

generation as a new normality. Government and private initiatives (charities) have responded to the immediate needs of the area, but their many projects have been the proverbial drop in the ocean. In the face of such complexity, the Designing Out Crime center established a long-term partnership with the major social housing authority that holds local properties. DOC designers have been canvassing the neighborhood, talking to people to get a sense of problem situations that could be fruitfully addressed, and the solutions they envision.

The complexity of this situation defeats any attempt to come up with a single meaningful problem definition or paradox. The alternative is to ignore the plethora of problems, and aim the theme analysis toward building positive processes that will create a new core of solutions. When talking to inhabitants about what is important to them, we were surprised to find that the current dilapidated state of the built environment, which is highly symbolic to outsiders, was not an important problem to them. Low self-esteem and a lack of self-respect came up again and again as a root cause for their apparent inability to change the course of their lives.

5 THEMES AND FRAMES

From these conversations on meaning and value emerged the themes of identity (what is my essence?), aspiration (what can I hope to achieve?), and empowerment (how can I increase my self-worth?). But it is clear that single frames based on any one of these rich themes would still fall short of resolving the situation—they would have very little effect because there is not enough of a context; they need an overall structure in which the results of the projects could be taken forward. To create such a structured process, the designers realized that the themes needed to be combined, forming a “classic” transformation (learning) cycle if we add the activity of “reflection.” This cycle then forms a meta-frame that delineates the steps of personal and societal transformation (see figure 5.5).

This transformation process became the central meta-frame for approaching the complex problem situation. As we will see, each of these steps needs to be framed and supported in completely different ways. To attain a clear and sharp frame that can lead to action, we need to concentrate our efforts on one section of the population that we see as being amenable to positive influence. The many young (teenage) mothers were singled out as an important group: it was clear from seeing them pick up their kids from school how much love and hope they invest in the next generation (the kids all looked immaculate,