TPR, 81 (2) 2010 doi:10.3828/tpr.2009.31

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Centenary paper
UK urban regeneration policies in the early twenty-first century

Continuity or change?

This article charts the successes and failures of urban regeneration policies in the UK. Aspects of both continuity and change in the direction and implementation of urban policy are explored. It is argued that while New Labour's approach since 1997 has been distinctive and, in some respects, innovative, especially in relation to community engagement, it has continued to adopt a flawed conceptualisation of the urban problem which has led to a limited policy response. That legacy is likely to have a continuing influence on policy. Looking ahead, new challenges need to be faced, notably economic recession and climate change.

> The draft National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal is the most far-reaching, analytical and exciting development yet undertaken by this Government, and the most impressive report on neighbourhood renewal in many people's living memory. (Urban Forum, quoted in SEU, 2001, 69)

> Although the 'regeneration' metaphor can signify profound and socially pervasive transformations, its strongest present connections are with more conservative, individualistic and statist traditions. Accordingly, despite the novel 'holism' and 'inclusiveness' of many recent urban initiatives in Britain, the dominant agenda is less radical than it appears. (Furbey, 1999, 440)

Continuity and change

The centenary volume of *Town Planning Review* (*TPR*) provides a valuable opportunity to locate a review of contemporary urban regeneration policy within a wider historical context. In the first issue of *TPR*, published in April 1910, the editor, Patrick Abercrombie, reviewed the role of Garden Cities in alleviating contemporary urban problems. Another influential contributor, Professor Stanley Adshead, advocated the aesthetic and cultural virtues of high quality civic design, and F. J. Marquis, in an essay on sociological aspects of town planning, argued that planners must seek to

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Paper submitted April 2009; revised paper received and accepted August 2009

move working-class families to the outskirts of the city, to ensure that their children 'should be physically healthy, and reared under such conditions as would surely tend to the production of citizens of better type'. The new journal also gave an account of the 1909 Housing and Town Planning Act, which established the first system of local statutory planning. This first issue concluded with a section charmingly entitled 'Chronicles of Passing Events', which had an announcement for a planning competition for the completion of Port Sunlight. That was certainly appropriate: Port Sunlight's founder, W. H. Lever, had helped to set up and finance the Department of Civic Design at the University of Liverpool, which remains, to this day, the home of the *TPR* (Abercrombie, 1910; Adshead, 1910; Marquis, 1910).

It is tempting to view the first issue of the *TPR* as simply the product of a bygone Edwardian age and only of historical interest. On reflection, however, it is striking how the concerns of that time still have relevance today. A century on, we can imagine that Abercrombie would have been able to recognise some of the arguments around the Government's Eco-Town proposals, while Adshead would have been able to engage with ongoing debates, inspired by the Urban Task Force Report, (UTF, 1999), on the importance of quality in urban design. Marquis would have empathised with current attempts to improve conditions in deprived neighbourhoods. All three of them would have been fascinated, perhaps shocked, to see the massive accretion of planning legislation and policy initiatives over the past century.

Looking back at developments in UK urban planning and policy over the last hundred years, it is apparent that there is considerable continuity (Rydin, 1993). The agenda set by members of the new profession of town planning was pursued, and came to fruition, in the subsequent decades (Hall, 1975). There was slum clearance, suburbanisation, the post-war new towns and renewal of urban infrastructure (Atkinson and Moon, 1994). To a large extent, planning was about responding to the problems of the Victorian city, both by redevelopment of the urban core and retreat to the suburbs and beyond, done within a framework of regulation. It was primarily a physical process, about physical development and moving people and jobs. Additionally, physical planning was often seen as potentially providing solutions to social problems, not least in dealing with the 'pathologies' of poor communities. The planners and their professional colleagues made the important decisions. As 'experts', they knew what to do; they had the answers (Davies, 1972). The people might be consulted, but that tended to be a somewhat passive, deferential, even tokenistic process.

However, continuity should not be over-stated; clearly much has changed. In urban planning and policy, ideas, approaches and interventions have evolved. Over the past 50 years, urban policy has gone through different phases. Roberts and Sykes (2000, 14) neatly encapsulate these phases in their five 'Rs': reconstruction, revitalisation, renewal, redevelopment and regeneration, with each term capturing a particular set of ideas and assumptions about the problem and the policy response. Over

time, the legacy of the Victorian city has faded and the emphasis on accommodating manufacturing has largely given way to a focus on the service sector and post-industrial consumption (Buck, 2005). Policy has also become much broader in scope, more 'holistic', as the limitations of a predominantly 'physical' approach to solving urban problems that had their roots in complex social and economic processes was eventually acknowledged (Atkinson and Moon, 1994, 39). In addition, interventions have been spatially targeted in different ways and at different scales, focusing on the 'inner city' in the 1960s (McKay and Cox, 1979) and, more recently, on the neighbourhood (Smith et al., 2007).

The property-led regeneration of the late 1980s may prove to have been the last major, full-scale manifestation of a kind of 'traditional' urban policy based upon a physical planning which effectively excluded the wider community. The Urban Development Corporations stimulated massive redevelopments on the degraded and abandoned remnants of former industrial cities and docklands (Imrie and Thomas, 1998). Like the new town development corporations before them, they were set up to get things done, and not get diverted by consultation or by the complexities of partnerships and inclusive governance. Their remit was tightly drawn, focusing on attracting private-sector development and achieving rising land prices rather than employment for local people. In practice, they were in, but not of, 'those inner cities' that Margaret Thatcher sought to convert to the Conservative cause (Robinson and Shaw, 1994). Today, those developments and the processes which created them appear outdated. Of course, there are still big projects, such as the Olympic developments, which are pushed through. However, the rhetoric – and a fair amount of the reality – around urban policy and regeneration has changed: it is more participatory, less dogmatic, and less simplistic. There is no more belief in the inevitability of 'trickle down' than there is in the notion that planners once had that shipping people out to peripheral estates solved their problems.

The post-Thatcher 'turn to community' in the mid-1990s (Duffy and Hutchinson, 1997) marked a very significant shift in policy, probably more important in retrospect than it seemed at the time. The City Challenge programme and its successor, the Single Regeneration Budget, brought about the development of partnership-based and community-centred approaches to regeneration and renewal (Shaw and Robinson, 1998; Hill, 2000). These initiatives were recognition of the limitations of property-led regeneration and of the failure of top-down interventions. Moreover, they were experiments which provided the foundations for New Labour's wide-ranging urban regeneration programme, with its emphasis on combating social exclusion, renewing neighbourhoods and involving communities (Imrie and Raco, 2003; Smith et al., 2007).

In this review of urban regeneration since 1997, we consider how innovative, how different New Labour's approach has actually been. Has it been a natural follow-up to

what went before, an extension and expansion of the preceding 'turn to community'? To what extent is it a story of change or continuity?

Recent assessments have tended to question the originality (and effectiveness) of New Labour's urban policies and initiatives and view the espousal of community involvement as a 'mere rhetorical device' (see for example: Hoban and Beresford, 2000; Oately, 2000; Jones and Ward, 2002; Imrie and Raco 2003; Atkinson and Helms, 2007). But we would agree with Marinetto that this is a 'simplistic interpretation' and that the New Labour administrations 'made serious endeavours to develop policies to promote community involvement' (Marinetto, 2003, 116). In arguing for a balanced assessment of the current state of urban policy and regeneration practice, our review highlights improvements in how problems are now conceptualised; the level of evidence underpinning policy formulation; the development of a more integrated approach to policy; and the priority accorded to community involvement as the central feature of the regeneration process.

We conclude by looking ahead to new challenges facing urban regeneration. In a period of rapid change and great uncertainty, there is a tendency to hold on to the familiar and to continue to do what has been done before. However, economic recession and the enormous challenge of climate change need new and radical responses. There is a need to think again about what the problems are and where the solutions may lie. Effective community engagement will continue to be of crucial importance. However, policy will need to be more radical in terms of 'bringing the state back in', restoring the power of local government, recognising the limitations of small area interventions, and acknowledging that national redistributive strategies are necessary to tackle deep-rooted socio-economic inequalities.

Contemporary urban policy: key themes

Soon after coming to power in 1997, the New Labour government established the Social Exclusion Unit (SEU). The Unit's report, *Bringing Britain Together*, presented a realistic critique of urban policy:

> There have been many initiatives aimed at tackling the broader problems of poor neighbourhoods from the 1960s onwards. The Urban Programme, then the Urban Development Corporations and Task Forces in the 1980s, and the Single Regeneration Budget in the 1990s. All tried new approaches and all had some successes. But none really succeeded in setting in motion a virtuous circle of regeneration, with improvements in jobs, crime, education, health and housing all reinforcing each other (SEU, 1998, 4).

In their view, a whole generation of interventions had simply not worked. The report went on to identify a series of mistakes and problems that had characterised

previous urban regeneration policies. These included: too little investment in people; the by-passing of communities; a lack of mainstreaming; excessive managerialism; a profusion of initiatives; and a lack of coordination and joined-up working (SEU, 1998, 32–34).

The new administration wanted to move on from past failures and set to work inventing new policies in the hope of finding 'what works'. Regeneration was very much a part of the New Labour 'project', an active area of policy-making with a 'broad and eclectic range of ideas and policies' (Bache and Catney, 2008, 416). The government has launched a staggering array of plans, programmes and initiatives concerned with economic, social and environmental regeneration (see, for example, Imrie and Raco, 2003; Jones and Evans, 2008; Syrett and North, 2008). The result has been an 'Amazonian jungle of institutions, policies, programmes and acronyms' adopted since 1997 (Jones and Ward, 2002, 473).

The diversity in interventions after 1997 reflects how New Labour has responded to a range of different pressures and concerns. These include: *spatial* concerns (such as growth in the South East); *social* concerns (such as reducing social exclusion); and *economic* concerns (such as the competitiveness of a number of core cities). The policy response also involved the development of new forms of local *governance*, such as Local Strategic Partnerships and Neighbourhood Partnerships, and initiatives to enhance the capacity of agencies and individuals to promote regeneration, such as the Academy for Sustainable Communities (now the Homes and Communities Academy).

While it is difficult to obtain an overview of all this activity (see Table 1), it is helpful to focus on four overarching themes: neighbourhood renewal; urban renaissance; sustainable communities; and competitive cities.

Neighbourhood renewal

The preferred scale and language for many New Labour regeneration interventions has been the neighbourhood:

> The neighbourhood has been part of a number of policy initiatives that have been concerned with tackling disadvantage, improving service delivery, renewing democracy, engaging citizens, reinvigorating civil society and creating sustainable communities. (Lepine et al., 2007, 1)

This emphasis is perhaps best captured in *The National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal* (SEU, 2001). The Strategy included programmes such as the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund, New Deal for Communities and the Neighbourhood Management Pathfinders, which aimed to narrow the gap between the most deprived areas and the rest of England, so that 'within 10–20 years no-one should be seriously disadvantaged by where they live'.

Table 1 Urban regeneration under New Labour 1997–2009

Machinery of government	• DETR/ODPM/CLG (1997–2009) • Social Exclusion Unit (1997) • Neighbourhood Renewal Unit (2001) • Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (1998) • Urban Policy Unit (2001) • Academy for Sustainable Communities (2005)
Key documents/strategies	• Bringing Britain Together (1998) • Urban Task Force Report (1999) • National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal (2001) • Urban White Paper (2000) • Sustainable Communities Plan (2003) • Egan Review (Skills for Sustainable Communities (2004) • Making it Happen: The Northern Way (2004) • Sustainable Communities: Homes for All (2005) • Sustainable Communities: People, Places & Prosperity (2005) • Sustainable Communities Act (2007) • Planning for a Sustainable Future White Paper (2007) • Prosperous Places: Taking Forward the Sub-National Review of Economic Development and Regeneration (2008) • Transforming Places, Changing Lives: A Framework for Regeneration (2008) • Communities in Control White Paper (2008) • Local Democracy, Economic Development & Construction Bill (2009) • Social Mobility White Paper (2009)
Delivery agencies	• Regional Development Agencies • Local Strategic Partnerships • Urban Development Corporations • Urban Regeneration Companies • City Region Partnerships • Homes and Communities Agency
Funding regimes	• Single Regeneration Budget (Rounds 6&7) • Neighbourhood Renewal Fund • Safe and Stronger Communities Fund • Area- Based Regeneration Grant • Working Neighbourhoods Fund • Empowerment Fund
Regeneration initiatives	• New Deal for Communities Partnerships • Neighbourhood Management Pathfinders • Neighbourhood Wardens Scheme • The Liveability Fund • Local Enterprise Growth Initiative • Housing Market Renewal Pathfinders

The emphasis on 'neighbourhood' seemed to evoke a more restricted spatial dimension than 'community', and might be said to provide a familiar and secure 'place' within which people would be 'able to define their own social identity and social position' (Cochrane, 2007, 52). The neighbourhood was also seen as a place where there was a reasonable chance that services could be 'joined up' and a sense of identity engendered. Moreover, because the neighbourhood is, by definition, small-scale, there may be greater likelihood that intervention can have a real impact and bring about significant change.

Urban renaissance

The Urban Task Force Report, *Towards an Urban Renaissance* (UTF, 1999) and the Urban White Paper, *Our Towns and Cities* (DETR, 2000) promoted the benefits and possibilities of urban developments. One overriding concern of the Task Force report was to challenge traditional 'anti-urban' sentiments in the UK (Mellor, 1982) and to encourage the more Continental view that cities were able to provide a framework for 'humane civic life' (UTF, 1999, 26). The city would be enhanced by promoting design excellence, assuming environmental responsibility, promoting social well-being and introducing good governance (Lees, 2003, 68–69). In terms of policy measures, the emphasis was on brownfield development, building housing to higher densities, and conserving the surrounding greenbelt. Overall, the goal was 'compact cities' where people live, work and enjoy leisure time at close quarters, hence reducing commuting and protecting the countryside. The White Paper referred to the importance of 'diversity' of urban life, in which the 'mixing' of different people, activities and cultures serves to 'strengthen social integration and civic life' (DETR, 2000, 40). An important future aim was 'to develop cities on the basis of a mix of tenures and income groups' (DETR, 2000, 45).

Sustainable communities

Another phrase in New Labour's lexicon is 'sustainable communities', 'places where people want to live and work now and in the future' (ODPM, 2003a, 56). The original Sustainable Communities Plan in 2003, while being heavily shaped by housing supply and quality issues, also reflected a concern to 'improve the quality of the public realm – the surrounding environment and community services that make an area more liveable' (Jones and Evans, 2008, 90). The key initiatives included the development of four growth areas in South East England (Thames Gateway, Milton Keynes, Ashford and Stansted) and the creation of Housing Market Renewal Pathfinders in the North (ODPM, 2003a, 5). Alongside the plan went a number of Planning Policy Statements shaping local authority planning approaches, including *PPS 1, Delivering Sustainable*

Development, which emphasised that plans should involve communities in developing a shared view of sustainable patterns of local development (ODPM, 2005a). The requirement for local authorities to develop Sustainable Community strategies, and the opportunity for them to make proposals which contribute to promoting the sustainability of local communities, through the Sustainable Communities Act, 2007, also reflect this agenda.

Competitive cities

There has also been explicit recognition of the role of cities in the global economy and particularly their ability to harness new information and knowledge-based activities and services (Buck, 2005). This has been underpinned by policies to help realise the full economic potential of UK cities (ODPM, 2004a). As promoted by a range of government departments (including, crucially, the Treasury), this predominantly economic development agenda was reflected in, first, the development of business-led Urban Regeneration Companies and, more recently, proposals for City Development Companies (CLG, 2006). The influential Sub-National Review of Economic Development and Regeneration (CLG, 2008a) advocated new city-region frameworks and structures to promote economic regeneration, establish Multi-Area Agreements, and support economic development and transport, while local economic development has been strengthened by the requirement on councils to prepare Local Economic Assessments (CLG, 2008b).

Such a wide-ranging and extensive approach to regeneration runs the risk of attempting too much, losing strategic direction and, more importantly perhaps, pursuing inconsistent policy goals. As we noted (in 2005), the Government's approach to community-based regeneration was being pursued at the same time as a much more traditional 'quango-led' strategy in which the Urban Development Corporations were brought back to push through change in the South East growth areas and business-orientated Urban Regeneration Companies were encouraged to lead town centre development (Robinson, Shaw and Davidson, 2005). Similarly, Cochrane highlights the tensions and inconsistencies in any comparisons between the primary focus of the Urban Task Force report and that of the Bringing Britain Together Report. The former is mainly concerned with physical or property-led regeneration, the latter with social or community-led regeneration (Cochrane, 2007, 93). As three influential critics of the government's approach have similarly argued,

> We have Rogers on the 'urban', the Social Exclusion Unit on poor 'neighbourhoods' and the local government White Paper on local 'governance'. The consequence of this is to provide one set of policies for the urban middles classes, one for the urban poor and another for the partial reform of the political establishment governing both. (Amin, Massey and Thrift, 2000, 7)

An important reminder perhaps, that whatever the innovations introduced after 1997, a number of tensions that have long characterised UK urban policy may still remain.

Contemporary urban policy: methods and approaches

One kind of overview is provided by picking out the main themes; another way is to identify methods and approaches. New Labour's approach to urban policy may usefully be explored and assessed by posing three key questions:

- Are the needs and dynamics of communities now better understood?
- Have recent approaches to community involvement significantly changed the process of regeneration?
- To what extent has a more joined-up approach been able to overcome the limitations of previous policies?

Understanding communities

Much has been said about the need to identify policies that can be shown to 'work', and are not simply based on 'ideological conviction' or 'common sense' (Davis et al., 2000, 1). In addition to 'evidence-based' policy-making, the post-1997 period has also been characterised by 'realist' approaches to evaluation that have sought both to describe and explain policy outcomes (Ho, 1999; Taylor and Balloch, 2005). Government has commissioned a number of long-term national evaluation programmes that have produced perhaps the most extensive and wide-ranging evidence-base ever produced on area-based regeneration in the UK. Examples include national evaluations of the New Deal for Communities programme (CLG, 2008c), of Neighbourhood Management (CLG, 2008d), and of Local Strategic Partnerships (ODPM, 2005b). One thing that has not been lacking in recent years is detailed research and policy analysis on the problems of deprived areas, their residents, and the associated policy response – unlike the 1980s, when there was a marked absence of detailed government evaluations and policy reviews (Shaw, 1995).

New Labour's efforts to improve understanding of communities, and their problems, can further be illustrated with reference to their emphasis on tackling social exclusion.

The early incorporation of the social exclusion framework, in both the machinery of government and the strategic direction of policy, represented acknowledgement of the cross-departmental and multi-dimensional character of the problems that the government aimed to address. 'Social exclusion' is

> about more than income poverty. It is a short-hand term for what can happen when people or areas have a combination of linked problems, such as unemployment,

> discrimination, poor skills, low incomes, poor housing, high crime and family breakdown. These problems are linked and mutually reinforcing. (Social Exclusion Task force website, www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/social_exclusion_task_force)

The term has its roots in European policy development and the EU placed social exclusion at the centre of its approach to fighting poverty after the Lisbon Summit in 2000 (Kahrik, 2006). In the UK, the adoption of the concept of social exclusion had the merit of downgrading pathological ('blame the victim') explanations, which stressed the individual or behavioural roots of poverty, in favour of a more structural emphasis on the processes that lead individuals, groups and communities to be excluded from mainstream society (Morrison, 2003, 141). As one observer has noted, it allowed the debate on deprivation to be extended

> beyond the confines of the circumstances and experiences of the poor to encompass the reaction to poverty of other social agencies and individuals throughout society … rather than being a *state of affairs* – as poverty has often been conceived – social exclusion is really a *process* involving us all. Unlike poverty and deprivation, therefore, exclusion focuses our attention on what others *do to us*. (Alcock, 1997, 95)

This approach to understanding disadvantaged communities is concerned with how sections of the population are 'cut off' from the labour market, struggle to gain educational qualifications, and are denied access to effective public and private services and a good local environment (Camina, 2004). Hence, a much wider understanding has been developed of what it means to be disconnected from the experiences and aspirations of mainstream society. As Edwards notes, 'whether it be age, gender, race or disability, social exclusion highlights the "social multidimensionality of poverty"' (Edwards, 2001, 267). The term has also allowed new contemporary dimensions of exclusion to be identified. Hence, we now talk of financial exclusion (Collard et al., 2001), political exclusion (Electoral Commission, 2005), and of the 'digital divide' (DTI, 2005). The focus on tackling 'social exclusion' (and promoting 'social inclusion') has now also established a strategic momentum at a sub-national level, with a number of local authorities moving on from their initial 'anti-poverty' strategies to developing their own local social exclusion/inclusion strategies (see, for example, Newcastle City Council, 2008).

Community involvement in the regeneration process

The strong commitment to 'engaging' the community in the process of regeneration has changed practice, fostered innovation and revealed new insights (Burton, 2003; Robinson et al., 2005; Skidmore et al., 2006). New Labour have promoted engagement as a mechanism,

> which can break-open systems of governance, making them more responsive, more accountable, and perhaps most importantly, more effective and efficient … Giving communities more of a say over what policy priorities should be and how resources should be spent is seen, more broadly as a good thing, something to be nurtured, as an integral part of any strong democracy. (Imrie and Raco, 2003, 8)

There is now a well-established consensus that local communities need to be involved in the process of regeneration and we now know much more about the appropriateness and effectiveness of different approaches and methods.

- Over the last decade, a more sensitive and precise understanding of the different types of 'community' has emerged, with the interests of communities of 'identity' being considered alongside more traditional communities of 'place' (ODPM, 2003b). Deeper understanding has led to explicit concern to reach and engage groups which may otherwise be excluded, such as BME groups (Chouhan and Lusane, 2004), young people (Marshall, 2004), older people (South West Foundation, 2008) and groups with a particular viewpoint, such as faith communities (Farnell et al., 2003).
- Efforts to enhance the capacity for involvement have also led to the development of good practice in measuring and monitoring community involvement (Wilson and Wilde, 2003). One useful example is assessment and benchmarking based on four 'dimensions' of involvement: influence; capacity; inclusion; and communication (Active Partners, 2000). This has contributed to the wider debate on how communities should be directly involved in shaping and monitoring local indicators that are both 'bottom-up' and capture the aspirations of local people, such as the 'Communities Count' and the 'Prove It' frameworks developed by the New Economics Foundation (NEF, 2000; Lingayah and Sommer, 2001).
- The range of mechanisms available for engagement and involvement has also expanded considerably, with established techniques such as 'planning for real' or consultative forums now expanded to encompass a wide variety of other kinds of opportunities for involvement. These range from participating in surveys of beneficiaries (CEA, 2005) to influencing service provision (CLG, 2008d), voting in community elections (Shaw and Davidson, 2002), being involved in participatory budgeting exercises (PBU, 2008), shaping regeneration plans, such as new housing developments (Cole et al., 2004), contributing and playing a part in evaluation (Graham and Harris, 2005) and becoming (often elected) community representatives on partnership boards (Rallings et al., 2004). It is now generally accepted that engagement has to draw upon a variety of different methods to reach local people. Not everyone wants to be involved and different people want to be involved in different ways – hence the need for a spectrum of opportunities. The concept of a 'life-cycle of engagement' has been suggested, an evolving process in which there

is a change in emphasis over time in order to reflect different priorities, stages of development, and the arrival of new groups into a neighbourhood (CLG, 2009a).
- The experiences of the major regeneration initiatives developed since 1997 have demonstrated the benefits of community involvement; it is now embedded in practice and very likely to be sustained as a principle in future regeneration initiatives. In the New Deal for Communities programme, where nearly £2bn of public expenditure has been spent in 39 localities over the last decade, it can be said that the focus on community is the central feature of the whole programme. Whatever the drawbacks of involving the community, if 'properly channelled it can help identify choices, reveal who the real losers are, and reinforce the importance of bringing benefits of the programme to all residents' – in short, the 'alternative is far worse' (CLG, 2008e, 13). Evaluations of the Housing Market Renewal Pathfinders have praised the progress they have made on community engagement, 'particularly in exploring the views of potential residents and people in hard-to-reach groups. All the pathfinders have developed community engagement strategies, establishing various mechanisms for resident participation and community consultation' (NAO, 2007, 26). Similarly, one of the more successful of the recent regeneration programmes, the Neighbourhood Management Pathfinders, have placed community engagement at the heart of enhancing local service provision, and ensured that the relationship between service providers and residents has helped service providers to 'shape their service more in line with local priorities' (CLG, 2008d, 46).

Joined-up interventions

The idea of developing 'joined-up' approaches to understanding problems, finding solutions and implementing policy is a familiar New Labour mantra (Ling, 2002). In urban regeneration, as in other policy areas, the results have been mixed. Probably the greatest success has been achieved in Neighbourhood Management projects, where multi-sector partnerships (including residents, elected members, service providers and representatives of the voluntary and private sectors) have been established, producing a governance more attuned to local needs and facilitating dialogue with service providers which has helped them identify the 'need for additional or re-shaped services' (CLG, 2008d, 42; Power, 2004). More broadly, partnership working is now ubiquitous and, while certainly not always a great success, it brings agencies and interests together so that there is at least the prospect of a joined-up approach (Glendenning et al., 2002).

In addition to organisational integration, joined-up thinking has also directly contributed to the emergence of a more comprehensive, integrated and, even holistic, understanding of problems and appropriate policy responses.

- We now understand in much more detail – and at a 'fine-grained' level of analysis – the cycle of decline in poor neighbourhoods and the complex, interacting, factors including 'low levels of economic activity, poor housing and local environment, unstable communities, and poorly performing local public services' (Prime Minister's Strategy Unit, 2005, 47). It is understood that 'problems often interact and reinforce each other in particular places to create complex problems, which require integrated and tailored solutions' (CLG, 2008f, 54). Research and policy evaluation work has confirmed the importance of seeing 'renewal in the round: change in one outcome area is associated with change in others' (CLG, 2008c, 51). Our understanding of the complexities of deprived neighbourhoods (and of the potential impact of types of intervention) has also been broadened by the realisation that population 'churn' (residential mobility) is one of the key contextual issues for regeneration partnerships (CLG, 2008c, 51–56).
- There is also a strong body of evidence that holistic interventions can produce related benefits: interventions in one area can have a positive impact on other outcomes (CLG, 2008c; 2008f). This includes strong, and statistically positive, relationships between improving housing and the built environment and reducing crime; and relationships between residents feeling part of their community and improved educational outcomes; and reduced levels of worklessness and improved health outcomes (Taylor, 2008, 9). Just as importantly, perhaps, local people are also increasingly aware of the advantages that accrue when regeneration programmes adopt a joined-up approach. As the national evaluation of New Deal for Communities notes, local people point to the 'importance of ensuring new housing developments improve the environment and help "design out" crime; training schemes can provide local residents with the skills required for new housing schemes in the area whilst at the same time helping the most disadvantaged into jobs; new health projects can train local people; and so on' (CLG, 2008c, 51).
- The *Sustainable Communities Plan* (ODPM, 2003a), with its commitment to bringing together the economic, social and the environmental in a coherent approach, has shaped the emerging policy agenda on environmental exclusion, which identifies the relationship between deprived areas and poor environmental quality. This has highlighted an 'absence of equity' in relation to three interlinked components: environmental protection; quality of access to public space; and access to environmental 'goods', such as food, shelter, transport, and nature (ODPM, 2004b, 4). Similarly, joining-up the three dimensions has also underpinned liveability (or 'crime and grime') initiatives at the neighbourhood level, notably in New Deal for Communities and Neighbourhood Management projects (Shaw, 2004).
- 'Joining-up' has also meant a more balanced approach, in which physical regeneration is linked to wider social, economic and environmental objectives. It is now the conventional wisdom, for example, that 'housing investment alone is unlikely to

turn around estate decline and bring long-term changes. To promote sustainability, major investment programmes need to be integrated into wider strategies which encompass physical, management and social issues' (Cole and Reeve, 2001, 4).

Continuities

So far we have stressed — and welcomed – the distinctiveness and innovation of New Labour's approach to urban policy and regeneration. However, there is continuity as well as change, and the legacy of the past is certainly evident. Three elements are particularly notable: a tendency to resort to pathological assumptions on the causes of urban deprivation; the long-standing acceptance of a small-area focus; and the continued adoption of physical 'solutions' to complex social problems.

The legacy of social pathology

There is a long-standing, deeply ingrained tradition of individualistic explanations, in which the 'poor' are held to blame for their own misfortunes and so require intervention to help modify their aberrant behaviour, values and attitudes (Masterman, 1909). That is still evident; there remains an emphasis in public policy, and in public discourse, on individual deficiencies and the need for individual 'problem solving', requiring a large dose of self-help.

Whether categorised as the 'mob', the 'dangerous class', the 'residiuum' or the 'undeserving poor', the urban working class that lived in the 'great gloomy cities' of the nineteenth century were both reviled for living their lives in social and moral degradation, and feared for their potential to contribute to civil unrest and social disorder. One Victorian commentator looked to the future and foresaw apocalypse:

> the time may come when the neglect of these social issues will exact a terrible revenge on the wealthier classes … If we do not drain away the foul sewage that stagnates at the base of our social fabric, we inevitably prepare terrible disasters for our descendants. (Samuel Smith, quoted in Sills et al., 1988, 4)

Pathological views of the moral failings and cultural difference of the urban poor permeated debates within planning and urban development in the first part of the twentieth century (see, for example, Damer, 1989). Much later, at the end of the 1960s, urban initiatives in the UK were heavily influenced by ideas from across the Atlantic, such as 'the culture of poverty' and 'cycle of deprivation', which held that anti-social behaviour was transmitted from generation to generation of spatially concentrated extended families (Lawless, 1988). In the 1980s, identification of a so-called 'urban underclass' pointed to a stratum which could be distinguished from the rest of society both by relative poverty and behavioural distance from mainstream norms, values and behaviours (Murray, 1990). While there has been extensive criticism of such

'pernicious blaming the victim ideology' (Damer, 1992), these approaches continue to have a lingering influence. As Hastings has noted, the origins of the considerable stigma attached to disadvantaged housing estates often lies in a 'subtle adherence to pathological explanation' (Hastings, 2004, 1).

Reviewing aspects of New Labour's ideology, Cochrane concludes that 'the echoes' of pathological approaches 'are unmistakable' (2007, 70). The worthwhile focus on social exclusion has tended to be undermined by reference to the deficiencies of poor communities in terms of their skills, aptitudes, aspirations or individual levels of 'social capital'. For example, poor communities are said to lack what Johnston and Mooney have referred to as 'officially sanctioned' social capital (2007, 135). Hence, individuals and groups in poor communities are seen to struggle not just because of lack of employment, poor health, low educational attainment, but because they are assumed not to be good neighbours or active citizens. Value judgements are applied to the poor, not the affluent:

> no one ever demands that the residents of Mayfair get involved with their street lighting or pavements, so why should these people whose difficult lives and lack of money make it harder. This is a curiously Victorian notion that 'community activity' is a good of its own, or at least that it is good for the poor on council estates. (Toynbee, 2003, 130)

Blaming the victim deflects attention away from structures and institutions, and how they create and reinforce economic inequalities and unequal power relationships. And that can also, of course, lead to a fundamental critique of community involvement in regeneration: people are encouraged to take part and become active citizens, not question the forces which generate and maintain disadvantage.

Focusing interventions on small areas

Relatively small-scale, locally focused urban policy interventions will always be open to charges of tokenism, because they cannot offset opposing trends caused by the operation of the wider economy. Small area interventions may well improve conditions for some, but will not attack the main causes of poverty and disadvantage. The criticisms levelled by the Community Development Projects (CDP, 1977a; 1977b) over 30 years ago remain valid today. As Oatley has remarked, the CDPs' reference to wider structures and to causes outside neighbourhoods and communities seemed to 'fall into the category of "inconvenient" knowledge, best ignored' (Oatley, 2000, 93). Another observer ruefully notes that it 'still remains impossible for governments to develop a narrative of urban problems which links them to wider structural forces central to the operation of contemporary capitalism' (Atkinson, 2000, 229).

The way in which urban policy has defined problems and, by extension, solutions, as area-based has hardly changed over the past 40 years:

> By redefining social problems in ways that identified them with particular areas, rather than as a consequence of structural inequalities, it became possible to develop area-based policies to deal with them … instead of attempting to provide a more or less 'universal' welfare safety net, urban deprivation … was identified as an exceptional problem outside the normal. (Cochrane, 2007, 3)

The long-standing geographical critique of area-based interventions, that there are no area problems, merely structural problems that find their place locally (Chatterton and Bradley, 2000), has more recently been re-stated by Cheshire (2007). While acknowledging that poor people might be made poorer by the nature of the local area in which they live, the central issue is that

> The poor do not choose to live in areas with higher crime rates and worse pollution: they cannot afford not to. That is, the incomes of people determine the character of the neighbourhood they can afford to live in. The problem is poverty, not where poor people live. (Cheshire, 2007, 9)

There is a measure of acceptance that 'neighbourhood effects' do exist and that certain types of place-based interventions can sensibly allow for the targeting of vulnerable groups concentrated in particular localities (CLG, 2008f). Moreover, concentrating effort on a small area can bring about real changes in that area, but the overall impacts, on a city or, indeed on the society as a whole, are going to be very limited. Evaluations of small area interventions, either commissioned by government (CLG, 2008c; 2008d) or undertaken by independent researchers (Taylor, 2008; Hills *et al.*, 2009) suggest that, for all the activities undertaken (and the billions of pounds spent), the impact on the *life chances of individuals* has been rather modest. Taylor summarises a large literature succinctly, in her review of evidence for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation:

> The strong view emerging from neighbourhood renewal programmes operating in Britain is that such interventions have not done enough to turn around the disadvantages deprived areas suffer in terms of weak economies, high levels of worklessness, low skills levels and insufficient enterprise. (Taylor, 2008, 9)

Physical 'solutions' to complex problems

Physical change and development, whether through clearance or construction, has always had its appeal, not least because it is clear that action has been taken and there is a tangible result. The problem of 'housing market failure' in the cities of northern England provided a prime example of the continuing potency of physical solutions to complex problems. The Housing Market Renewal Pathfinders turned to large-scale demolition as a strategy to deal with low demand and create new, mixed communi-

ties through redevelopment. Not surprisingly, concerns were raised about the loss of existing communities, the destruction of the 'heritage of vernacular dwellings' and 'damaging parallels … with the planning and housing policies of the 1960s' (TCPA, 2006, 2). This emphasis on demolition and extensive new construction also informed a number of highly contested regeneration schemes developed by Labour local authorities in several northern cities, such as Middlesbrough and Newcastle, during the last decade (Byrne, 2000; Shaw, 2000). In the event, such strategies proved problematic, affected first by the housing boom, which called into question their validity, then by a bust which has halted redevelopment.

Physical regeneration may seem the only option, but can mean gentrification through the displacement of working class residents by an incoming middle-class population (Smith, 1996). It is not surprising, perhaps, that some critics have seen the terms associated with the Urban Renaissance, such as 'social mix', 'enhancing diversity', and 'promoting difference' as euphemisms for the contested process of 'gentrification' (Lees, 2003, 77; Colomb, 2007, 15). It has been argued that the concept of Urban Renaissance is underpinned by the construction of an enticing and appealing vision of a new 'urban idyll' sold to the new professional classes on the basis of hitherto 'rural' themes, such as 'community', 'nature', and 'heritage'; it is

> implicitly based on excluding certain 'undesirable' elements, not least those already resident. Public portrayal of the city is tilted to attracting new development, high-class housing and leisure facilities for those who embody a cultured, sophisticated and cosmopolitan lifestyle. (Hoskins and Tallon, 2003, 36)

The approaches developed within the Housing Market Renewal areas and in some of the local regeneration strategies in northern cities, can be viewed as 'state-managed' gentrification, as agencies aim to recreate housing markets by attracting a 'critical mass' of middle-class homeowners into areas of low demand through demolition and altering the existing tenure mix substantially in favour of owner occupation (Atkinson, 2003).

At the core of this debate are the considerable tensions in trying to promote an agenda that both tries to involve and enhance social inclusion amongst existing residents, but also aims to attract a new group of wealthier residents into 'regenerated' and 'socially mixed' communities. It can be argued that not only are the tensions difficult to reconcile, but that the achievement of one may reduce the possibility of achieving a measure of success in the other. As Atkinson has argued:

> For a more sustainable revitalization of our towns and cities we need to look less to an influx of middle-class gentrifier households … and more to ways of improving amenity and environmental quality for existing residents while reducing inequalities and improving neighbourhood management. Within this there is clearly no reason to believe that diversity is bad but that such discourse has often served to mask a

> supplanting of existing residents, rather than their integration into future places and plans. (Atkinson, 2004, 119)

Retrospect and prospect

The hundred years since the publication of the first edition of the *TPR* have seen vast economic, social and physical changes in UK cities. Those changes have been accompanied, and shaped, by the search for appropriate public policy interventions to tackle the particular manifestation of the 'urban problem' at a particular time – whether it be the poor physical environment, spatial inequalities in the distribution of jobs and people, pockets of deprivation, lack of opportunities for private investment, or the intensification of social exclusion. Over time, not only has the nature of 'the problem' changed, but so too has its definition and conceptualisation.

There is, however, a well-established view that shifts in policy and approach have only amounted to little more than superficial change. One commentator speaks of an urban policy that allows 'a wilful denial of the past and a stubborn refusal to learn the lessons of past practice and experience' (Burton, 1997, 243). Another has said that urban policy-makers have suffered from a form of 'policy amnesia' with the result that 'wheels have had to be reinvented, and long established truths rediscovered' (Wilks-Heeg, 1996, 1264). Jones and Ward (2002, 481) talk of the 'exhaustion of policy repertoires' and how 'old policies are recycled'. More recently, Cochrane seems to imply a kind of eternal optimism, despite repeated failure, concluding that policy-makers appear to have had their 'memory banks wiped clean, so that they are persuaded that this time it really will work' (Cochrane, 2007, 24). Different phases of policy are thus viewed as being unable to break with the past, or as inevitably having the same flaws as the previous generation, and because of this, new approaches and ways of working are unlikely to emerge, let alone succeed. Little or nothing is learnt.

There is some truth in such critiques. After all, it is easy enough to point to failure. More than a century after the pioneering work of Charles Booth, Tower Hamlets in the east end of London is still blighted by poverty and deprivation (Gripaois, 2002). A government paper on 'Why Place Matters' notes that

> Charles Booth's maps show that the area around Bethnal Green Road was one of the most deprived in London in the late 19th century. These areas are now part of Weavers Ward which remains the second most deprived ward in London. (CLG, 2008f, 12)

Our own account of successive phases of regeneration in the west end of Newcastle shows how it has served as a 'policy laboratory', subject to most forms of urban policy intervention since the 1960s, none of which has solved the area's problems. Commenting on the arrival of yet another initiative, the Housing Market Renewal Pathfinder, we noted that

TPR81_2_03_Shaw.indd 140 19/02/2010 16:32

> There is an understandable scepticism founded on past experience. We've been here before. There have been repeated attempts to regenerate the West End and similar places yet, here we are, still trying to find solutions. (Robinson, 2005, 15)

But this is not the full story. Conditions in UK cities have improved enormously: people are better housed, in better health, live longer and most are now freed of hard physical drudgery. Urban policy, ranging from slum clearance in the past to 'worklessness' initiatives today, has played a part in that progress. It is virtually impossible to isolate the contribution of urban policy and separate it from the much bigger role of wider economic change and the impacts of major public policy programmes and expenditures. And it is too simplistic – and inaccurate – to deem all urban policy interventions as failures. As our earlier example from Newcastle highlighted (Robinson, 2005), relatively small-scale interventions in the west of the city had at least helped to arrest decline – although not reversed it.

It can certainly be argued that New Labour's urban regeneration policies have been disappointing. Past mistakes have been repeated, some experiments have failed, and early promise did fade. Inconsistencies and contradictions have become increasingly apparent, notably between the drive for economic growth and the goal of environmental sustainability. Furthermore, after more than a decade in government, a general weariness has set in, a feeling that there have been too many initiatives, and that there has been great investment of money and effort with too little to show for it.

Several observers have argued that the fundamental problem for successive New Labour administrations has been the attempt to reduce social exclusion and neighbourhood inequalities at the local level, while at the same time promoting a neo-liberal approach to the economy as a whole. Thus, while the rhetoric at the local level talks of community-based 'solutions' to tackle worklessness, policy outcomes remain heavily influenced by the central adherence to flexible and deregulated labour markets and by national changes in the eligibility for a number of benefits and entitlements for those without work (Ball-Petsimeris, 2004, 180). For some critics, the shift from 'government' to 'governance' has also been a key feature of the neo-liberal approach. Hence, the creation of un-elected local partnerships serves both to undermine accountability and democracy, and to promote the view that deprivation can best be reduced via the reform of local public services, rather than through any change in the way the private sector operates. Geddes has noted that despite poor neighbourhoods suffering because of business decisions on wage levels, on the delocation of investment or because of poor private services, local partnerships tend not to make any demands on local business, which exemplifies the 'reluctance of neo-liberalism to exert pressure on private capital to commit to public policy objectives which are not in its narrow interests' (Geddes, 2006, 932).

However, it would be too simplistic to view New Labour's approach merely as a form of 'warmed-up Thatcherism'. The post-1997 approach to urban regeneration

reflects a range of often competing agendas, some of which clearly reflect neo-liberal or market-led assumptions, while others aim to allow a range of local groups access and influence. As Raco has argued of the Sustainable Communities Plan,

> 'embedding' policy proposals in specific places provides opportunities for a range of existing actors, from community groups to local authorities, to influence the implementation and evolution of actually existing policy agendas. (Raco, 2005, 343)

It is therefore right to acknowledge that significant advances have been made since 1997 in both the style and substance of urban policy – changes which will leave a positive and useful legacy for subsequent phases of policy intervention. There is greater understanding of what the problems and priorities are, what should be done and how it should be done. That legacy includes, for example, a generation of active residents who have become accustomed to, and knowledgeable about, the regeneration process and who will not sanction any return to the 'bad old days' of top-down regeneration. Partnership is now seen as the only way to work. There is an appreciation of interconnections and, consequently, more joined-up thinking and action.

Policy now has to respond to new, complex and difficult challenges, notably economic recession (CLG, 2009b) and the effects of climate change and resource depletion. The credit crunch and global recession have undermined common assumptions about the financial sector and property markets and led to rising unemployment. Climate change and resource depletion present many and varied threats to UK cities, ranging from flooding to power shortages. Attitudes are changing, resulting in much more emphasis on low-energy solutions such as housing refurbishment, rather than demolition, and on the use of retrofitting programmes. Urban growth and development will need to be reviewed with reference to a rising sea level. And communities themselves will have to find new ways to consume less and live sustainably.

These challenges could open up radical policy options on the role of the state that would not (in 'normal' times) even be considered. As Coaffee has argued,

> we now perhaps have a tremendous opportunity to refocus regeneration and renewal on issues such as social and environmental justice in ways that will enhance employment prospects, while at the same time reducing serious social exclusion. (Coaffee, 2009, 302)

In these new circumstances, regeneration is likely to require much more state intervention. Giddens, author of New Labour's 'Third Way' (2000), believes that 'the period of Thatcherite deregulation is over. The state is back' (Giddens, 2009). There is now a new role for public-sector house building and public-sector enterprise. The opportunity is also there for Governments to look at national interventions that will promote a more redistributive approach to taxation, enhance and widen the scope of key welfare benefits, and promote national strategies to create new jobs in key sectors

that link to more sustainable forms of economic development. For example, the economy could be stimulated by a Green New Deal promoted by government (NEF, 2008). Crucially, the advent of national programmes and interventions to respond to economic decline and environmental change, can also help reduce the reliance on small, area-based interventions, which whatever their contribution to increasing social capital are unlikely to be able to fundamentally tackle problems caused by national and international structural change. And in the policy areas where sub-national interventions could play a useful role, the move away from neo-liberal approaches at the national level is likely to reduce the likelihood that the impact of initiatives at the local level (in tackling worklessness, for example) are undermined by the actions of central government.

Elected local authorities should be invigorated, enabling them to provide leadership in difficult and uncertain times. Such developments also hold out the possibility of 'rolling back' the myriad of un-elected local partnerships and networks that comprise the 'cluttered' governance of the locality, and begin the shift back from 'governance' to 'government'.

Urban policy developments of recent years should provide a good foundation for developing policy and practice for the new era. However, it could be worth looking back at what lessons we can learn from an earlier time, before neo liberalism, a time of state intervention and regulation. The way forward for urban regeneration should be to combine progressive vision and leadership with the resources of the state and the insights and interests of local communities.

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