Title: Community cohesion and ethnic difference : examining "race relations" and equalities practice in Bristol
Author: White, Hannah
Awarded: 2011

Abstract:

Community Cohesion was one of New Labour's most durable social policy programmes. Launched during the aftermath of the 2001 riots, due to concerns that segregation is exacerbated by the absence of day-to-day interaction between members of different ethnic 'groups'. In contrast to the alleged divisiveness of the protectionist multicultural model, its architects claimed Community Cohesion signalled a more sophisticated approach intended to establish shared commonalities in an era of increasing diversity. This thesis explores New Labour's transformations to 'race relations' and equalities practice at the end of the last decade, by examining the implementation of Community Cohesion in the city of Bristol. Central to the study is exploration of different understandings of identity, as cultural differences were perceived to be the root-cause of social fractures, while the promotion of a shared sense of belonging, experience, and values, the recommended solution. In particular, the research examines whether the advised approach of emphasising common similarities addressed the underlying causes of ethnic disadvantage. This research is intended to complement the existing academic literature, by examining not only the repercussions of New Labour policy introduced to address. divisions rather than inequalities, but also the implications for single-issue campaigning. More specifically, it investigates how attempts to establish the 'invisibility' of ethnic difference across service provision, impacted upon single-issue organisations acting as supplementary service providers and proxy representatives of minority interests. The research findings suggest that in Bristol neither 'race relations' nor equalities policy were embedded across Council services. Instead voluntary and community organisations (VCOs) were primarily responsible for addressing the effects of structural inequalities. However, due to the priority of establishing cohesion, organisations were struggling for survival, and subsequently by the end of New Labour's term the foundations of a 'colour-blind' approach to tackling social disadvantage had been laid.