From worst slum to best example of regeneration

Complexity in the regeneration of Hulme, Manchester

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Abstract

One of the celebrated features of the emergence of ‘complexity thinking’ on the research scene is its acclaimed ability to cut across disciplinary boundaries, offering potential explanations to pertinent issues that have haunted ‘experts’ and bureaucrats for a long time. In the field of urban studies, such vexing questions revolve around the notoriety and reluctance of the urban system to be harnessed into our-own-made, control-oriented predictive models. Despite the prevalence of copious volumes of literature on the subject, there are still more questions than answers in the understanding of the urban system. This paper attempts to view urban regeneration through the lenses of complexity theory. The task involves a historical narrative that weighs the evolution of the regeneration processes of a once highly deprived inner city area of Hulme in Manchester against the characteristic features of complex adaptive systems. A premium is placed on the analysis of the design platform and processes that saw Hulme emerge from worst slum in Manchester to one of the exemplars of regeneration in England. The analysis goes beyond mere explanation by making a commitment to securing potential areas for better-informed intervention. The fundamental argument that is championed is that even prior to central intervention, there is usually a resilient prior reality that characterizes that particular setting and that successful intervention is a function of how well a programme conforms to these natural tendencies.

Introduction

The dawn of complexity theory on the research platform has paralleled an increase in dissatisfaction with the traditional approach. Capra (1982) calls this dissatisfaction a crisis of perception and suggests that it occurs when people subscribe to a mental model that no longer achieves their standards of accuracy. The traditional or classical science approach is largely identified with the philosophical assumptions of reductionism, objective observation, entity as a unit of analysis, linear causation, and many other tools of analysis associated with the scientific method(s). Although many of these assumptions still work well within a certain range of conditions, beyond that (where complexity begins) they no longer give us a reliable guide to the understanding of the real world. It is, therefore, imperative that new theories are found to replace the old ones, or at least, to extend them by improving the approximations. The potential of complexity as a new window through which to view the world is explored in this paper within the context of urban regeneration. The paper is based on a study that was carried out on the regeneration of Hulme, an inner city area in Manchester (England). Through a historical narrative, the paper analyses the dynamics of Hulme regeneration against the characteristic features of complex adaptive systems, with emphasis on the edge of chaos principle. The paper is organized into five main sections beginning with an exposition of complexity theory in the section titled “The complexity (r)evolution”. The following section “The dilemma of alternative theories of urban change” takes a swipe at the alternative theories of the urban system with the sole purpose of pronouncing their poverty in tackling the urban problem. This section begins by highlighting the multifaceted problem of the typical English inner city area and consolidates the case for a new way of intervention. Section “Reasons to be cheerful in Hulme-Manchester” narrows down to a complexity-driven tour of the dynamics that transformed Hulme from one of the worst slums to an exemplar of regeneration in England. This is crowned, in the penultimate section “Discussion and analysis”, with a more conclusive discussion on the case for adopting complexity in seeking to secure well-informed intervention in the urban system in general and urban regeneration processes in particular.

The complexity (r)evolution

It appears that the science of complexity emerged as a direct product of the desire to explore the real world. Since the time of Isaac Newton, scientists had become accustomed to dealing with linear approximations -thinking of the world as a fundamentally neat and predictable place obeying well understood laws. Practically, this mechanist/reductionist approach has found its expression in the experimental method whereby results of observations in the laboratory are taken as a true representation of universal laws. But the real world is never as smart as the experimental environment. Except for the very simplest physical systems, almost everything is entangled into a vast web of nonlinearity. Upon these multiple sources of dissatisfaction with the traditional approach, researchers began to unveil questions that were considered ‘sacred’ for many years. For example, why is there order in the universe and where does it come from The answers to such far-reaching questions seemed to be found within the science of complexity – the new way of looking at the world. After many years of
operating in the experimental environment, researchers finally began to recognize that the horizon of knowledge production is far much wider than the boundaries of the reductionist cocoon. Consequently, there has been a general movement from what Ervin Laszlo (1996) calls the mechanistic view to a holistic perspective. The dichotomous relationship between the two is summarized in Table 1.

The language and practice of complexity are still relatively new in science in general and in the domains of social sciences in particular. Its serious consideration as a subject matter is barely two decades old, and may be accurately traced to the ideological revolt by a determined group of multidisciplinary researchers who founded the Santa Fe Institute in May 1984. Since then, complexity theory seems to have taken an upward swing as suggested by Figure 1.

Figure 1 shows a general upward movement in terms of research and publications based on the complexity theme particularly towards the conclusion of the last decade of the 20th century. The general thesis at the heart of complexity is clearly the rejection of reductionism, although this aspect is not always appreciated even by those who propose it (Byrne, 1998). Perhaps this is partly due to the multidimensional and multidisciplinary nature of the theory as evident in the dilemma surrounding its definition.

### Defining complexity theory

There is no precise definition of complexity so far. This void may be partly attributed to the fact that complexity is still an emerging science, and partly to the multidisciplinary nature of the subject. Instead of a single identifiable complexity theory, there are a number of theories concerned with complex systems that are pooled together under the general project of complexity research.

As Figure 1 above suggests, there has been a growing amount of literature on complexity since its genesis in the early to mid 1980s. The various dimensions and issues surrounding this emerging science are expressed in this burgeoning account of the new world view, notably by writers such as Waldrop, 1992;

<table>
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<th>Table 1</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>The classical and the systems view of the world</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Mechanistic View (Classical)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nature as machine with replaceable parts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deterministic and linearly causal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Atomic and individualistic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Materialistic: Things are distinct measurable material entities with fixed properties and highly predictable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ever expanding growth in material wealth defines ‘success’ and promotes greater use of natural resources</td>
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<tr>
<td>Anthropocentric: Man dominates nature. Control and mastering it for own ends</td>
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<tr>
<td>In social sciences the dominant notions are struggle for survival, profit of individual and some assumed automatic coincidence of individual and societal good.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In medical science: body as machine. Medicine impersonal and factual intervention. Body and mind are separate</td>
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Lewin, 2000; Kauffman, 1994; Gell-Mann, 1994; Holland, 1995; Cilliers, 1998, and many others too numerous to list. The Emergence: Complexity and Organization
Emergence: Complexity and Organization

makes life and mind possible (Waldrop, 1992). That something is a special kind of balance between the forces of order and the knowledge enterprise. One concept that puts them into perspective is Christopher Langton’s “something mysterious” that

fundamental principles of living things though the systems themselves are ordered (Allmendinger, 1999). But chaos theory on its own has very little to say about the nature of complex systems is perhaps better explained by chaos theory -that amazing science of the unpredictable (Gleick, 1993). This slice of the view of complexity is characteristic of all complex systems and may be summarized in the fundamental notion that ‘equilibrium is death’ (Pascale, et al., 2000). The second tier of Price’s (2004) location of complexity is that of complicatedness also alluded to by Cilliers (1998) as discussed above. In organizational settings, this complicatedness may generally be understood and termed as organizational non-simplicity associated with the sheaf cost and burden of organizational bureaucracy. At the third level is a more general or diluted sense of complexity many of whose advocates are those who have been inspired by the mainstream (first tier) complexity. It is not the intention of this paper to put a premium on the semantics surrounding the language of complexity. Rather than grappling with a definition that may not be ripe at the present moment, there is perhaps more utility in merely examining the characteristic features of complex systems.

Characteristics of complex systems

Complex adaptive systems seem to share certain common properties that distinguish them from mere complicated objects. Kay, et al., (1999) proposed an eight-point criterion for identifying such systems as shown in Table 2.

Each of the complex, self-organizing, adaptive systems possesses akindofdynamismthath qualitatively distinguishes it from non-complex systems. Complex systems are more spontaneous, more disorderly and more alive than static objects. This dynamical nature of complex systems is perhaps better explained by chaos theory -that amazing science of the unpredictable (Gleick, 1993). The basic notion of this theory is that very simple dynamical rules can give rise to extraordinarily intricate behavior. Chaos is not synonymous with disorder but suggests that it is extremely difficult if not impossible to model certain systems even though the systems themselves are ordered (Allmendinger, 1999). But chaos theory on its own has very little to say about the fundamental principles of living things (social systems inclusive). So, despite having a common area of intersection, chaos and complexity are two different spheres of the knowledge enterprise. One concept that puts them into perspective is Christopher Langton’s “something mysterious” that makes life and mind possible (Waldrop, 1992). That something is a special kind of balance between the forces of order and those of chaos. Its name is the edge of chaos.

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Property</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>I Nonlinearity</td>
<td>Behave as whole systems. Cannot be understood by decomposing them into pieces which are added or multiplied together</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II Hierarchical</td>
<td>Are hierarchically nested. Such nesting cannot be understood by focussing on one hierarchical level alone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III Internal causality</td>
<td>Non-Newtonian, not mechanisms, but rather are self-organization</td>
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<td>IV Window of vitality (Edge of chaos)</td>
<td>Must have enough complexity but not too much. There is a range within which self-organization can occur</td>
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<td>V Dynamically stable</td>
<td>There may not exist equilibrium points for the system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI Multiple stead states</td>
<td>There is not necessarily a unique preferred system state in a given situation. Multiple attractors may be possible and the current system state may be as much a function of historical accidents as anything else</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VII Catastrophic behavior</td>
<td>Moments of unpredictable behavior. Sudden discontinuity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIII Chaotic behavior</td>
<td>Our ability to forecast and predict is always limited</td>
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Life at the edge of chaos

If systems are understood in terms of how they behave and not how they are made, it is possible to distinguish the two extremes of order and chaos. The scenario can best be explained in terms of the difference between solids and liquids. In solids, atoms are locked into place, while in liquids they tumble over one another at random. However, right in between the two extremes, at a kind of abstract phase transition called the ‘edge of chaos’ you also find complexity — representing a class of behaviors in which the components of the system never quite lock into place and never quite dissolve into turbulence either. The edge of chaos is the domain for maximal innovation in complex systems. In human organizations, the simplest synonym is a system that is neither too centrally controlled (order) nor too liberal (chaos). The big question is perhaps on how complex systems get to the edge of chaos. The answer can easily be deduced from the above illustration about solids and liquids. It is a matter of logic to conclude that frozen systems can achieve this by loosening up a bit, and turbulent ones can do by getting themselves together a little more organized. Whether and how this can be achieved is an issue that is given appropriate attention later in the discussion. The next section consolidates the case for a new theoretical platform for urban change by sweeping through what has already been tried.

The dilemma of alternative theories of urban change

The complexity inherent within the internal workings of the urban system has been recognized by researchers working in this environment. Many of them, especially the young generation of enthusiastic professionals now have to come to terms with the harsh reality of the challenges posed by the city as a complex system. As early as the late 1960s, they clearly understood that in order to tame the urban system, an important prerequisite was to understand the characteristics of the system, a task they came to acknowledge as too mountainous and actually close to the edge of their skills (Eldredge, 1987). Classical professional town planners, flanked by a myriad of experts from other related fields of study, have had their fair share of involvement in the urban system, but the sheer complexity of the system demands that even higher levels of human thought and skills are deployed. In the search for such improved levels of understanding, it is appropriate to start with a review of urban theories that have been tested in the past and highlight the notion that these have only managed to scratch the urban problem. As a prelude to a theoretical exposition of urban change, the paper starts off with a requiem note on the state of the English inner city in the latter half of the 21st century.

The English inner city: The legacy of the Industrial Revolution

Mankind's rise from the doldrums of the primordial village-based and nomadic modus vivendi to urban civilization took tens of thousands of years. However, ever since the first true cities arose, sometime between 4000 and 3000 BC, the influence of city-based cultures and steady increase of urban populations around the world have taken the centre stage of human history (LeGates & Stout, 2000). From Babylon the Great, to the Hellenic Athens and Classical Rome, to Renaissance Florence and Georgian London, history is replete with examples of towns and cities, which describe the best of urban tradition. These cities inspired generations in terms of designs, economic strengths and cultural diversity.

The legacy of the beautiful cities, as the pinnacle of human endeavor (Lawless & Raban, 1986), is however overshadowed by the harsh realities of more recent history, which has been dominated by a severance in the relationship between people and place. In its painstaking account of the origins of the urban problem in Britain, the report of the Urban Task Force of Rogers (1999) suggests that English cities have paid a particularly heavy price for spearheading the Industrial Revolution. The industrial city, with its pollution, its slums and its short-term vision, destroyed our confidence in the ability of the city to perform its civic role. It appears that the city is now torn between two forces. On one hand, the 19th and 20th century visionaries like Ebenezer Howard and his exponents have advocated for an escape from the city through the Garden City movement. On the other hand, the writings and the influence of William Morris, John Ruskin and a host of others have cherished the idea of re-establishing contact with the familiar landmarks of a lost pre-industrial order and innocence, which still influences peoples attitudes towards towns and cities today (ibid). These two titanic forces, coupled with numerous associated and unpredictable factors, have been translated into a general process of urban decline at the centres and expansion at the periphery of towns and cities, which began at the turn of the 20th century and continues to date. With many towns and cities continuing to decay at an exponential rate (ibid), it is evident that the Industrial Revolution, together with more recent economic upheavals, has left an urban legacy littered with derelict buildings and empty sites. Towns and cities continue to exhibit all the hallmarks of social polarization and social exclusion, including high levels of unemployment, homelessness, high levels of crime, and poor housing and environmental conditions. The planning system has continually succumbed to the dictates of market forces and generally appears to have failed to harness the city in its diversity. This failure can legitimately be attributed to the classical theories underpinning urban change.

Classical theories of urban change

Emergence: Complexity and Organization
There are numerous theories and theorists of urban change, although Portugali (2000) suggests that they all came from three quarters of the world. From one corner, came the whole scientific arsenal of location theory and spatial analysis - the land use rings, rent bid curves, hexagonal central places, etc. These provided explanations. From the second corner came the Radiant City and the City of Tomorrow as postulated by Ebenezer Howard and Le Cobusier with their super blocks and wide highways. These provided the vision – the image of the city of tomorrow. From the third corner came systems theory with its acclaimed ability to cut across disciplinary boundaries. At the battlefront of this army of professionals was the rational comprehensive planner. The harsh reality is that despite this horde of experts and visionaries having been in existence and operational for many years, the urban problem is still haunting us. The urban system has just refused to be planned and tamed. Where or how did all these urban theories and theorists go wrong? The consolation to the lay reader is that these same questions are beginning to come out of the planning experts themselves as can be discerned from their own writings:

> “Why is it that however well we plan, things still turn out to be different from what we expected. Why are we left with so many planning disasters, from car-choked cities to homeless young people. And why, no matter how hard we try or no matter how inclusive a process we attempt, are people left feeling isolated and frustrated at the system” (Allmendinger, 1999: 255).

The single answer to these crucial questions is that they involve complexity. Prior to this ideological awakening, the closest that conventional planning had ever come to a complexity aware approach was through the systems view.

### A systems view of planning

To understand the systems view of planning, it is necessary to unpack the contents of general systems theory itself. Systems theory is basically concerned with problems of relationships, of structures, and of interdependence, rather than with the constant attributes of objects (Katz & Kahn, 1966). This viewpoint treats organizations as open and dependent on the environment through interconnections with external and internal multiple agents. Its founder, Ludwig von Bertalanffy, was concerned about the growing compartmentalization of science:

> “The physicist, the biologist, the psychologist, and the social scientist are, so to speak, encapsulated in a private universe, and it is difficult to get word from one cocoon to another.” (Bertalanffy, 1968)

In fostering his intellectual movement, Bertalanffy argued that general ideas could have relevance across disciplinary boundaries. It also endeavored to demonstrate that many of the most important aspects studied by both social and physical scientists can be pooled together under the general theme of systems. The effect of general systems theory in other disciplines was to stimulate new applications, such as operations research, systems engineering, and systems planning.

Much of the interpretation of general systems theory into urban planning is associated with Chadwick (1971) from whose book the above title is drawn. Chadwicks systems model is essentially a modification of the process of scientific inquiry. His departure from conventional rational planning is at a point where the problem is concerned with complex (complicated) systems, in which case the process must be extended to include elements in Figure 2.

Chadwick (1971) further suggests that any such process will start with two directions of inquiry (and not one) because the recognition and description of the system and the formulation of criteria for its testing proceed in parallel. There is also a need to model the system in order to test it.

Admittedly, the systems view of planning was a milestone achievement in planning theory because it tilted the perception of the urban problem from arrogant positivism to a more eclectic discourse. The most prominent legacy of positivism that still crept into the systems view is perhaps the commitment to a future-seeking endeavor. The problem with this kind of undertaking is that the future is not something that happens to us. It is constituted in part by current decisions as well as being a product of chance and forces that lie outside human perception and knowledge (Allmendinger, 1999). Thus, although the failure of rational planning to tame the city was diagnosed as early as the late 1960s, the dilemma is still with us to date. This is evident in the persistence of the urban problem and the birth of quasi-independent disciplines like urban regeneration, the central theme of this paper.

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The concept and process of urban regeneration

The last two decades of the 20th century saw a burgeoning stream of research and literature emanating from a variety of perspectives and disciplines, all concerned with one or more aspects of the urban system (Lawless & Raban, 1996). Despite the presence of such a wide array of fragmented information, little written material is available that combines coverage of the entire fundamental (physical, economic, social and environmental) dimensions of urban regeneration with the implementation, management and evaluation of the processes.

The problem yet again is that because the various dimensions of regeneration are inter-linked, a comprehensive urban regeneration process is unlikely to achieve the desired sustainable outcomes unless it adopts a special kind of holistic approach. What is required is substantial amount of departure from the conventional reductionist explanations of the process of urban change identified above. These traditional approaches begin their analyses by considering a single factor (e.g., economic dimension) and seek to widen their horizon by reference to the outcomes of urban change rather than the underlying causes. The result of such type of reductionism is partial insight into what are actually complex urban processes. There has been a general trend towards the appreciation of this notion since the 1990s although not in a manner that is consistent with the ethos of complexity thinking. The planning system itself appears to have been undergoing an evolutionary process from a highly authoritative regime to a more flexible and community-aware planning. Hall (1992) makes reference to three stages in planning theory: an initial stage lasting until about the 1960s when plans where literally blueprints; followed by the emergence of systems theory, and the current thinking which emphasizes continuous participation of multiple agents. However, in broad terms, the planning system through its authoritarian centralism appears to have been out of tune with the social and cultural dynamics, hence the endurance of the planning dilemma.

The “how can we account for” dilemma of planning

The practice and theory of planning helped to define the vision of the progressive force of modernism through its endeavors to engineer the system and systematically impose an abstract space on the complex social and industrial order. It attempted to apply the simple, regulated and methodical (scientific) principles of coherent stability to the spatial form and temporal rhythms of the massive, chaotic urban system (Graham & Marvin, 2001). Thus, unlike the mostly utopian urban theorists identified above, the rational planner was poised to technically conduct his planning activities in a manner that conforms to scientifically defined courses of action. The disillusionment about this planning process came in the late 1960s and early 1970s. It was increasingly becoming apparent that rational comprehensive planning is actually an irrational assumption, that planning is a political, incremental and essentially non-scientific and non-technical process. It became evident that planners cannot rationally tame the city. They were in a dilemma, which can best be described in the words of David Harvey (1973), quoted in Portugali’s (2000) Self Organization and the City:

“How can we account for the coexistence of spectacular scientific instruments to control the environment and their failure in the efforts to tame the city... How can we account for the fact that beautiful scientific instruments such as the gravity, interaction, or entropy maximization models can hardly scratch the complexity of the urban scenario; and that so are the rent bid curves of Alonso’s urban land use theory... and the location triangle of Weber’s industrial location theory, and the hexagonal geometrical landscapes of Christaller’s and Losch ‘s central place theory. All this... seemed incapable of saying anything of depth... about the real problem of society and... when we do say something, it appears trite and ludicrous” (p. 32).

The realization at the dawn of general systems theory that planning is essentially a non-scientific and non-technical process paved way for a more eclectic system than its technocratically authoritative predecessor advanced by modernism. It was increasingly becoming recognized that despite their good intentions, planners cannot escape the hands of the politicians, the ruling classes, and the multinationals that control the system (Portugali, 2000).

There is no need for the complex accretion of rules and regulations that have characterized the planning system for more than half a century and allowed planners to hide behind the mask of technical expertise (Allmendinger, 1999). This is not a straight case for advocating for a free market system, because even capitalism needs some form of central intervention to function as the executive committee of the whole bourgeoisie so as to fill up the gap left by the profit motive (Byrne, 1998). It must, therefore, be acknowledged that privatization is not synonymous with a drive towards the elimination of planning. The way forward rather is to engage in a search for an appropriate balance between the planned and the unplanned. In complexity theory, a such balance is the domain for maximal innovation as explained by the edge of chaos hypothesis. The complexity revolution has arisen out of the general milieu of dissatisfaction with rational comprehensive planning and its subsequent systems alternatives. The discomfort with these alternative approaches has led to an important ideological awakening and rethink about the way we understand the urban system:
“Not only that science cannot control society and its... environment, but that it should not attempt to do so. Let society, and its artificial products... be what they have come to be: uncontrollable, unpredictable and unplannable. Let us urbanists and planners make them more so by deconstructing all that has been constructed; let us deconstruct disciplinary boundaries inside science and between it and art” (Portugali, 2000: 228).

This is a new vision that complexity theory stands for and I would like to translate into a better understanding of the urban system. Its potential application in urban regeneration is now explored in the case study of inner city Hulme in Manchester.

Reasons to be cheerful in Hulme, Manchester

“The area developed haphazardly as an area of tightly packed terraces and courts, providing cramped and often unsanitary accommodation from migrants coming to Manchester city. Some houses had no toilets of their own while many...”

The above quote is a description of the inner city area of Hulme, Manchester, in the late 1970s, and is a view that remained valid till about the dawn of the 1990s. And yet today, the people of Hulme can boast of a new Hulme, new housing and a host of community groups and resource centres. Today, it is not uncommon to come across captions like “Reasons to be Cheerful in Hulme.” All this is because Hulme has moved from the rank of worst slum in Manchester to that of one of the best examples of regeneration in Britain. More important than mere praise, here, is a critical understanding of the roadmap to this achieve-ment of unparalleled magnitude. What was the nature of the path to the success story of Hulme and to whom (or to what) does credit go

The inner city area of Hulme is situated immediately south of Manchester city centre and is sandwiched between Upper Brook Street in the east and the Manchester ship canal in the west. Its northern boundary is defined by the Manchunian Way, while at the southern boundary is its neighboring ward, Moss Side. The area is also suitably located in close proximity with the education precinct of Manchester University, and Manchester Metropolitan University. The area enjoys the economies of proximity to the city centre apart from having an excellent access to Manchester International Airport and the extensive motorway network through Princess Road.

The area supports a population of well over 9,646, a far cry from the late 1800s figure of 100,000. A critical analysis of the drivers of change in the evolution of Hulme should reveal the factors behind this drastic fall in the area’s population. As with the wider context of Manchester, the starting point is the Industrial Revolution.

Prior to the onset of the Industrial Revolution, Hulme was predominantly an agricultural area. It was not until 1784 that the agricultural pre-occupation of the area began to fade following the completion of the Bridgewater canal through to Manchester (Makepeace, 1995). The new waterway brought with it a fresh inj ec- tion of development to the south-western peripheral areas of the city, as wharves and warehouses clustered around the canal terminus. The new structures were erected in a haphazard pattern and had no regard for municipal boundaries. For instance, the River Medlock almost disappeared as its course was built over.

The canal development had a profound effect on the growth of Hulme, such that by 1801, Hulme was the second largest township (after Adwick) around Manchester with a population of 1,677 (ibid). The population later grew rapidly, particularly, between 1831 and 1874 when it galloped from 9,624 to 74,731 under the exigencies of the Industrial Revolution, before beginning to decline, falling to 66,916 in 1901. Ironically, much of the industrial activity in 19th century Hulme was on a small scale, often in workshops, while large firms were located in outlying areas. It was in Hulme that the first Rolls Royce motorcar company emerged in 1904, the outcome of a meeting between Henry Rolls and Charles Royce at the Midland Hotel in Manchester (ibid). Industrial activity based in Hulme, can therefore, not be said to have been the main source of population growth in the area around this time. Rather the more plausible source was from migrants to Manchester who continued to vote with their feet to the entire city in response to the magnetic effect of the Industrial Revolution. Out of this kind of socioeconomic environment, Hulme grew up very rapidly in the mid 19th century to accommodate Manchester’s increasing population (HRL, 1994). The area developed haphazardly as an area of tightly packed terraces and courts, providing cramped and often unsanitary accommodation from migrants coming to Manchester city. Some houses had no toilets of their own while many...
others had no foundations and were laid on bare earth (HMSO, 1995). As a result of these squalid conditions, Hulme was soon branded one of Manchester’s worst slums, occasionally ravaged by outbreaks of cholera and other diseases associated with unsanitary conditions. The Sunday Chronicle made the following comment about Hulme in 1889:

“The streets are dim with smoke and the floors of the passages and the carvels are positively reeking under the hot sun. Stagnant water, rotten vegetables and liquid filth lie amongst the stones, the ash boxes are overfull, the atmosphere is thick and the stench is overpowering” (26th May, 1889).

Despite the dim picture painted above, industrial age Hulme was an important inner city area, close to the major areas of employment. The area also had a wide range of facilities associated with major residential neighborhoods, including shops, churches, pubs and even its own town hall. Its high street, Stretford Road, was one of Manchester’s important shopping streets (HMSO, 1995).

However, today, the Hulme of the 19th century is none existent. The old buildings of Hulme have been demolished and replaced by modern (predominantly residential) buildings. There is one thing about Hulme, though, that is analogous to a mathematical constant, as it has stood the test of time. It is the community spirit of the Hulme residents, which the people themselves have always boasted about. The community spirit of Hulme has remained intact despite the odds of having to face numerous upheavals in the form of displacements induced by slum clearance and redevelopment programmes initiated by the central and local government. Like in other British inner city areas, efforts to correct the urban problem in Hulme began with the physical approach.

Apart from the slum clearance programmes followed by the erection of a number of traditional brick-built flats and high-rise blocks, an important feature of post-war Hulme was the continuation of a rich mixture of businesses and trades, ranging from the Dunlop rubber factory, Gaythorn Gas works, to smaller specialized industries like gold-beating and sign-writing (HRL, 1994). The relocation or closure of these traditional industries and centres of commerce had a very devastating effect on Hulme. It is no wonder that Hulme residents believe that in the 1960s, their area underwent some of the most shattering changes a community could ever have imposed upon it, and from which it was still struggling to recover by 1990 (Hulme Views Project, 1990). Like in other British inner city areas, the period after 1960 was the most radical in urban regeneration circles.

The rise of deck-access housing

By the early 1960s, all remaining terraced houses in Hulme were demolished in a slum clearance programme that spared only a few buildings (HMSO, 1995). The design philosophy of the time was for a new Hulme planned around the rigid segregation of vehicles and pedestrians. Tenants were to be accommodated in flats and maisonettes on interlocking decks where it was assumed that traditional street life would be replicated far above the hazards of traffic. Shopping facilities were to be confined to the three areas of the Moss Side district centre and the two traditional neighbourhood shopping centres along Alexandra Road and Princess Road. The crowning piece of the redevelopment was on the four huge crescent blocks. These were five-storey deck access blocks each a quarter of a mile long, and together having a capacity of 1000 homes (EIUA, 1997). They consisted of 2 and 3 bed-roomed flats, and 1 bed-roomed maisonettes, which were all connected by large access decks. There were no ground level flats as the space there was designed for garages and shops. Lifts were provided to service the height of the deck-access blocks, especially to cater for the disabled and the elderly. Each of the crescents was also designed in such a way that all the flats faced a large open public garden and away from the roads. Pedestrian crossings were situated to ensure easy access to shopping facilities, public houses, community resource centres, and the library, without having to cross any of the busy roads. The four crescents of Hulme were named after the renowned British architects Charles Barry, William Kent, John Nash and Robert Adam, who designed them, and even won prizes for the ‘achievement’.

The redevelopment of Hulme was virtually complete by 1972. More than 5000 housing units had been built in less than eight years with 3000 of them being deck access, making Hulme the biggest concentration of this type of housing in Britain (HMSO, 1995). The crescents did indeed become the pride of the new Hulme though not to the extent that the designers or the council had anticipated. The deck access blocks offered housing standards far ‘better’ than what the old Hulme had to offer. The new housing units were neat and well equipped. Everything was done and taken into account, perhaps except for one:

“No one thought of involving residents in the decisionmaking processes of the (proposed) redevelopment of Hulme” (HPRC, 1977).

The result of such an omission can perhaps be understood from the next section.

The deck-access disaster

The honeymoon for the architects of the Hulme crescents (together with that of the city council and everyone concerned) was
short lived. It was not long before the disadvantages of deck access housing overtook the advantages. As tenants moved in, problems began to surface almost immediately and at an exponential rate (HRL, 1994). Structural faults were spotted in some sections of the new buildings. Maintenance problems equally arose from poorly designed systems such as heating, ventilation, and waste disposal. There were also major difficulties with the upkeep of common areas such as lifts, walkways and entry areas. Many of these defects were translated into high occupation costs on the part of tenants. Expensive heating systems meant that many households, even with children, were disconnected due to non-payment of bills and had to rely on calori gas stoves and candle light instead (HMSO, 1995).

Hulme had acquired a reputation and its residents were stigmatized. There was a high concentration of poor people, the elderly and the disabled, ex-homeless, a high incidence of alcoholism and drug dependency. Many children left school without any proper qualifications. Truancy and vandalism were rife and went unchecked. At this time, and using Great Britain as the yardstick, if you lived in Hulme, you were: seven times more likely to commit suicide; thirty-one times more likely to be the victim of crime; and forty-one times more likely to be actually murdered. (HPRC, 1977). The upper deck-access units of the crescents were particularly unsuitable for children. This became tragically evident when a child fell to his death from one of the crescents in 1974. The tragedy aroused the Hulme tradition of tenant activism, which was overwhelmingly directed at Manchester City Council. By 1975, the council had bowed to the pressure and opted to change the approach to housing allocations (HMSO, 1995). The crescents and the rest of Hulme were opened up as housing for single people, students and adult households on shared tenancies, while allowing families to move out. Apart from changing the council’s allocations policy, problems with deck-access housing had two other side effects. First, the council’s policies on housing construction and design were modified towards low-rise terraces with gardens. Secondly, the shift in allocations policy ignited an enormous change in Hulme’s social mix, but instead of being a solution to the problems of Hulme, the council’s decision appears to have aggravated the situation. The deteriorating deck access stock was increasingly taken over by other tenants whose housing rights and choices, such as students, were extremely limited (EIUA, 1997). Some of the tenants, such as the homeless, mental health patients, alcoholics and drug addicts, were much more vulnerable than the elite with university degrees. For others, such as squatters, travellers, artists and musicians, Hulme was the right place to be as it was cheap and flexible enough to accommodate various lifestyles. A comprehensive study jointly conducted by Manchester City Council’s Social Services and the Planning Departments in the late 1970s revealed that Hulme topped the list of areas of multiple deprivation out of 33 areas of Manchester city. Community facilities in Hulme were non-existent. Children under 16 shared two adventure playgrounds. There was one old people’s centre, but nothing at all for the intermediate ages. The relationship between the police and the youth of Hulme was that of antagonism. The police in the area were generally ineffective as 75% of crimes were committed above ground level on the decks. Whenever police did appear in the decks, they went there in threes and only to arrest someone (HPRC, 1977).

The crescents particularly were also hosts to a variety of unconventional creative and leisure activities in the mid 1980s. It was common knowledge that deck access housing had succeeded in creating a unique, diverse and underprivileged community. Each of the various interest groups had very different expectations, needs and attitudes towards life in Hulme. This combination of deplorable housing conditions and a diversity of social mix coincided with a period of enormous economic change in the early to mid 1980s, in which potential sources of employment for Hulme declined. Despite all this, the Hulme community has always boasted of great strengths and the caring and supportive approach of neighbors. Indeed...

“.there must be very few places in Britain where, against all odds, there is such a lively array of associations and clubs firmly based within their communities” (HMSO, 1990: 13).

In the 1980s, this community spirit found itself in the aggressive hands of the market-oriented Conservative government, thereby further alienating the chances of narrowing the central-cum-local authorities and local communities gap in the decisionmaking processes.

The dilemma of the 1980s

By 1985, Manchester City Council was still at a loss as to the best way of tackling the problem of Hulme. Tenant activism was also at its zenith, such that the possibility of a tenant and officer/councillor joint conference was receiving serious consideration. Two such conferences were later held on 22nd February 1985 and 16th November 1985. It was an unusual occasion that all the stakeholders never considered would be a possibility as suggested by the words of one of the participants (quoted in the Hulme Conference Report of 22 February 1985):

“We also took the unusual step of deciding to have a tenants conference, rather than one dominated by politicians and professionals” (John Nicholson, Chair of Housing, Manchester City Council, 1985).

After the two conferences, tenants looked forward to a period of real involvement in the decisionmaking processes of Hulme. However, the anticipated participation was soon disillusioned. The city council certainly consulted the tenants, but it would appear that the whole exercise was reduced to the level of merely listening and then going off to do what the council had
intended to do in the first place (HPRC, 1985). The remainder of the 1980s was characterized by protracted debate about the future of Hulme, with a frustrating search for practical solutions to the many problems being made (EIUA, 1997). The key stakeholders in the debates and search for solutions were the city council, Hulme residents, the Government Office for the Northwest, and the Housing Corporation. Each of these bodies had their own interests to pursue and secure. The council was primarily interested in finding comprehensive solutions to the problems of deck-access housing and ensuring that Hulme became a good place to live in. The Government Office for the Northwest was set on seeing to it that Hulme benefited from whatever national government regeneration initiative came up. The Housing Corporation was keen to take part in the redevelopment of Hulme though it fell short of justifying a specific role for itself, basically for two reasons (ibid). First, the cost of a comprehensive redevelopment programme in Hulme was beyond the corporation’s means. Second, there was no precedence for the corporation, and the Housing Associations it funded, involving themselves in the problems of local authority estates. Residents were divided in many issues regarding the way forward for Hulme, reflecting the multiplicity of interest groups. However, they seemed to have been united in their demands for three things (ibid):

1. Although comprehensive redevelopment was necessary, it was argued that there was need to go beyond the physical approach so as to tackle economic and social problems as well.

2. There was need to ensure that the redevelopment focussed on existing residents. The residents were convinced that they at least did not want a repeat of the 1960s programmes where local communities were disintegrated and scattered around Manchester. This also meant empowering residents in the decision-making processes on matters that affected their living environment.

3. Privatization of tenure, a reminiscent characteristic of the 1980s, was not welcome. Residents wanted to remain council tenants and not to be left in the hands of a private landlord. It was for this reason that the decision to declare Hulme a Housing Action Trust in the late 1980s met with resistance from the residents.

Efforts at finding a practical solution that would satisfy all the interest groups proved futile. The nearest attempt came in the wake of the Hulme Study (MCC, 1989), a government funded partnership between the Department of Environment, Manchester City Council and the tenants of Hulme. The aim of the study was to produce plans which had the maximum chance of meeting the needs of existing tenants, of being acceptable to central and local government and of being resourced (HMSO, 1990). The Hulme Study was popular with tenants, who found it an important arrangement for raising their concerns, finding their way around Manchester. This also meant empowering residents in the decision-making processes on matters that affected their living environment.

The debate about the future of Hulme continued into the 1990s though it seemed that all parties would have to settle for a series of ad hoc housing improvements rather than the comprehensive programme of physical, economic and social regeneration (EIUA, 1997). Manchester City Council was able to secure £7 million from the central government for Housing Investment Programme and Estates Action funding for housing improvements. A breakthrough came in the wake of a consultancy study early in 1991 from which it was realized that the best approach to the problems of the deck access stock was demolition rather than refurbishment. Recall that this was exactly what the community groups had always advocated for since the late 1970s. An agreement was reached between the government, the council and the Housing Corporation that the poorest quality and most under-occupied decks in some parts of Hulme would be demolished and replaced with new Housing Association homes. The Housing Corporation established a special consortium of Housing Associations to be given the task of building and managing the new housing stock. Tenants also became actively involved in the programme as overseers and through plans for them to form a community-based housing association to manage the new housing units. It was at this rather innovative stage that the government announced the City Challenge (regeneration) programmes.

Hulme City Challenge

The Hulme City Challenge was launched in April 1992 with the help of £37.5 million of government money. This funding acted as a catalyst for a comprehensive programme of initiatives to tackle economic, social and physical problems based on a partnership between the public, private, voluntary sector, and the local community groups. Holism was at the centre of the City Challenge approach. It was recognized that no single organization has a monopoly of knowledge about, or resources to deal with, complex urban problems (EIUA, 1997). Therefore, programmes needed to be drawn on the basis of the expertise, energies and resources of local authorities, government, other public agencies, the private sector, voluntary groups and local residents.

A plethora of initiatives were set up to achieve these objectives. Hulme Regeneration Limited (HRL) was set up by Manchester
City Council and AMEC PLC as a joint venture to coordinate and manage a complex of these new initiatives (MCC, 1997). Plans were drawn up to build 3,000 housing units as well as new shops, roads, offices and community facilities. The overall approach reflected a deliberate departure from the traditional land use zoning to that of achieving a close integration of economic and social activities. Hulme Community Homes Limited (HCML) a community-based forum was set up. The forum re-established the linkage with the local community to formulate social housing policies for the proposed redevelopments. A Hulme Tenants Participation Project (HTPP) established earlier in 1988 would work alongside the HCHL. The HTPP was the first funded agency to work specifically for, and with the tenants of Hulme and to liaise between the institutional stakeholders and tenants. The initiative was funded jointly by the Housing Corporation and the City Council, the latter through City Challenge. The Moss Side and Hulme Business Federation was also set up in 1994 by local businesspersons in conjunction with Manchester Chamber of Commerce and Industry. Its main aim was to assist local businesses, especially those with 25 or fewer employees, to have equal opportunities to compete effectively in local, regional, national and international markets. Out of this rich mixture of multiple agent involvement in the regeneration processes, emerged one of the best examples of regeneration in Britain in the 1990s. Though many writers have attributed the successes of Hulme regeneration solely to the City Challenge programme, the conclusion in this study is different as the following discussion suggests.

Discussion and analysis

It is not necessary to conduct a full-scale debate on whether or not the dynamics of Hulme regeneration can be defined in terms of complexity. Many of the characteristics of complex systems, such as the prevalence of multiple agent involvement are a subject of platitude and do not need a vigorous investigation. Instead, the discussion focuses on the edge of chaos principle as it relates to the evolving dichotomous relationship between local authorities and local communities in the decision-making processes between 1960 and the eve of Hulme City Challenge programme. The controversy that followed the completion of the 1960s redevelopments in Hulme seems to suggest a system that evolved to the edge of chaos in terms of decision-making processes. The following chronology of events (Figure 4) from the two extremes of order (central control) and chaos (power of community groups) illustrates the picture.

![Image](https://journal.emergentpublications.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/b25a3d6c-0e40-50b7-4ec5-82944e339ad2-300x353.png)

**Fig. 4: Evolution of Hulme regeneration to the edge of chaos**

The diminishing gap between local authorities and local communities in the decision-making processes was measured by the use of social network analysis tools, particularly the strength of ties between the two parties. Using archival records such as minutes of meetings from the County Records Office and the local history of the City Library, it was possible to deduce the level (frequency) of interaction between local government and local communities at different times. Although the diagram shows a neat pattern, the eventual loci of ascension on the ‘fitness landscape’ should essentially describe a ragged topography. That should be anticipated in any analysis of an evolving social organization. There is equally no guarantee of staying on the edge of chaos once the emergent processes have secured that niche.

From the above historical account of events, we see that there was an ‘iron curtain’ between the local authority and local residents from 1960 to 1985. The decision-making mechanism was enshrined in the notion of local authorities making decisions for local communities without the latter being consulted. Hulme had become frozen by many years of authoritarian planning. This appeared to have been the case since the 1960s and up to about the mid 1980s when consensus was finally in sight. The once highly centralized system was beginning to loosen up under the exigencies of the (emergent) local community networks. The statement by a Manchester City Council officer in the Hulme Study (MCC, 1989) was a radical turnaround in local authority thinking. From the highly centralized “we know best” spirit of the 1960s to an acceptance of the opinions of community groups as useful and valuable in the decision-making process. It represented a massive change and paved way for real progress in Hulme in the 1990s. Hulme as a system was searching for the edge of chaos, a special kind of balance (in decision-making) between central control and the power of community networks. An important point to note here is that (unlike the Hulme Crescents designed by architects) no one designed this search process for the consensus that ensued — the system itself found that balance. If systems are more innovative at the edge of chaos than anywhere else, the remaining challenge is to ascertain whether the Hulme regeneration process was more innovative at this point (1985 – c1990) than at any other during the period under consideration.

There is enough evidence in the literature on the regeneration of Hulme to confirm the notion that the Hulme regeneration processes were more innovative at this stage. One such source of evidence is from a team of professionals at KPMG who were appointed to evaluate the achievements of the City Challenge initiatives countrywide. Their report on Hulme indicated that the City Challenge programme was announced at a rather innovative stage (1991). It is very compelling to conclude, therefore, that the Hulme City Challenge programme was a success because it came at a time of highest innovation. The programme was like
a seed planted on fertile ground — that fertile ground being the edge of chaos phase in decision-making. If one accepts this line of thought, then an important analytical tool for urban regeneration processes shall have been established by this study. The highly suspicious coexistence (in the late 1980s to early 1990s) of consensus building and the level of innovativeness such as was never witnessed in Hulme since the conception of real measures to tackle the urban problem is compelling. Such a coincidence of maximal innovation at a time when the system can be described as “neither too centrally-controlled nor too free market-led,” describes the behavior of a complex self-organizing system.

Conclusions

Through the exploration of complexity theory as an analytical tool, the paper has highlighted a potentially fundamental insight into the understanding of the urban system in general and urban regeneration processes in particular. The complexity project has opened a new window through which to view the urban problem. In particular, the principles of self-organization and the edge of chaos are so robust and irresistible as they offer a new way of planning — one that is aware of the complexity of the urban system and allows the overall plan to emerge from the system. Its latent quest for intervention without violation of natural order is not only compelling, but also brings us closer to a crossroads of deciding whether the way forward in planning (and urban regeneration) is to build footpaths where people actually walk or continue to impose those patterns on people through rational comprehensive planning and its tired decision-making instruments.

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