drawing up a regional strategy. However, attempts to establish the post of Commissioner for England through Parliamentary Private Members' Legislation recently failed after a lack of cross-party support.

The Government has announced that it intends to monitor developments in Wales before taking a decision on an equivalent office in England. The situation now is that children in England lack a strong, independent voice, and there is no imminent likelihood that England will follow the 18 other countries that already have in place commissioners or ombudsmen (see Chapter 1).

Recommendation:

An independent Commissioner for Children's Rights in England, should be established, with the aims of influencing law, policy and practice; advising Government, public authorities and NGOs; conducting enquiries; and monitoring progress.

A recent government report from Policy Action Team 12 (HM Treasury, 2000) drew attention to the fragmentation of current policy thinking and service delivery targeted at young people, with at least eight Government departments involved (see Chapter 3). It found that a significant minority of young people continually faced a range of problems in areas of family life; accessing education, sports, leisure facilities and housing; as well as being liable to poorer health, and being more likely to be victims and perpetrators of crime. Although the scale and nature of these problems varied, black and minority ethnic community young people were disproportionately affected. While it was recognised that recent initiatives had begun to ease some of these problems – for example, through the joined-up work of Youth Offending Teams and Drug Action Teams – a more co-ordinated response was advocated. Among the recommendations was that new structures were needed to secure better co-ordination of policies and services. Likewise, there should be a shift from crisis intervention towards prevention achieved through a closer link between young people and how services (for example, housing, health, leisure, education, benefits and volunteering) are designed and delivered.

The Government has moved towards meeting these recommendations by establishing a Unit for England with responsibilities for co-ordinating children's overall affairs. In July 2000, a Children and Young People's Unit¹ was set up within the DfEE, backed by a cross-governmental committee. This differs from its counterparts, such as the Women's Unit and the Social Exclusion Unit, which are anchored in the Cabinet Office (see also Chapter 1). There is still a gap in locating responsibility for children's policy in connection with the reserved powers for the UK as a whole. A Minister for Young People in England has been created, with the day-to-day responsibility for the Unit, and the co-ordination of the Government's strategy on vulnerable children and young people.

Developments in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland also represent important and positive changes to the ways in which young people are recognised in society. One inevitable consequence of devolution is the variety of offices and ministerial roles for children from different parts of the UK, and it is important that successful models and best practice are replicated throughout the four countries. To date, the commitment given by the new Scottish Ministry to introduce a comprehensive "child-proofing"

¹ The Unit will co-ordinate policies on children and young people; aim to prevent poverty and disadvantage in children and young people; and manage the new £450m Children's Fund. It supports a new Cabinet Committee on Children and Young People's Services, chaired by the Chancellor of the Exchequer. Although based in the DfEE, the Unit is made up of people from a wide range of backgrounds across the public, private and voluntary sectors. The Unit reports to the new Minister for Young People.

policy for all Scottish Office Departments – whereby all legislation is to be monitored for its impact on children – is a model that has not been replicated elsewhere in the UK.

Recommendation

Best practice should be shared between England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland in the development of effective government structures and processes for children

And finally...

The fundamental principle underpinning this book is that children as citizens have the right and entitlement to be involved in shaping their own communities, now and for the future. Only through regular participation will children develop an understanding of their own competencies; gain a sense of communal responsibility; and become equipped with the skills needed to plan, design, monitor and manage their own physical and social environments. However, strengthening the active social commitment of young people comes neither easily nor automatically – especially when objections relating to children's competence or lack of interest are commonplace. Social barriers of this kind say a great deal about those who object. Most of today's adults grew up at a time when children's rights were not taken seriously, and it is not surprising that those without much experience of having a say themselves should foresee problems and difficulties for subsequent generations. Archard (1993) develops this observation, by suggesting that what is seen as childlike in children depends on what is viewed as

Box 6.4: Children and active citizenship

A citizen must be educated both to and in democracy. Education must have a certain content, comprising not just an introduction to the principles and practices of democratic government, but also an inculcation of the civic virtues – tolerance, respect for others' rights, and non-violence, among others. At the same time, children must learn democratic participation through practice. That practice should not simply commence at the

age of majority, and thereafter be only quinquennial. There is no reason why both the family and the school should not be the sites for exercises – even if limited – in self-government. Active democratic citizens are not born overnight, when a certain age is reached.

Source: Archard (1993, p. 164).

adult by adults. Given that child-rearing reflects the values and priorities of adult society, it is self-evident that, if children are deemed as incompetents, they will be brought up in a way that reinforces this stereotype (Box 6.4). Central and local government have a crucial role to play in order to overcome social prejudice of this kind. Without a combination of political will, and the development of effective political and civil structures – particularly at a neighbourhood level – young people have little chance of being heard within the political landscape. Yet, as others have been suggesting for some time (Hodgkin and Newell, 1996), there is still a long way to go within the UK before children's participation becomes normal and routine.

Much is happening, however, and there appears to be a momentum for change. For example, the reports of the Policy Action Teams, and the development of the NSNR, have highlighted

the importance of involving young people in joined-up community regeneration programmes, sustained through local partnerships involving public, private and voluntary agencies. Equally, the placing of citizenship on the National Curriculum has reinvigorated the social education debate. Yet, developing opportunities for social change is, of course, not just a matter for politicians and local bureaucrats: it depends on us all. If too much is imposed from above, experience has shown that young people will not get involved, and local regeneration programmes will flounder. Much more needs to be done to widen the debate about children's participation within the UK, so that it becomes a compelling issue, not just for professionals, but for all adults and all communities. Success depends on young people themselves having an opportunity to take responsibility to make things happen, so that community empowerment means real power, not just another case of tokenism.

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