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# The Problem with Community Cohesion

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## **Abstract**

*It is ten years since the Civil Disturbances took place in Bradford, Burnley and Oldham. After these events Community Cohesion was introduced and this concept has recently become progressively at the forefront in public policy debates. The term was effectively developed as a direct response to the civil disturbances in 2001 as Oldham, Burnley and the City of Bradford were at the epicentre of disorder at this time. The civil disturbances have widely been understood by central government as resulting from a lack of social cohesion. The concept of community cohesion is seen, by central government, to be the solution to solving the issues of segregation among communities. This paper critically examines, from a policy context, the debates around community cohesion. Drawing on qualitative research conducted in Oldham in Greater Manchester, the paper presents an insight into how community cohesion is perceived by policy makers and residents.*

**Key Words:** Central Government, Civil Disturbances, Community, Community Cohesion, New Labour, Multiculturalism, Local Government, Oldham, Regeneration, Segregation, Social Capital and Social Cohesion.

**Biographical note:** **Jamie Halsall** is Senior Lecturer and Course Leader in Social Sciences in the Department of Behavioral Sciences and Social Sciences at Huddersfield University. In 2003 Jamie gained a BA (Hons) degree in Geography from Edge Hill University. The following year he gained a Masters degree in the Geographies of Globalisation and Development. In 2010 he completed his Doctorate of Philosophy while studying at the University of Liverpool. In March 2011 he became a Fellow of the Higher Education Academy. Jamie Halsall's research interests lie in: Community Cohesion, Civil Disturbances, Ethnicity and Urban Regeneration.

## **Introduction**

Since the election of New Labour in 1997 the word community has returned to the social and political agenda. Over the last 50 years there have been changes in the phrasing and terminology used when referring to community. In the 1970s the popular term was 'community,' and by the 1980s the phrase 'social cohesion' was brought in. Fundamentally, social cohesion was put in place to tackle divisions within communities. Following the millennium, tensions between the white and British Asian communities became more evident. During the spring and summer of 2001, for example, civil unrest erupted in England's northern mill towns. The violent community disorder was described as some of the worst in 20 years (Kundnani, 2007) and involved hundreds of, mainly young, people. The incidents involved the intervention of over 400 police and caused millions of pounds worth of damage. In total 395 people were arrested in conjunction with the rioting (Denham, 2001). To many it was a blatant reminder of the established racism and cultural intolerance in Britain (Amin, 2002). The cause of the troubles has been extensively debated. It was generally agreed that each disturbance was motivated by an intervention from the British National Party (BNP), British Asian youths and the police. When the media reported these disturbances they highlighted racial tensions. There were reports of 'no-go areas' emerging between British Asians and whites (Bagguley and Hussain, 2008).

After the disturbances, independent panels were set up by the Home Office to investigate what were the main causes of the conflicts. In each inquiry it was argued that communities were effectively living parallel lives, which was seen to be both a failure within the communities themselves, and of social policy in general, citing 'social segregation' as a contributory factor. In each independent report the language was strong and clear. Ouseley (2001) was alarmed that some parts of Bradford were drifting 'towards self-segregation' and was concerned that 'white flight' and 'middle class' people were moving 'out of the city' and 'leaving behind an underclass of relatively poor white people and visible minority ethnic communities' (Ouseley, 2001, p.9). Moreover, Ouseley (2001) went on to state that if this trend continued it was almost inevitable that the British Asian and the white communities would become even more segregated in terms of social and economic indicators. In 2001, following the civil disturbances which took place in Bradford, Burnley and Oldham, the term 'community cohesion' was introduced. What is relatively important about the concept of community cohesion is that it is widely regarded as the new framework for governing race relations in Britain.

From this point forward there has been a shift in central government policy. The historical events since 2001 have brought about a fundamental change in central government policy as policies of ‘social cohesion’ have been discarded and have been replaced by ‘community cohesion’ policies. In essence, community cohesion is seen to be a potential problem-solver regarding segregation between ethnic minority groups and the white population. The Cattle Independent Review Report (2001) defined community cohesion as a set of values and shared challenges that endeavoured to develop trust and hope in a community.

Since the introduction of community cohesion there have been numerous written and debated contributions (Kundnani, 2007; Flint and Robinson, 2008). This paper argues that local residents and local policy makers do not view the concept of community cohesion with confidence. They are cynical about the policy’s capability to tackle the complexities of divisions within Oldham. This paper is divided into five sections. The first section will examine the past and current developments in communities in the British context. The second section will explore the issues and debates surrounding the concept of community. The third section will outline how this research was undertaken. The fourth section of the paper will present the findings from a case study research with reference to community cohesion. The final section of this paper draws on the key findings.

### **1. Treatise on Community**

Notions about community have always played a role in urban strategies but now community cohesion is the driving force behind central government policy. In 1997, the arrival of the New Labour Government brought a renewed emphasis on involvement and development in communities (Brown et al., 2001; Lauder et al., 2006). The concept is held to be innovative, both for British institutions and in the public debate. The ideas of community cohesion originate from North America and Canada (Cattle, 2001). Significantly, community cohesion overlaps with the concept of multiculturalism although this was not at first recognised by policy makers.

Multiculturalism was introduced to Britain in the 1960s by Roy Jenkins, the then Home Secretary. Modood (2007) has observed that countries such as Australia and the United States claim to live in multicultural societies. This is the basis for today’s approach to Britain’s multicultural society, whereby central government follows models from other countries. In a nutshell, multiculturalism recognises the existence of many sociological groups in a society. It is thus important to promote a cohesive understanding of the issues within and between these groups. Parketh (2000, pp.2-3) has defined multiculturalism as ‘not about differences and identity *per se* but about those that are embedded in and sustained by culture; that is, a body of

beliefs and practices in terms of which a group of people understand themselves and the world and organise their individual and collective lives.’ As it will be seen, the theories of multiculturalism and community cohesion have the same set of principles but when community cohesion was launched back in 2001 by Ted Cante, there was no specific reference to multiculturalism. Moreover, it has been argued that the introduction of community cohesion was the death of multiculturalism (Burnett, 2007). As Kundnani (2002, p.67) notes, since the events of civil disturbances and September 11<sup>th</sup>, central Government has ‘sounded the death knell for multiculturalist policies’ and these have effectively been replaced by community cohesion.

Social capital complements both the theory and the practice of community cohesion (Cante, 2005). Over recent years social capital has become increasingly popular and influential with urban policymakers (Mayer, 2003). Aldridge et al., (2002) have stated the reason why urban policymakers are fascinated with social capital is that it is an alternative way of describing ‘community’ because a traditional community encapsulates networks, friendships and shared social values. The concept of social capital has been around for some time and in the past the term was seen to be ambiguous. Robert Putnam, an American political scientist, has championed social capital (Putnam, 1993; 1995a; 1995b; 2000; 2007) and has brought the concept to the forefront in public debate, as Field (2003), notes Putnam has rescued the term from social and economic theory. Furthermore, social capital is now seen to be clear-cut because Field (2003, p.1) argues that social capital can be ‘summed up in two words: relationships matter.’ This observation by Field (2003) that relationships matter is directly linked to social policy because crucially social capital has one main purpose, to promote the cohesion of a community. Social capital has been defined by many scholars (Baron et al., 2000; Zetter et al., 2006; MacGillivray, 2002) but the most significant definition on social capital is by Robert Putnam (1995, p.67) he defines social capital as

“...features of social life - networks, norms, and trust - that enable participants to act together more effectively to pursue shared objectives....Social capital, in short, refers to social connections and the attendant norms and trust.”

For social capital to work effectively it must first of all be practiced efficiently within governance as the ideas around social capital are strongly linked to governance. Skidmore et al., (2006, p.8) have noted that there are strong connections ‘between the properties of social capital and effectiveness of governance.’ Hence the promotion and practice of social capital means better governance (Putnam, 1993). The success of social capital is the development of institutions and opportunities for public engagement and involvement. As Kearns (2003, p.52)

argues 'the crucial role attributed to social capital in the regeneration of deprived areas fits nicely with New Labour's so-called 'Third Way Politics.' However, there has been some criticism on the development of social capital because Maloney et al. (2000) have argued that social capital lacks leadership within the local government framework. Furthermore, (Kearns, 2003, p.26) has provided an itemised criticism of social capital

- Sectional unrest undermine economic performance
- Old boy networks inhibit social mobility
- Strongly bonded social groups may exacerbate community conflicts
- Strongly bonded and spatially concentrated groups can become insular
- Social capital can be used to promote damaging behaviour
- Strong communities can be oppressive and conformist

In addition Lowndes and Wilson (2001) have stressed that public involvement in local communities is difficult to encourage. Due to the events of 2001, because there was a demand for communities to bridge together, this framework has changed from social capital to community cohesion (Skidmore et al., 2006; Sullivan, 2009). Further to this there is the added complexity of introducing the conceptualisation of social capital within the context of governance thus creating subtle differences in approaches.

## **2. Issues and Debates of Community Cohesion**

There are conflicting debates on a clear definition of community cohesion. The term is capable of multiple interpretations and Harrison (2005) has argued that community cohesion can be linked with other broad concepts such as 'social capital', 'social cohesion', or 'the social glue.' Markusen (2003) has noted that these types of concept have created fuzziness in terms of clarity and how they can be tested. According to Cantle (2001), community cohesion originates from economic terms but now the concept involves a broader range of issues.

This categorising of community cohesion is useful because it shows linkages with social cohesion. Moreover, it could be said that community cohesion is simply a build on from social cohesion. Cantle (2005) has argued that the terms community cohesion and social cohesion are interchangeable. Cantle (2005, p.52) defines both concepts

“Social Cohesion reflects divisions based on social class and economic factors and is complemented by social capital theories relating to the 'bonding' between people and the presence of mutual trust. It is seen to be undermined by the social exclusion experienced by individuals or groups, generally defined by their social class and economic position.”

“Community Cohesion reflects divisions based upon identifiable communities, generally on the basis of faith or ethnic distinctions. It is also complemented by the social capital theory of ‘bridging’ between communities. It is undermined by the disadvantage, discrimination and disaffection experienced by the identifiable community as a whole.”

Cantle (2005) recognises that there are some distinctions between these two concepts. First, social cohesion has inclined to be used more broadly and aligned with more socio-economic factors. Kearns and Forrest (2000) argued that social cohesion is ‘nebulous’ and ‘everyone knows’ what the key elements are. They also say that social cohesion is seen in a positive light - ‘social cohesion is a good thing.’ However, Kearns and Forrest (2000) have argued that there is a need for greater clarity and consensus about its meaning and its effects in public policies. In brief, social cohesion means that

“...a cohesive society ‘hangs together’; all the component parts somehow fit in and contribute to society’s collective project and well-being; and conflict between societal goals and groups, and disruptive behaviours, are largely absent or minimal.” (Kearns and Forrest, 2000, p.996)

Secondly, community cohesion has tended to be a more exact term to describe societal fractures, which are based on identifiable communities defined by faith or ethnicity, rather than social class. Nevertheless community cohesion has been based within the British context because of race, faith and the necessity to develop shared values across ethnic divisions as a response to community conflict and unrest. As Cantle (2005, p.48) points out

“It is easy to focus on systems, processes and institutions and to forget that community cohesion fundamentally depends on people and their values. Indeed, many of our present problems seem to owe a great deal to our failure to communicate and agree a set of common values that can govern behaviour.”

But the view from central government is that social cohesion and community cohesion’s principle aims are to not only reduce social exclusion in all communities but also to tackle the ever growing segregation between the white and British Asian communities. The introduction of this policy has caused much critical discussion. In particular McGhee (2003, p.382) has argued that community cohesion has become a highly ‘problematic political project.’ McGhee goes on to add that this type of policy is a classic new Labour ‘third way policy.’ Thus, as



Robinson (2008, p.22) argues, community cohesion is an 'empty concept' that the government failed to respond to the civil disturbances of 2001.

There are two clear criticisms of community cohesion. The first being how the policy tackles integration with different ethnic groups in society. Flint and Robinson (2008) have accused central government of boiling down the community cohesion policy and creating a crisis of cohesion in Britain. In addition Worsley (2005) has argued that the policy from central government is not specific and does not take into account each area that has a local problem. This can directly cause relationship problems when integrating the policy at a local level. As McGhee (2005) states, the community cohesion policy has to be reviewed and rewritten to assist local authorities to tackle integration.

A second criticism of community cohesion that McGhee (2003) points out is how to tackle diversity. Since the introduction of this policy, politicians according to McGhee, have simply 'politicised' this policy and as Worsley (2005, p.491) notes:

“One of my main concerns with the current policy framework is the assimilationist tone of the rhetoric; alongside a discourse of blame directed towards new migrants and especially British Muslim communities, who are expected to show ‘which side they are on’, through an allegiance to a ‘phoney’ (Kundnani, 2005) construction of Britishness.’

This accusation states that all communities that are facing segregation are forced to change their identity where they live or, as Amin (2002, p.14) argues, could further create 'a naïve pursuit sense of place.' With this politicisation occurring there is a tendency for the far right, such as, the National Front and the British National Party, to create and cause fears in local communities jeopardising the efforts to tackle segregation (McGhee, 2006). Moreover, with this conflict occurring Burnett (2004) has questioned what the future is for community cohesion because in the past the British Asian community has suffered criminalisation and victimisation and at the moment community cohesion offers little safeguard. In summary, community cohesion represents a new political approach to tackle the problems in urban areas but as discussed its implementation is not without problems. The relevance of this analytical discussion is that the case study will effectively test the community cohesion strategy.

### **3. Methodology**

Several factors influenced the selection of Oldham as a case study. Jackson (2005), for example, notes that Oldham as a place provides an 'unusual social makeup and typology of its urban

fabric.’ Building on this observation there were three principal reasons why Oldham was selected as appropriate for this investigation. First, Oldham, historically, has a traditional ethnic minority population. Since the early 1960s Oldham, as a town, has had its fair share of social problems within the British Asian communities, such as unfit housing and social exclusion. Second, Oldham was one of the areas that experienced civil disturbances, or as the media coined it ‘race riots.’ Moreover, following these disturbances Oldham was one of the first areas where community cohesion was introduced from both local and central government levels, therefore becoming the model on which subsequent statutory and voluntary sectors referred to. Third, and most importantly, over the last decade there has been relatively little research on Oldham and therefore the findings of this investigation can potentially contribute to policy makers and social scientists.

This paper has drawn on two types of qualitative methods. The first method analysed documentary data sources. Analysing central and local government reports on community cohesion enabled the research findings to be presented in a chronological sequence. The second method used structured open-ended interviews. Two groups were targeted for this research. First, the residents: who live and work in Oldham, and second, the policy makers and politicians who contribute to the cultural, economic, social and political makeup of the area under investigation. For the interview schedules to be successful gatekeepers were established. Other community research studies, which were also dealing with sensitive issues, have used the gatekeeper approach and have found the technique beneficial (Higgins et al., 1996; Agada 1999; Arcury and Quandt, 1999; Reeves, 2010). In total there were four gatekeepers who introduced the people that were required to be interviewed. In this research, the original choice of gatekeepers were not initially drawn upon but after consideration they were required because it was difficult to break into the different communities in the case study area without the gatekeepers inside knowledge. On several occasions, when approaching potential interviewees, rejection was experienced and respondents would say ‘why should I help you...what am I getting out of this?’ This confirmed the need to identify and utilise secure gatekeepers. All four gatekeepers had varied ways of introducing this piece of research to the interviewees. All of the gatekeepers gave access to information i.e. the name of the person who agreed to be interviewed and the contact details (email and mobile number). Gatekeepers would contact the people they thought should be interviewed, giving advance warning i.e. the interviewees knew the name of the researcher who would be contacting them. Overall the gatekeeper approach was successful for two reasons. Firstly, it gave direct access to people who would be a source of relevant information and provide responses that were crucial to the credibility of the research. Secondly, because the

gatekeepers were known to the interviewees an immediate assumption of trust between the interviewer and the interviewees was established. Coupled with the gatekeeper approach, the snowballing technique was applied to this research. This technique gave access to all strata of society within the selected case study. Furthermore, snowballing is a popular technique to use when using qualitative research methods as this approach ensures that the researcher is accessing appropriate contacts that will provide meaningful information to the research (Ruddick, 1998; Rao et al., 2003; Valentine, 2009).

The data collected was analysed in a structured way. Firstly, the documentary data sources were interpreted. Secondly, interviews were undertaken, transcribed and analysed. Throughout this research, field notebooks have formed a crucial part of data collection and thus the entries documented in these field notebooks have helped to inform the research. After the qualitative data (documentary data and interviews) was collected, the analysis was compiled in three stages. Therefore, the qualitative data analysis has three main components which were: (1) data reduction; (2) data display and (3) drawing and verifying conclusions (Miles and Huberman, 1994, p.12).

#### **4. Oldham's Community Cohesion**

As stated earlier originally community cohesion was promoted as a panacea for addressing segregation between ethnic minorities and white communities. The practical foundations of the concept emerged after the civil disturbances that took place in Bradford, Burnley and Oldham in 2001. Ted Cante, a past policy guru and civil servant who is now viewed by many academics, commentators and policy makers as the founder of the concept of community cohesion states that the policy was brought in as a consequence of the disturbances: 'the term community cohesion was effectively created in response to the riots in the northern towns of England in 2001' (Cante, 2005, p.48). After the race riots of 2001 independent teams were set up to measure the amount of tension between ethnic minorities and white communities.

David Blunkett, the then Home Secretary, announced the independent reviews on Burnley and Oldham produced by these teams, on 10th July 2001. As Denham (2001, p.2) notes, 'the Home Secretary's statement stressed the importance of involving local people in our work. As part of the Government's initial response to the disorder, an independent review team was also established under the chairmanship of Ted Cante.' The instigation of community cohesion was lead by the independent review team at the Home Office. This team, lead by Cante, was to work in collaboration with the other three independent review teams in Bradford (Ouseley, 2001), Burnley (Clarke, 2001) and Oldham (Ritchie, 2001). As Harrison

(2006, p.83) notes, 'responding to the disturbances, central government established a ministerial group on public order and community cohesion, to consider how national policies might be used to promote community cohesion.' These independent review teams were crucial in drawing together the formation of, and also overseeing the implementation of, central government policy on community cohesion.

The Cattle Independent Review (2001) has become the most recognised and influential of all the reviews of the civil disturbances (Harrison, 2006). In places such as Birmingham, Bradford, Burnley, Leicester, Southall and Oldham, the extent of the physical aspects of segregation in housing surprised the team. The 'team was particularly struck by the depth of polarisation' of the places they went to (Cattle, 2001, p.9). Notably, as evidenced in the interview quoted below, the Cattle Independent Review Team was alarmed to discover the separate education arrangements in Primary and Secondary schools and the division in community involvement in the voluntary sector, employment and cultural aspects of the area. Moreover, this separation meant that 'communities operate on the basis of a series of parallel lives.' In the geographical areas examined 'lives often do not seem to touch at any point, let alone overlap and promote any meaningful interchanges' (Cattle, 2001, p.9). As a past member of the Cattle Independent Review Team informed this research

"When I visited these places [e.g. Oldham] I was frankly struck that [the] communities had no contact with each other. [They were] separated from each other, which over a long period of time has created an unequal society. There was a failure of integration." (Interview, Policy Maker)

The above quote revealed the level to which areas, such as Oldham, were segregated to a significant extent and as is clearly evidenced this level of segregation has been present over many years. The Cattle Independent Review Team proposed 67 recommendations, which focused on the main concerns, as they were perceived at the time. The recommendations were divided into 14 themes: (1) People and Values; (2) Political and Community Leadership; (3) Political Organisations; (4) Strategic Partnership and Community Involvement; (5) Regeneration Programmes, Initiatives and Funding; (6) Integration and Segregation (7) The Views of, and Facilities for, Young People; (8) Education; (9) The Funding and the Role of Community Organisations; (10) Disadvantaged and Disaffected Communities; (11) Policing; (12) Housing; (13) Employment and (14) Press and the Media. These themes suggest that the main purpose of the Cattle Independent Review Team was to develop policies that were workable and which could be integrated with the activities and responsibilities of local government.

A fact that came to light as a result of analysing the reviews into the civil disturbances of 2001 is the evidence of how central government controlled and orchestrated the way the findings contained in the reports were presented. This was clearly evidenced in the documents analysed and from the interviews, as one policy maker commented on the attitude from central government:

“It was pretty obvious that David Ritchie was going to stitch us up. The council was being singled out. Ritchie went out of his way to get the council.” (Interview, Policy Maker)

When the independent reviews were published, the contents of the reports and the recommendations were put forward in such a way that fitted into policy initiatives. The qualitative evidence from the policy makers interviewed for this research confirmed this control by central government. The publication date (11<sup>th</sup> December 2001) for some of the findings from the reports conducted in Burnley, Oldham and the Cattle Independent Review Team Report coincided with the local government White Paper ‘Strong Local Leadership Quality Public Services’ which set out a contemporary vision for the future of local government (Department for Transport, Local government and the Regions, 2001). The White Paper addressed the segregation problems that were occurring in different geographical areas of Britain, with specific mention of the areas of Bradford, Burnley and Oldham. As Stephen Byers (the then Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions) stated the new White Paper ‘seeks to establish a partnership between central and local government, reflecting the critical importance of local authorities, both as a tier of democratic government and as a body with the responsibility to deliver high quality public services to local people’ (Hansard, 2001). In essence the services councils provide must have a strong and sustaining social and economic base, which shapes the fabric of communities.

In overall terms the White Paper had four underlying principles with the intention of reshaping local government in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The crux of the White Paper was to guarantee that local and central government worked cohesively (Department for Transport, Local government and the Regions, 2001). In essence, what was clear in this White Paper was the reference to the civil disturbances in Bradford, Burnley and Oldham. The new local government policy was announced on the same day as the four independent reports into the disturbances were published (Cattle 2001; Clarke 2001; Denham, 2001; Ritchie 2001). As a consequence of the findings of this research, the timing of these independent reports’ release and the White Paper’s announcement is evidence of central government’s control. Bagguley

and Hussain (2003, p.2) noted that the early findings from the Ouseley Report released in early July of 2001 ‘helped to set the agenda and focus for the subsequent reports’ of December 2001. All the reports discussed the importance of leadership. Stephen Byers strongly emphasised in the White Paper the importance of leadership and the promotion of social cohesion, ‘I hope that this approach will encourage local political and civil leadership. Today’s reports into this summer’s disturbances in Oldham, Burnley and Bradford show how important it is to have a leadership with a democratic mandate who are prepared to take the often sensitive and always difficult decisions necessary to ensure social cohesion. The White Paper has at its heart community leadership and democratic renewal of local government’ (Hansard, 2001).

When analysing the White Paper social cohesion and community cohesion were perceived to be interchangeable. Moreover, it could be easily ascertained that the phasing out of social cohesion came about following the publication of the Independent Review reports and the term was re-branded as community cohesion. As the White Paper stresses that in order for communities to engage at a local council level, it is important that community cohesion is promoted and implemented in a manner which is representative of the community it seeks to serve. One of the main criticisms of community cohesion revealed in this research is how little time was taken to develop this policy. In real terms the concept of community cohesion was introduced after the civil disturbances. When these reports were presented there was little chance to debate issues relating to community cohesion. As one policy maker who was involved in the early stages stated

“Community cohesion what’s that all about? It is just a rehash of social cohesion. It’s simply controlled by central government. We had little chance of debating the issue. We were just told this is the solution to the tensions in Oldham.” (Interview, Policy Maker)

The comment from the policy maker clearly demonstrates their frustration regarding the implementation of the community cohesion policy. This quote in particular accuses central government of forcing the new policy. More seriously the respondent states that this initiative was introduced to Oldham without consultation at a local level. Other studies (Foley, and Martin 2000; Wilson 2003; Pratchett 2004; Liddle 2007) have provided the same level of analysis on central – local policy tensions. These studies reveal that central government is reluctant to trust local authorities to implement changes in local government services and thus creating an ‘earned autonomy’ environment (Wilson, 2003, p.342).

As is evidenced above central government perceived community cohesion and social cohesion to be the same thing. Cattle (2005) confirms this stating that the terms community cohesion and social cohesion are interchangeable. These two ideas relate back to social capital. On 5<sup>th</sup> May 2004 the Housing, Planning, Local government and the Regions Select Committee published their report on social cohesion. The committee acknowledged a wide variety of other investigations into the social divide between ethnic minorities and the white population. Specific reference was made to the reports on Bradford, Burnley and Oldham. But the select committee felt obliged to undertake an investigation. They paid particular attention to the case of Oldham and held evidence sessions there. These evidence sessions constituted interviewing witnesses from various voluntary and statutory sectors for example representatives from Oldham Metropolitan Borough Council, Oldham Sixth Form College, Oldham Primary Care Trust, First Choice Homes Oldham and Greater Manchester Police. The select committee also examined other geographical areas such as Burnley, Leicester and Harrow. The committee's report interviewed specific witnesses that were directly involved with segregation and community cohesion. This select committee report was perceived as a progress report into Oldham and in the summary section the committee members felt that in the case of Oldham it 'seemed considerable progress had been made' in tackling problems (Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, 2004, p.3).

It is generally accepted by social commentators and social scientists that this policy was introduced as a direct consequence of the disturbances of 2001. Therefore Oldham was one of the first areas where this policy was established. As one local politician pointed out in this research, Oldham was the 'guinea pig' for community cohesion stating that

“When community cohesion is discussed Oldham always comes up. I was at a conference a couple of months ago and references were given on Oldham's community cohesion.” (Interview, Policy Maker)

After the events of 2001 Oldham experienced some major political upheaval. As discussed earlier the council had to respond to the Ritchie Report's recommendations. The council devised a community cohesion strategy so that the town could build a better future. This was achieved by the introduction of a Local Strategic Partnership Strategy as a direct response to the Local Government Act 2000, which requested that all local authorities have a community strategy. At the crux of the community strategy was Oldham's Local Strategic Partnership (LSP). The partnership was formed and replaced the existing Oldham Partnership Board. Members of the LSP are key players from different organisations within the Borough of Oldham. These organisations include private, public, voluntary, community and faith sectors.

Oldham's LSP has two functions. Firstly to set out overall action plans and secondly to monitor progress on what is happening locally. The Oldham Partnership Board was already in place. However the new, updated version introduced an integrated approach on the key aspects of community cohesion.

At the centre of the community strategy for Oldham is community cohesion. Councillor David Knowles (Leader of Oldham MBC and Chair of the LSP) stated that 'Central to the strategy is the principle of community cohesion, whereby we wish to learn from each other and move forward as a united community, working positively together for the good of all' (Oldham Metropolitan Borough Council, 2002, p.1). Additionally, the new partnership recognised that action must be taken in order for communities to come together, hence the promotion of community cohesion. It clearly states (p.9) 'Community cohesion is at the heart of all our future policies, plans and programmes. It is an issue, which is so central to the future prospects of the borough and its people that it must be at the heart of everything we do. As we tackle this issue, we will have regard to other key policy documents which can support the pursuit of greater cohesion.' For community cohesion to work properly the LSP, in conjunction with the Home Office's Community Cohesion Unit, devised a set of indicators to measure its success. In total the LSP identified eight themes and five factors that were deemed to be essential to build a cohesive community in Oldham.

Three years after Oldham's community strategy was published a new Oldham community strategy was updated titled 'Planning for Sustainable Communities 2005- 2020.' This updated document sets out the new way forward. Again at the centre of the Oldham Partnership is community cohesion. In this document community cohesion is contextualised for everyone. It is stated that 'cohesive communities are stronger, safer and more confident communities. Building community cohesion and creating a fair and equitable borough is a key priority of the Oldham partnership. While much has been achieved over the last three years, much remains to be done' (Oldham Metropolitan Borough Council, 2005, p.9). The Oldham's partnership definition of community cohesion is categorised into three concepts: identity, equality and engagement. What is apparent when analysing this detailed document is that community cohesion has shifted the focus away from race and placed a new focus on social inclusion. A number of detailed targets were established and how these targets would be met was outlined. For example one of the main targets was to tackle social exclusion. This target is to be met by providing resources through the Housing Market Renewal Strategic Programme. The leading organisations to ensure that this target is achieved are Oldham Council and Aksa Housing Association.



The definition of community cohesion, in the case of Oldham, is derived from central government terminology. Community cohesion, in central government and Oldham's view, has four underlying principles which are (1) the sense of belonging for all communities; (2) diversity of people's background; (3) everyone has similar life opportunities and (4) positive relationship within the local communities in Oldham (Oldham Metropolitan Borough Council, 2002, p.9). As part of this research interviewees were asked to provide a definition on what they thought community cohesion meant to them. Many of the interviewees were sceptical of community cohesion. This scepticism came from all quarters, from local residents, councillors and policy makers. This is confirmed with the tone of some typical quotes expressing a cynical view on community cohesion from local residents and policy makers

“Political headline where people skip through a park eating candy floss. Classic council brochure, black and white teenagers playing together. Community cohesion a group of people who live together share and celebrate culture. It's a very lazy term becoming quickly expressing on an idea. A buzz word with no meaning.” (Interview, Local Resident)

“Don't know what it is meant to do. No idea of grass roots level. It is always based on theories.” (Interview, Local Resident)

“I don't like the term. It has multiple interpretations and is complicated. Here in Oldham we have our own ideas about community cohesion. Community cohesion in Oldham is about building bridges between different parts of the borough. Community cohesion is all about race.” (Interview, Policy Maker)

“Not a useful phrase here in Oldham. We don't use it because people don't understand the term. It is too academic. It is so open to different interpretations. What we promote here is people should integrate more - building schools for the future, housing and school linkages.” (Interview, Policy Maker)

As the above comments confirm people who live and work in Oldham are uncertain what community cohesion actually does and means. Moreover, the concept of community cohesion comes across to the residents as too complicated. This perception of the policy by residents and policy makers in Oldham has caused different levels of political connotations in terms of

how and whether community cohesion as the solution 'fits' the problem. But what can be said is that community cohesion, in the case of Oldham, has driven changes in the voluntary and statutory sectors. Additionally, the ethos surrounding community cohesion has played a crucial role in the regeneration of Oldham.

## **5. Conclusion**

This paper has critically examined the concepts of community cohesion within a case study context. Community cohesion was perceived to be a solution to segregation. This paper suggests that community cohesion is not an innovative approach but merely a re-branding of old concepts namely, multiculturalism, social capital and social cohesion. Moreover, all of these concepts have been critically evaluated to gain an understanding of the foundations on which community cohesion is based within a theoretical framework. The research found that the core of the ethos of community cohesion is valuing the contribution and importance of all members of that community. Hence, to achieve community cohesion it is vital that the community is bonded together in a cohesive manner.

The concept of community cohesion, introduced by central government in an attempt to provide solutions to segregation, was analysed from central government and local perspectives. It is noteworthy to add that the community cohesion policy was not an established policy and Oldham was in fact the first community, the 'guinea pig' on which the policy was tested. The focus of this analysis was to identify the origins and the implementation of community cohesion policies. This analysis revealed that community cohesion is an economically driven concept, which is controlled by central government. When the reports of the independent inquiries into the civil disturbances of 2001 were released in Bradford and later in Burnley and Oldham, the White Paper 'Strong Local Leadership Quality Public Services' was published in an effort to improve the performance of local government in specific matters. Central government's control was evident in the Oldham case study. The main criticism was on the manner that community cohesion was introduced i.e. within a relatively short time frame. Furthermore, the policy failed to take on board each geographical area's characteristics and therefore failed to provide a unique solution to segregation in Oldham. In the interviews and documentary data sources there was strong evidence that the terms community cohesion and social cohesion were interchangeable. The application of community cohesion has caused many policy makers in Oldham to express scepticism with regard to its long-term suitability and its success as a solution to addressing Oldham's segregation problems.

It is important to state that this paper does not offer a panacea for the complex differences and divisions that occur in a segregated, geographical area. Overall the case study focused on a specific problem in a particular area, consequently findings are explicit to this area and thus the causes of, and policies put in place as a solution to Oldham's segregation, may not apply to segregation problems experienced in another area. Oldham was selected specifically because past researchers and government have deemed this area to be segregated. This has raised awareness that Oldham as a case study has specific problems.

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