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Abstract

Town twinning describes the establishment and practice, by various groups and to various ends, of relatively formal and long-term relationships between settlements usually located in different nation-states. Twin towns are sometimes called sister cities. This paper draws on a study of town twinning that focused on the involvement of British localities since the end of the Second World War and analysed data collected by the Local Government Association (for England and Wales), materials archived in the National Archives at Kew, London and various local record offices, and transcripts of interviews with representatives of relevant local, national, and international organisations. The paper makes three main contributions. Firstly, it provides a brief history of town twinning involving British localities. Secondly, it develops from this historical narrative an original conceptualisation of town twinning, arguing that it should be approached less as a coherent movement and more as a device, a repertoire, and a model. Thirdly, it argues that town twinning has often been used as a device for extending care across space – and that much can be learned from its history for contemporary geographies of care. Town twinning participants have approached the problem of care-at-a-distance as both an ontological problem and a practical problem. Some have focused more than others on the role of distanced causal relationships in the generation of needs in distant places. Some are currently encountering another problem as they attempt to globalise care: the problem of care-in-a-hurry.

Key words

Town twinning, sister cities, care, geographies of care, care-at-a-distance

1. Introduction

Almost two decades ago, the *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* published a paper by Wilber Zelinsky on twin towns or, as they tend to be called in

North America, sister cities (Zelinsky 1991). In the paper, Zelinsky noted that town twinning – the establishment and practice, by various groups, of relatively formal and long-term relationships between settlements usually located in different nation-states – was invented as an organised phenomenon in Western Europe after the Second World War, from where it spread to the USA and other ‘advanced countries’ during the Cold War, and to former ‘Eastern Bloc’ and ‘Third World’ countries during the 1980s. He noted that town twinning tends to occur between settlements with historical connections they wish to maintain, or with shared contemporary concerns of economic, cultural, recreational, or ideological character. He noted the various principles involved, from ‘questing after one’s own kind’ to humanitarianism, philanthropy, and development. Finally, under the heading ‘unfinished business’, he posed two seemingly important research questions. Does town twinning reinforce or undermine nation-state authority? And has town twinning helped to create transnational commonalities of thought and behaviour? This, then, was an agenda-setting type of paper that called for further research on town twinning (pp1-2):

Over the past forty years, more than 11,000 twinings have been formalised among a wide range of communities in at least 159 countries – people-to-people relationships that, one is inclined to believe, are generally inspired by quite laudable ideals. But, whatever the motivation, here, most certainly, is a development that cries out for methodological treatment by human geographers.

This call for additional study fell mostly on deaf ears, at least within the discipline of Geography. There has been next to nothing published on town twinning by geographers since 1991 (though see Clarke 2010a, 2010b). The same cannot be said for other disciplines where a literature does exist on town twinning and related fields such as municipal internationalism (Ewen and Hebbert 2007), municipal diplomacy (Hobbs 1994, Kincaid 1989, Kirby et al 1995, Shuman 1986-87, 1992), and municipal exchange (Bontenbal and Lindert 2009, Hewitt 1996, 1998, Shuman 1994). In particular, a few historians have studied the ideals and institutions of post-war town twinning in Western Europe (Campbell 1987, Vion 2002, 2007). This work provides one support for Section 2 of the present paper. Sociologist John Lofland has considered the politics of ‘local foreign policy’ between sister cities in the USA and

the Soviet Union during the 1980s (Lofland 1989). More recently, economists based in New Zealand have studied the role of town twinning between settlements in New Zealand and Japan in local economic development (Cremer et al 2001, Ramasamy and Cremer 1998). They view cultural differences between Asia and New Zealand as one obstacle to trade, and town twinning as a policy instrument for reducing such cultural distance.

The rest of this paper seeks to answer Zelinsky's call for further research in two main ways. Firstly, it provides a brief history of town twinning involving British localities. From this historical narrative, a conceptualisation of town twinning is developed which is needed because there is some confusion over definitions of town twinning in both academic and popular literatures (see Clarke 2010a). Secondly, the paper argues that some forms of town twinning have been attempts to extend care to 'distant strangers' (Corbridge 1993). As such, there is much to learn from them about the problem of 'care at a distance' (Silk 2007) – a central concern for geographers of care who tend to overlook historical examples of 'globalising care' (Robinson 1999) while they focus on contemporary developments (e.g. the extension of market relations into new areas of social life – Lawson 2007) or more abstract debates between feminist and other moral philosophies (e.g. Smith 1998).

The paper draws on research conducted as part of a project on the participation of British settlements in town twinning since the end of the Second World War. This research involved: analysis of data on town twinning collected by the Local Government Association (of England and Wales); analysis of correspondence and other documents held in the National Archives at Kew, London; and interviews with representatives of relevant national and international organisations such as the International Union of Local Authorities.¹ The research also involved 11 case studies of town twinning partnerships.² Methods for these case studies included: content, narrative, and contextual analysis of documents held in local record offices (see Miller and Dingwall 1997); and interviews with representatives of local authorities, town twinning associations, and other partnership organisations. In what follows, data from three case studies are used to balance the need for depth of analysis (since individual cases demonstrate the rich complexity of town twinning and its relationship to care and the extension of care across space) with breadth of analysis (because, as a

group, the selected cases cover different forms of town twinning, from post-war links for peace and reconciliation in Western Europe, to late twentieth-century links for international solidarity, international development, or transition in post-socialist Europe and Asia).

To complete this opening section, an introduction to each case study partnership referred to in the rest of the paper is provided in Figure 1. The next section develops a brief history of town twinning (from the perspective of British localities and organisations) and a conceptualisation of town twinning based on this historical narrative. The argument here is that town twinning is best approached not as a movement but as a device, a repertoire, and a model. Section 3 reviews the ‘geographies of care’ literature (Lawson 2007), with a particular focus on the problem of care-at-a-distance. Following this, Section 4 shows how town twinning has sometimes been used in attempts to extend care to distant others, how the problem of globalising care has been approached in different ways by those involved, and how these attempts to extend care across space have worked out in practice. The paper’s main arguments and contributions are summarised in the concluding section. Town twinning has been used to address care-at-a-distance as an *ontological* problem demanding interurban relationships and awareness of those relationships. But awareness of *causal* relationships that generate needs have been less of a concern in some forms of town twinning. Secondly, town twinning has been used to address care-at-a-distance as a *practical* problem demanding interurban relationships and action within those relationships (to meet needs) – but this has sometimes taken the form of uncritical modernist development. Finally, in attempting to extend care across space using town twinning, participants have recently encountered the problem of short timeframes in partnerships that are increasingly organised through projects (making them easier to audit). This relationship between care, space, and *time* appears to be crucial and worthy of further study.

2. Conceptualising town twinning

In much of the existing literature, town twinning is conceptualised as a ‘movement’ (e.g. Campbell 1987, Lofland 1989, Zelinsky 1991). In this section, I draw on a brief history of interurban partnerships involving British localities to argue that town

twinning is better conceptualised in three ways: as a device (for producing topological proximity between topographically distant localities); a repertoire (of formal agreements, trade delegations, joint projects, exchange visits etc. but that also forms one device in the higher-order repertoires of peace activists, council officers, business leaders, civil servants etc.); and a model (in that town twinning as a device or repertoire has proved itself to be highly mobile and has been taken up and used by numerous different interest groups, in numerous different contexts, with numerous different ends in mind). There are now multiple models of town twinning in existence to be copied, combined, and elaborated. This is because the history of town twinning is not a history of stages, in which later forms of partnership have replaced earlier ones, but a history of supplementations, in which early forms (e.g. town twinning for European integration) continue to thrive alongside later ones (e.g. town twinning for local economic development). As such, town twinning has become an internally diverse category best conceptualised along the lines suggested above.

This becomes clear if we consider the brief history of town twinning involving British localities. Town twinning was invented as an organised phenomenon in Western Europe in the period immediately following the Second World War. Various models of town twinning were proposed by different organisations at this time. The two models that came to represent different approaches to interurban partnerships over the next few decades were those associated with the Council of European Municipalities (CEM) and the United Towns Organisation (UTO). The CEM was established in 1951 after a conference organised by *La Federation*, a French group pursuing European unification by, amongst other things, promoting direct links between European municipalities. According to Vion (2002), the CEM model of town twinning involved ritual oath-taking, sometimes during religious services, sometimes involving members of the Congress for Peace and Christian Civilisation, and sometimes incorporating messages from the Pope. The purpose of town twinning for the CEM was to promote European unity and defend Christian civilisation against Communism (ibid).

The UTO was also established in 1951 – initially as *Le Monde Bilingue*, a project to preserve the French language and promote it as a ‘world language’ through which ‘world understanding’ might be achieved (UTO 1965). In contrast to the CEM, the

UTO was interested in the potential of town twinning partnerships to span the emerging geopolitical and geoeconomic fault lines of the post-war period. It championed town twinning between localities on either side of the Cold War divide, and between settlements in the so-called developed and developing worlds. So, in the early 1950s, at least two alternative models of town twinning became available to British and other localities. One, advocated by the CEM, approached town twinning as a device for *bonding* between people sharing certain characteristics (e.g. Western European Christians). The other, advocated by the UTO, viewed town twinning as a mechanism for *bridging* between different groups of people (e.g. capitalist westerners and communist easterners, or ‘developed’ northerners and ‘developing’ southerners). These two models – the CEM bonding model and the UTO bridging model – became major characters in the subsequent history of town twinning and are useful categories through which to approach this diverse field.

Measured by the number of links involving British cities and other settlements, the phenomenon of town twinning grew steadily after these early years of invention. This can be seen in data collected by the Local Government Association (LGA). The dataset contains details of over 2,500 partnerships involving almost 1,400 British localities and partners in 90 countries spread across much of the world. A fuller analysis of these data is available elsewhere (Clarke 2010a) but two general points are worth emphasising here. Firstly, each decade between the end of the Second World War and the end of the twentieth century, more and more new town twinning arrangements were established involving British localities. So town twinning is not some quaint post-war phenomenon and deserves serious academic treatment. Secondly, these arrangements have their own geography in that certain overseas countries are over-represented in the dataset including some in Western Europe (France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Belgium), two of the world’s larger economies (the USA and China), and some in post-socialist Europe (Poland, Russia, the Czech Republic, Hungary). Reasons for this should become clear as we proceed with our historical narrative.

At the beginning of the Cold War, at least two models of town twinning were available to British localities (the CEM bonding model and the UTO bridging model). Gradually, over the next three decades, one of these models became favoured over the

other among British organisations and came to account for most of the growth in town twinning during this period. The favoured approach was the CEM bonding model and reasons for this can be found in correspondence and other documents held in the National Archives at Kew, London. Again, these documents are analysed in detail elsewhere (Clarke 2010b). Initially, in the early 1950s, the British authorities (e.g. the Foreign Office) were supportive of all forms of town twinning – though no financial support was offered because housing provision and similar tasks took priority in the immediate post-war period. From the early 1960s, however, the CEM and UTO began competing for members among British towns and cities. They also began briefing against each other to the Association of Municipal Corporations, the Foreign Office, and other more or less relevant bodies. Gradually, the British authorities began suspecting the UTO of ‘communist manipulation and infiltration’ (Foreign and Commonwealth Office 1972). This was because the UTO had members in the Soviet Union, the French Communist Party had briefly taken an interest in the UTO model of town twinning as a means promoting Communism, and representatives of the UTO had expressed opposition to the Vietnam War (ibid).

In this context, the British Government launched its first and only scheme sponsoring town twinning partnerships. Beginning in 1972, the Rippon Programme funded links between British localities and those in Western Europe. Its official purpose was to prepare Britain for entry into the European Economic Community. Another effect, whether intentional or not, was to guide local authorities towards the CEM model of town twinning. This can be seen in the LGA data. Each decade between 1950 and the end of the century registered an increase in the number of countries represented in town twinning links involving British localities. This means that town twinning has become an internally diverse category over time. One exception, though, is the 1970s. Under the Rippon Programme, and in its wake too, British localities turned towards settlements in France and Germany and away from settlements in other countries (especially those outside of Western Europe). At the end of Cold War, support for the bonding model of town twinning continued in Europe, initially via the European Commission’s Community Aid for Twinings – a scheme launched in 1989 to promote awareness of the European institutions among their citizens – and more recently via the Commission’s Citizens for Europe programme, set to run from 2007 to 2013 with similar aims of promoting European citizenship.

So the CEM bonding model became dominant during the 1960s and continues to receive European support. From the late 1970s, however, other models of town twinning began to (re)emerge in Britain. Firstly, town twinning became used for local economic development purposes. The context for this was economic recession during the 1970s and subsequent control of public expenditure under Thatcher's Conservative Government of the 1980s. Faced with a combination of deindustrialisation and tightly constrained spending, local authorities began to elaborate and adopt new approaches to local government. Gradually, they supplemented – and, to a certain extent, replaced – the position that local welfare could best be secured by providing local welfare services, with the position that it could best be secured by attracting mobile investment capital (Cochrane 1993, Hall and Hubbard 1998, Harvey 1989). This 'new urban politics' provided one frame for developments in town twinning during the 1980s. In addition to further links with localities in France, Germany, and other Western European countries (recorded in the LGA database), new links were established with towns and cities in the USA (30) and China (19). These partnerships, like all town twinning arrangements, have their own unique characters and histories. But they are also united by their use in explicit attempts to access resources and markets, and to attract mobile investment capital.

The second form of town twinning to (re)emerge in the late twentieth century was connected to various governmental programmes offering support to post-socialist Europe and Asia after 1989, and seeking to influence transition in that region. The UK Government established the Know How Fund for Poland in 1989. This was eventually extended to other countries including all European Union Accession States, and focused on sectors reflecting the perceived expertise of Britain e.g. public administration, management, and 'good government'. It was delivered through a number of mechanisms including the Local Authorities Technical Links Scheme that funded partnerships between British and post-socialist localities, incorporating activities such as council officer secondments. A similar scheme was funded by the European Commission as part of its Technical Aid to the Commonwealth of Independent States (TACIS) programme launched in 1991. TACIS sought to promote democratic politics and market economics in the 'Newly Independent States'. From 1995, part of this agenda was pursued through the TACIS City Twinning Programme.

Interurban partnerships were funded to share technical and other 'know how' concerning social policy, management of urban services, public administration and so forth.

Thirdly, a form of twinning (re)emerged in the late 1970s and early 1980s that sought to bridge between what were becoming thought of at that time as the Global North and South. These partnerships included attempts to construct political solidarity between British localities and perceived centres of progressive politics around the world. For example, after the Sandinista Revolution of 1979, and Reagan's support for the Contras' attempted counter-revolution, 10 links were established between towns and cities in Britain and Nicaragua. These North-South partnerships also included attempts by members of Britain's development community to address issues of global poverty and inequality at the community scale. Links were established between British communities and those in Africa and other parts of the so-called Global South. In 1984, these arrangements came together in the United Kingdom One World Linking Association which uses town twinning and other partnerships to promote world friendship, understanding, and peace (www.ukowla.org.uk).

Finally, these (re)emergent bridging partnerships included those termed 'decentralised cooperation' (by the European Commission) or 'city-to-city cooperation' (by various agencies of the United Nations). 'Decentralised cooperation' entered European law in 1989 with the fourth revision of the Lomé Convention – the trade and aid agreement between the European Community (as it was then) and various countries in Africa, the Caribbean, and the Pacific. It describes attempts to build local government capacity in the Lomé countries through municipal partnerships and exchanges involving European cities. Such attempts have been funded by EuropeAid programmes including Urb AI (for cooperation between Europe and Latin America) and Asia Urbs (for cooperation between Europe and Asia). 'City-to-city cooperation' is the preferred term at the United Nations (UN) for such capacity-building partnerships. In agencies like the UN Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat), two contemporary processes are thought to lead in this direction (Bongers 2001, Bongers and McCallum 2003): urbanisation means that more and more people are living in cities; while administrative decentralisation means that more and more of these cities have a certain amount of democratic legitimacy and autonomy to act. So capacity-building

at the local government level is becoming central to international development efforts. This was reflected in the decision to make city-to-city cooperation the primary theme of World Habitat Day 2002. In Britain, it is reflected in programmes like the Commonwealth Local Government Forum's Good Practice Scheme which is part-funded by the UK Government's Department for International Development. The scheme funds partnerships between British cities and those in Ghana, Jamaica, South Africa, India, and Sierra Leone with a view to improving local government through 'good practice' dissemination.

This is the history of town twinning involving British localities. It spans a period of 60 or so years and the fields of post-war reconciliation, European unification, local economic development, post-socialist transition, and international development. Some have used the term 'town twinning' to describe just those partnerships forged in Western Europe after the Second World War, and have used other terms to describe later arrangements: 'North-South linking', 'decentralised cooperation', 'city-to-city cooperation' etc. But others have used 'twinning' to describe later arrangements (e.g. the TACIS City Twinning Programme), and all of those partnerships discussed above do share certain characteristics: the scale of the town, city, locality, or settlement; the scale of the international or transnational; the practice of agreement (whether by twinning charter, friendship agreement, memorandum of understanding, or project-specific contract); and the practice of exchange (whether of school children, artists, business leaders, or council officers). In view of this, town twinning needs approaching in a way that accounts for all of its different contexts, uses, participants, and practices. The concepts of device, repertoire, and model – introduced at the top of this section – facilitate such an approach.

Having conceptualised town twinning, we can now turn to its relationship with care and the problem of care-at-a-distance. The rest of this paper focuses on those cases where town twinning has been used as a device for extending care to distant strangers, whether as part of the repertoires of social movement organisations (on both Right and Left) or governmental organisations (operating at local, national, and international scales). The next section reviews the literature on geographies of care, with a particular focus on the problem of care-at-a-distance. Then Section 4 argues that town twinning has been used in attempts to extend care across space, explores how

the problem of care has been approached in such attempts, and considers how these attempts have worked out in practice.

3. The problem of care-at-a-distance

Town twinning research can help to interrogate and elaborate some key concepts, concerns, and debates within contemporary Human Geography and related disciplines. Elsewhere, I have used it to further understandings of urban policy mobility (Clarke 2010a) and municipal internationalism (Clarke 2010b). In the rest of this paper, I want to use town twinning research to engage with feminist moral philosophy and one of its applications: geographies of care. This is because much town twinning practice has been explicitly rationalised in terms of care and related categories such as partiality, responsibility, embodiment, interdependence, and mutuality (see Section 4). It is also because geographies of care are currently positioned at the centre of much human geographical debate (Lawson 2007).

In recent years, feminist moral philosophy has come to be accepted across the social sciences and humanities as a viable alternative – even a preferable alternative – to Kantian normative theory or ‘Oxford philosophy’ (Robinson 1999). This is because it exhibits at least two strengths. Firstly, it acknowledges that impartiality is practically unfeasible. A person cannot respond in the same way to every demand made of them, not least because there are not enough hours in the day. Secondly, it accounts for moral motivation, which it finds not in the abstract contracts between rational and independent persons emphasised by the Enlightenment tradition of philosophy, but in the concrete experiences and relationships of embodied and situated persons (ibid).

In recent years, then, feminist moral philosophy has come to be accepted in Human Geography as a useful framework in which to consider questions of care and space. Victoria Lawson, for example, in her Past President’s Address at the 2006 Annual Meeting of the Association of American Geographers, called for geographies of care and responsibility that promote relationships of certain character: relationships of interdependence, mutuality, and concern; relationships between people in the so-called Global North and South; and long-term relationships involving intermittent contact (Lawson 2007). The main route into these areas of enquiry for many

researchers has been through debates about how care relates to geographical distance. It has been argued that persons are more likely to respond to one another, and are best able to care for one another, in situations of proximity (Friedman 1991), and that persons are more likely to harm one another when distance comes between them, either in absolute space or via the distancing technologies and architectures of modernity (Bauman 1989). The research problem to emerge from these debates has been termed the problem of 'distant strangers' (Corbridge 1993), 'globalising care' (Robinson 1999), or 'care at a distance' (Silk 2007). Some of the geographies to emerge from these debates have been termed 'distance-decay' (Corbridge 1993), 'gravity' (Smith 1998), or 'Russian-doll' models of care (Massey 2005).

One way in which scholars have approached the problem of care-at-a-distance is to ask the question: what kind of problem is it? One response has been that care-at-a-distance is an *ontological* problem (Robinson 1999, Massey 2005). People are just not aware of the very real relationships they have with distant others. Social scientists can raise awareness of these kinds of relationship through research on, say, commodity chains, and by constructing a relational ontology from the basis of such research. Another response, however, has been to view the problem of distant strangers as more of a *practical* matter. After Fisher and Tronto (1990), Barnett and Land (2007) note that practising care involves at least four stages: caring about (when one person becomes aware that another person has needs); caring for (when the first person accepts responsibility for meeting these needs); care giving (when the first person works to meet those needs); and care receiving (when the second person responds to this work, and the first person adjusts their actions accordingly). Practising care, then, involves more than simply knowing about relationships that stretch across space. Barnett and Land go on to argue that we should not assume ethical action to be motivated by awareness of causal relationships. This is because relationships that stretch across distance in the modern world tend to be highly mediated. Awareness of such relationships, then, can actually persuade people that harms said to be caused by their actions are not really their responsibility, or at least not solely their responsibility. Rather than awareness of existing relationships, Barnett and Land argue that moral motivation lies in the actual demands people make of each other. In this view, the project of globalising care becomes a project of

constructing and facilitating relatively unmediated relationships across distance and borders through which demands might be voiced and heard.

A final way in which geographers and others have engaged with the problem of care and the project of globalising care has been to question their very terms. This has been done, first of all, using empirical argument. Smith (1998), for example, asserts that so-called traditional communities of propinquity were never straightforwardly caring communities. Theoretical argument has also been used. Massey (2005), for example, sees no simple relationship between distance and difference. She views 'place' as a point on the earth's surface where otherwise unconnected narratives come into contact. Following this, she identifies a prominent figure of place as 'the unexpected neighbour' – the radically different person who lives just around the corner. She doubts, therefore, if the problem of care is best thought of as a problem of geographical distance, at least in mobile and plural societies.

To summarise, care-at-a-distance has been approached as an ontological problem, a practical problem, and a problem in need of respecification. This summary provides a framework in which to view town twinning where it has been used in attempts to globalise care. Three questions can be asked of town twinning datasets:

1. Has town twinning been used in attempts to extend care across space and, if so, why?
2. How has the problem of care-at-a-distance been approached within town twinning partnerships?
3. How have attempts to globalise care through town twinning worked out in practice?

These questions are addressed in the next section. The question of whether care-at-a-distance is a problem in need of respecification (for mobile and plural societies) is considered in the concluding section of the paper which also clarifies what town twinning research contributes to the geographies of care literature.

4. Town twinning, care, and other problems

In materials held at the National Archives, there is plenty of evidence that town twinning was seen during the period following the Second World War as a device for

extending care across space. The UTO published its view in *A Short Guide to Town Twinning* (1965, p17). Partnerships:

[...] should seek to encourage and facilitate understanding between people, no matter what their system of government may be. Geographical distance, divergence of background, tradition, or ideology, these, far from being regarded as obstacles, should, on the contrary, only serve to make twinning more necessary and more desirable.

The UTO was defining town twinning with other competing models in mind – specifically the CEM bonding model. So it was arguing for partnerships between East and West (in Cold War terms), or between North and South (in terms later associated with the Brandt Commission). But it was also asserting that town twinning, by enabling ‘direct individual contact at the ‘man-in-the-street-level’ between peoples’ (p17), can encourage or facilitate understanding, especially between people separated by geographical distance, along with different backgrounds, traditions, and ideologies. This understanding was meant to ‘bind together in a spirit of equality and reciprocal friendship the entire population of two or more towns in different countries’ (UTO 1967, no p.n.). So the UTO viewed town twinning as a device for generating contact between distant peoples (who were assumed also to be *different* peoples), which in turn generates understanding, which in turn leads to reciprocity and friendship.

A similar though not identical view was taken by the Association of Municipal Corporations (AMC) – the national body representing British local authorities for much of the twentieth century. This can be seen in a speech given by Harold Banwell, Secretary of the AMC, to a conference on *Britain and Europe: The Role of Local Authorities* (Banwell 1961, no p.n.):

The broad intention behind the idea of linking is to enable persons to get to know each other better. If we have a greater knowledge of each other and by this means find out that, although we speak a different language, we are the same kind of people with the same kind of

problems and the same kind of likes and dislikes, we are much more likely to learn to get on well together.

In contrast to the UTO, Banwell was focusing on town twinning between localities in Western Europe. He thought that activities such as exchanges of various kinds would allow Europeans to get to know each other better. In doing so, they would realise how similar they all were. Having realised this, Europeans would 'get on' better. At the very least, they would not go to war with one another. In time, they might learn to care for one another. The structure here is familiar: town twinning generates relatively unmediated contact between people in different nation-states, which in turn generates understanding (or, in this case, knowledge), which in turn leads to friendship (or, in this case, parties that 'get on well together'). Where Banwell's view differs from that of the UTO is in its focus on bonding between people assumed to be similar (the CEM model, adopted by the AMC during the 1960s – see Section 2), as opposed to bridging between people assumed to be different (the UTO model).

Let us take one more example. In 1970, Nicholas Stacey, Deputy Director of Oxfam, wrote to Ben Whitaker at the Ministry of Overseas Development. He was concerned with how to get people in Britain to care about conditions in the 'developing world' (Stacey 1970, no p.n.):

I have been giving much thought to how the existing overseas aid Voluntary Agencies, a consortium of them, or a new organisation, could make a significant contribution to encourage the 'political will' required in this country in order that Britain might fulfil her responsibilities to the developing world [...] I believe that something else is necessary which might make world poverty a 'gut' issue and respectable among the middle classes. I believe the 'twinning' concept might go some way towards achieving this [...] The long-term effect, especially among those who have visited the developing country, would inevitably be that they are aware of development problems and, as and when the issue is discussed, at national or regional level, they would feel concerned.

Stacey identified a lack of ‘political will’ regarding overseas development. For this to change, he thought that awareness of ‘development problems’ needed raising. Moreover, he thought that ‘world poverty’ needed to be made a ‘gut issue’ about which people would ‘feel concerned’. These are the problems identified by Stacey. Town twinning is viewed as (part of) the solution. Through partnerships between localities in Britain and the ‘developing world’, British people could visit poorer communities, become aware of the difficulties they faced, come to care about their future, and form a public to which politicians might respond (with more coordinated action on international development).

So there is evidence in the National Archives that town twinning was viewed during the post-war period as a device for extending care across space. This view was held at a variety of organisations including the UTO, the AMC, and Oxfam – whether as the official view of those bodies (evident in documents such as guides to town twinning) or the personal view of senior figures within those bodies (evident in documents such as letters to Members of Parliament). Let us now turn to a different dataset – the case studies of particular partnerships introduced in Figure 1. Initially, these will be treated separately, one after the other. Subsequently, they will be discussed together as part of a more direct engagement with the questions raised at the end of Section 3.

Bristol embarked on its link with Hannover almost immediately after the Second World War. Since that time, various Annual Reports of the Bristol-Hannover Council (BHC – which organises the link from the Bristol end) have registered its aims and objectives. Town twinning was used as an ‘instrument for developing mutual confidence, friendship, and understanding’ among participants so that ‘permanent peace’ might be established in Europe (BHC 1949-50, p9). It was intended that Bristolians ‘make personal contact with people with similar interests on a very intimate and friendly basis which cannot be achieved by the ordinary holiday visit’ (BHC 1957-58, p5). The expectation was that ‘as the years went by, a community of background and of thought would grow up and prevent some of the misunderstandings and prejudices which have marred the earlier years of the century’ (BHC 1957-58, p10). Much of this should now be familiar. Town twinning was thought to involve exchanges that generate intimate contact (of the kind missing from

relatively mediated encounters such as tourism). From this would flow, it was hoped, understanding, then friendship, then peace.

There were other concerns that participants held at various points in the partnership's development. The first civic visit from Bristol to Hannover took place in 1949 and involved tours of the war-damaged city but also motorcycle outriders, a guard of honour, 'a quite sumptuous luncheon', tea with the Bishop of Hannover, and dinner with the British Commissioner for Lower Saxony (BHC 1949-50). Such hospitality did not attract these early participants who were expecting a difficult trip to a defeated Germany. But it was to attract future participants – in this link and others – as ceremonies, lunches, parties etc. became associated with the town twinning repertoire. A second alternative concern was that town twinning should be a 'weapon' against the belief that 'Communism offers the only sure road to permanent peace and international understanding' (BHC 1949-50, p9). As we have seen, this concern was held widely in post-war Western Europe and animated the CEM model of town twinning. Another aim of some participants was that industry and commerce be advanced through exchanges of various kinds. Chambers of Commerce did visit one another but little progress was made (BHC 1957-58). The same can be said for public administration which German participants were particularly interested in during the late 1950s (ibid). Civic delegations did incorporate visits to post-war housing estates around this time, but such visits were rarely central to exchanges. Indeed, when town twinning charters were finally signed on the link's 40th anniversary in 1987, it was notions of contact and understanding that were reaffirmed: exchange programmes would 'encourage further contacts [...] giving the people of each city a greater understanding of the other and contributing towards the unification of Europe' (BCC 1987, no p.n.). The context for explicit mention of European unification was discussion at the European institutions during the late 1980s about forthcoming programmes to support town twinning (e.g. Community Aid for Twinning – see Section 2). But the words of these charters that appear consistently elsewhere in materials associated with this partnership are those describing town twinning as a device for producing contact between distant strangers, understanding from contact, friendship from understanding, and peace from friendship. If only people knew each other, it was thought – knew of each other culturally, and knew each other personally – they would care enough to avoid further conflict with each other, and even to forge

a political community together. This is what it means to address globalising care as an ontological problem – a problem of (geographical) knowledge, awareness, imagination.

A focus on ‘awareness’ characterises the majority of activities pursued by the BHC. In the early years, care was approached as a practical problem, and Bristolians collected old shoes for their barefoot German partners who offered musical performances in return (Veale, No Date). Since that time, however, lectures and exhibitions have sought to raise awareness of distant strangers (and also to make them less strange). Exchanges of various kinds have sought to do something similar by engineering relatively unmediated contact. In 1997, to mark the partnership’s 50th anniversary, one of Bristol’s redeveloped waterfronts was named Hannover Quay. Bristol does not have road signs announcing its twinning partnerships, which is probably the most common way that participants raise awareness of town twinning among broader populations (Figure 2). But it does fly the various national flags of its twin towns outside the Council House (Figure 3). Below these flags can be found plaques representing each partnership (Figure 4).

One of these plaques marks Bristol’s link with Puerto Morazan in Nicaragua. This arrangement was established by Steve Roser and others in the early 1980s (see Figure 1). Roser had visited Nicaragua and been ‘deeply affected’ by the poverty he encountered there, and also ‘the good work of the Sandinistas’ (interview with the author). He returned to Bristol ‘politically awakened’ and keen to provide other people with similar opportunities, while continuing to express solidarity with the Sandinistas (ibid). In the following years and decades, these initial aims of raising political consciousness among Bristolians and demonstrating solidarity with Left Nicaraguans were much debated by members of Bristol Link with Nicaragua (BLINC) – the body organising the partnership at the Bristol end. Other concerns included aid and development. A crucial moment in these debates came with defeat of the National Sandinista Liberation Front in the Nicaraguan national elections of 1990. After that, solidarity became less of a focus (since few Sandinistas remained in Puerto Morazan) while development became the main objective of the partnership (ibid). This can be seen in activities such as fundraising events (dinners, picnics, football tournaments etc.) and development projects of various kinds: resource

transfers (e.g. of teaching materials); emergency aid (e.g. after Hurricane Mitch); development brigades (e.g. to sink wells) – all overseen by a resident local to Puerto Morazan, employed by BLINC as a part-time, on-the-ground development worker.

These aims, objectives, and activities suggest an approach to care that is practical in character. Needs are thought to exist in one location. Demands are voiced through BLINC's development worker. Bristolians respond with fundraising and other action. There is, however, another side to the Bristol-Puerto Morazan link. In addition to aid and related activity directed towards Nicaragua, BLINC pursues development education in Bristol. It does this through newspaper articles, film shows, lectures, school links, study tours (of Nicaragua, by Bristolians), and speaking tours (of Bristol, by Nicaraguans). The point of these events and arrangements is to raise awareness of Bristol's town twinning with Puerto Morazan. But it is also to raise awareness of needs in Nicaragua, and the causal relationships behind these needs, including historical relationships of colonialism and contemporary relationships of global capitalism. This partnership, then, approaches care as both a practical problem (to be addressed by aid and development activity) and an ontological problem (to be addressed through development education and awareness-raising of causal relationships that stretch across time and space).

The last case-study partnership introduced in Figure 1 is that between Bristol and Tbilisi. Paul Garland's founding aims when lobbying for this link during the mid-1980s can be found in a letter he wrote to Graham Robertson, Chairman of Bristol City Council (BCC) Resources Committee (Garland 1985, no p.n.):

It has been my desire, and that of many prominent Bristolians with whom I have had conversations, to twin Bristol with a Soviet city. Improving East-West cooperation and getting to know each other's culture, I think lessens the chance of conflict [...] It is hard to imagine a place [Georgia] more richly endowed by nature. Its scenic beauty is almost incredible [...] Georgian wines and cognacs are sold all over the world [...] Bristol's long association with the wine trade and the world wine fair is one important reason for linking our two great cities [...]

These aims are reminiscent of Bristol's link with Hannover along with views held at the UTO, the AMC, and Oxfam during the period following the Second World War. Town twinning is approached first and foremost as a device by which different national peoples may get to know one another, come to care about each other, and so reject international conflict. Garland's letter also recalls the Bristol-Hannover partnership by including a number of secondary reasons for twinning. Georgia exhibits natural riches that Bristolians might visit and enjoy. There may also be economic benefits, especially for those in the wine trade. These secondary reasons probably played well with BCC's Resources Committee.

BCC was eventually convinced by Garland and his colleagues so that twinning charters were signed in 1988. But civil war in Georgia meant that little activity took place – beyond a few civic exchanges, university projects, and choir tours – until 1995 when local government officers in Tbilisi requested assistance from their counterparts in Bristol (see Figure 1). By this time, Bristolians such as Derek Pickup who led the city's response, viewed Georgia in terms of needs (e.g. for advice on how to establish local democratic government after decades of Soviet centralisation and years of civil war) and also opportunities (e.g. for Bristol-based companies oriented towards emerging markets) (interview with the author). Awareness-raising activities resumed during the late 1990s, including school exchanges, film festivals, conferences, and Georgian study days. But practical action came to the fore by way of resource transfers (e.g. of refuse trucks, health equipment, and education materials) and three projects funded by broader programmes of national and international government. One of these programmes was the UK Government's Know How Fund Local Authority Technical Links Scheme (see Section 2). Bristol was funded to share information about EU environmental protection legislation, to assist Tbilisi in developing a waste management system, to lend Tbilisi some air pollution monitoring equipment, and to prepare an economic development strategy for Tbilisi. Another programme was the European Commission's TACIS City Twinning Scheme (see Section 2). On this occasion, Bristol was funded to develop indicators of sustainable waste and air quality management for Tbilisi. These projects operated primarily through council officer visits and exchanges.

We are now in a position to engage more directly with the questions identified at the bottom of Section 3. To the question of whether town twinning has been used in attempts to extend care across space, we can answer in the affirmative, while acknowledging other uses of the town twinning device (e.g. local economic development), and multiple uses of particular town twinning partnerships. Individuals and organisations at both local and national levels have viewed town twinning as a device for generating relatively unmediated contact between distant strangers. This contact is meant to be different from other highly mediated encounters (e.g. tourism) and is meant to produce mutual understanding, knowledge, affection, and, in turn, friendship, concern, community, and peace. In addition, for some town twinning participants, this relatively direct form of contact is meant to enable needs in one place to be articulated clearly, so that people in another place might respond appropriately.

The second question asks how the problem of care-at-a-distance has been approached through town twinning. One answer is that, often, it has been approached as an *ontological* problem – a problem of awareness deficits regarding distant strangers, their existence and needs, to be solved by awareness-raising activities such as exchanges, lectures, road signs and so on. These activities have sometimes been used to raise awareness of how distant others are not so strange after all (e.g. by town twinning partnerships based on the CEM bonding model). Occasionally, they have been used to raise awareness of causal relationships between different parts of the world (e.g. by BLINC in Bristol). It is only this latter use of the town twinning repertoire that fits with calls in the academic literature for a relational ontology through which people might acknowledge their historical-geographical relations, and accept what responsibilities follow (Robinson 1999, Massey 2005). Another answer to this second question is that, sometimes, care-at-a-distance has been approached as a *practical* problem – a problem of meeting needs voiced by town twinning partners, to be solved by aid and development activity.

Mention of controversial categories like ‘aid’ and ‘development’ brings us to the final question of how attempts to globalise care through town twinning have worked out in practice. Given the research methodology (Section 1), which focused on documents detailing aims, objectives, and activities, alongside interviews with representatives of

town twinning organisations – and did not systematically assess the impact of town twinning partnerships (a task for future research) – only three brief comments can be offered in response to this final question. Firstly, despite the rhetorical distinction often made by participants between town twinning and tourism, the repertoire of town twinning has often overlapped with that of tourism. For example, a civic visit from Hannover to Bristol in the late 1980s involved BCC presentations on elderly services, homelessness policies, and arts provision, but also tours of Ashton Court Estate, the City Museum, the SS Great Britain, and Bath (BHC 1988). In theory, town twinning is meant to involve long stays, repeat visits, home stays, language learning etc. It is this form of contact that is meant to bring knowledge, understanding, and affection. But town twinning has also involved coach tours, sightseeing, cultural shows and so on. The tourism literature, from Boorstin (1964) onwards, teaches how such activities work to construct other people as spectacularly different, exotic, and consumable. This is one contradiction evident in how attempts to globalise care through town twinning have worked out in practice: on the one hand, there has been a rhetorical distinction between town twinning and tourism (between the supposedly unmediated and mediated), while, on the other, there has been overlap or slippage between town twinning and tourism repertoires.

Secondly, where care-at-a-distance has been approached as a practical problem, town twinning has often involved aid and development activity, and has sometimes been enrolled into larger programmes of technical assistance. These programmes have tended to be uncritically modernist in character (Peet and Hartwick 1999) and have sought to address needs in distant places by changing behaviour in those places (e.g. through capacity-building projects). This is a very different approach from that of dependency theorists and others who argue convincingly that needs in distant places tend to arise from historical and contemporary relationships *between* places. For example, Massey (2004, 2007) has argued that, if relatively wealthy cities wish to respond to needs elsewhere, they should do so by focusing on their own behaviour, including the recruitment and investment policies of organisations based within their jurisdiction. This has not been a focus of town twinning practice, with the exception of development education pursued by some North-South links (e.g. Bristol-Puerto Morazan).

Finally, attempts to globalise care through town twinning are currently being affected by contemporary developments in local government international activity, and in society more broadly. British local authorities have begun to favour short-term partnerships or partnerships organised into short-term projects. This is the view of the Local Government International Bureau (Handley 2006: 4): 'Currently, the trend for local authorities considering forming new international links is to move away from formal, long-term partnerships such as town twinning and enter less binding agreements'. It was also the view of participants in the Quarterly Meeting of the LGA's International Cooperation Officers Network (observed by the author in December 2007). Council officers are turning away from 'traditional town twinning arrangements' and towards 'international partnerships' and 'international cooperation projects'. This is because they are interested in tightly focused projects, the clear benefits of which can be demonstrated quickly to local electorates.

These new forms of town twinning (if we retain the broad definition of town twinning outlined in Section 2) connect to broader movements associated with 'the new economy' (Sennett 2006) and what we might call 'the new democracy'. Sennett characterises the new economy by its temporality. Since the shift from managerial power to shareholder power in large companies after the collapse of the Bretton Woods agreements, companies have been increasingly subject to demands for short-term results and have responded to these demands by attempting to make themselves look beautiful to shareholders by demonstrating change, flexibility, dynamism, and innovation. The result of these attempts has been a generalised shortening of timeframes within organisations. To cope with and exploit these shortened timeframes, managers have cultivated knowledge workers, valued teams, flattened hierarchies, and organised through short-term projects (Thrift 2005). Regarding the new democracy, Power (1997) notes that, in addition to shareholders, organisations must increasingly give accounts to numerous other authorities including, ultimately, citizens. This account giving has become institutionalised in the audit. Performance must be measured against targets at regular intervals. This is another factor contributing to the shortening of timeframes in organisations.

In these two related contexts, town twinning appears to be changing in character, with implications for its use in attempts to extend care across space. One of the rationales

behind twentieth-century models of town twinning was that formal relationships tend to last for a long time and long-term relationships tend to be open and inclusive, to allow needs to be voiced and heard, and to generate obligations between parties. But now, at the beginning of the twenty first century, existing town twinning relationships are increasingly being organised through short-term projects, and newly formed links are increasingly being configured as informal, short-term, and tightly focused. In both cases, participants are coming to these relationships armed with the stuff of business plans: aims, objectives, targets, milestones etc. The intention is to be accountable, which is difficult to fault. But the consequences are significant for attempts to globalise care through town twinning. Sennett (2006) attributes three social deficits to the short-term culture of the new economy: low institutional loyalty; diminished informal trust; and weakened institutional knowledge. These are precisely some of the things which town twinning has promised to help generate: loyalty, trust, and knowledge between distant strangers.

5. Conclusion

British localities became involved in town twinning after the Second World War. They have used town twinning in attempts to promote peace and reconstruction in Western Europe, political and administrative unification of Europe, local economic development, transition to liberal democracy and economy in post-socialist Europe and Asia, and international development in the Global South. As they have done so, town twinning has grown over time – at least when measured by number of new partnerships involving British localities. This growth reflects a history of town twinning that is not one of stages (with, for example, town twinning for local economic development replacing town twinning for European unification) but one of supplementations. So town twinning is best conceptualised as a device, a repertoire, and a model. It has been used by numerous groups, with numerous interests, in numerous contexts, to numerous ends.

One of these ends has been the extension of care across space. We can see this in statements by various participant individuals and organisations who have seen in town twinning a means to engineering relatively unmediated contact between distant strangers. This contact has been thought to produce understanding and affection, and,

ultimately, friendship and peace. In addition, it has been thought to facilitate responsibility: the process of call and response by which needs become met and care becomes given. What, then, can be learned from this history of town twinning about geographies of care? Five main conclusions suggest themselves. Firstly, care-at-a distance has been approached as an ontological problem – a problem of how other people and our relationships to them are imagined – to be addressed by awareness-raising activity. But sometimes this activity has focused on forging new relationships which have been touristic in character, and raising awareness of these relationships. Not often has it focused on raising awareness of *existing causal relationships between places and people*. Secondly, the problem of care has been approached as a practical problem – a problem of how needs are communicated and settled – to be addressed by aid and development action. But sometimes this action has been uncritically modernist in character, oriented towards behaviour in distant places and not closer to home. These first two points are connected in a third conclusion. Care-at-a-distance requires not only knowledge that people with needs exist elsewhere, and action to build their capacity for coping with such needs, but also knowledge that *needs arise from distanced chains of cause and effect*, and action targeting each link of such chains (and not just those at the other end).

A penultimate conclusion is that attempts to extend care across space are currently under pressure from the short timeframes associated with recent economic and democratic developments. The practice of care involves building relationships in which needs can be voiced, heard, acted upon, discussed further and so on. But desires for accountability are leading to partnerships that begin with clear aims and objectives and report progress against these criteria after short periods of time. A final conclusion relates this last point back to the outstanding question of whether care-at-a-distance is a problem demanding respecification (for mobile and plural societies). On the one hand, this is clearly not the case in a world where colonial violence still proceeds through distancing strategies, discourses, and technologies (Gregory 2004). But on the other hand, Massey (2005) is surely right to argue that contemporary societies pose the problem of the proximate stranger (or ‘the unexpected neighbour’) at least as much as that of the distant stranger. So the problem of care is no longer simply and primarily a problem of geographical distance (if it ever was). In this light, how else might the problem be stated? One suggestion

from the history of town twinning is that care faces increasing challenges from the rise of short timeframes. This sets another problem alongside that of care-at-a-distance: the problem of care-in-a-hurry.

Notes

1. Representatives were interviewed from the International Union of Local Authorities, the Council of European Municipalities, the Association of Municipal Corporations, the British Council, the Nicaragua Solidarity Campaign, Towns and Development, the United Kingdom One World Linking Association, Oxfam, the Local Government International Bureau, the United Nations Development Programme, World Associations of Cities and Local Authorities Coordination, the Commonwealth Local Government Forum, and the Local Government Association (of England and Wales).
2. Case study partnerships included those between Bristol and its seven twin towns (Bordeaux, Hannover, Oporto, Tbilisi, Puerto Morazan, Beira, and Guangzhou), and between Newport and Kutaisi, Sherborne and Granville, Warwick and Bo, and Cardiff and Cochin.

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Figure 1: Case study partnerships

Bristol-Hannover

In 1947, a conference was organised in Bristol by German Educational Construction, a voluntary organisation founded during the Second World War by emigrant Germans in England. One of the delegates was Katherina Peterson from the Education Department of Lower Saxony. During the conference, Peterson discussed the idea of a town partnership with some of the delegates from Bristol (BHC 1997). The following September, a 'goodwill mission' travelled from Bristol to Hannover. Its five members represented Bristol City Council (BCC), Bristol Chamber of Commerce, and the University of Bristol. Funding came from the Bristol Council of Christian Churches, the Southwest Council of the Transport and General Workers Union, and the University of Bristol. That November (1948), the Bristol-Hannover Council (BHC) was established to oversee the emerging partnership. It operated through working committees on relief, education, church contacts, youth exchanges, and music. The BHC survives today and over the years has received funding from the Foreign Office, the British Council, Avon County Council, and BCC. Annual reports of the BHC suggest that between 1948 and 1965 (when records become patchy), over 6,000 residents of the two cities participated in education, foreign language, music, sport, cultural, public policy and other kinds of exchange. These participants often became involved as members of organisations including schools, universities, choirs, art galleries, churches, local authorities, youth clubs, sports associations, manufacturers, student societies, trade unions, women's guilds, cooperative societies, theatre companies, and fire brigades.

Bristol-Puerto Morazan

In the early 1980s, Steve Roser moved from Oxford to Bristol (interview with the author). He had been involved in Left politics in Oxford and had visited Nicaragua after the Sandinista revolution of 1979. On arrival in Bristol, he met Alix Hughes who had also visited Nicaragua and they discussed the idea of establishing a link between Bristol and Puerto Morazan (ibid). Bristol Link with Nicaragua (BLINC) was established in 1985. A friendship agreement was signed by the two local authorities in 1989. The partnership is mostly funded by annual events in and around Bristol such as the summer picnic and the Copa Sandino football tournament.

Bristol-Tbilisi

Paul Garland, a self-proclaimed communist who was later to become a Labour Councillor in Bristol, spent much of the early 1980s lobbying BCC for a twinning link with a Soviet city (interview between Derek Pickup and the author). A chance meeting at a conference in Cardiff between representatives of BCC and the city of Tbilisi focused this lobbying activity on the capital of Georgia (ibid). Delegations from BCC visited Tbilisi in 1985 and again in 1987. Twinning charters were signed in 1988 and the Bristol-Tbilisi Association was established to oversee activities such as university exchanges and choir tours. In 1995, Derek Pickup received a letter from Tbilisi City Council via his line manager in the Department of Environment at BCC (ibid). It was requesting help with rebuilding Tbilisi after the recent civil war. Pickup was given officer time (though no money) to form a response. He put together a group of people representing BCC, the Bristol-Tbilisi Association, the universities, Bristol Chamber of Commerce, and the Georgian Embassy in London. Exchanges of council officers and business leaders were organised. In 1996, the twinning charters were redrafted in Georgian.

Figure 2: Welcome to Reading, twinned with...



Figure 3: Town twinning flags, Bristol Council House



Figure 4: Bristol-Hannover plaque, Bristol Council House

