Chapter 44

The Social Construction of Urban Policy

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There has been something commonly labeled "urban policy" since the early 1960s in the US and since the late 1960s in most European countries. The starting point of this chapter is a high degree of frustration about the ways in which debates about and around urban policy have generally been conducted. Even the academic literature is increasingly dominated by a "practical" or practice-oriented approach. The brief neo-Marxist fever associated with the writing of Harvey (1973) and Castells (1977) seems to have inoculated more recent writers against the dangers of recurrent infection. Authors generally either see themselves as reporting the ways of the experts to the wider public or as providing advice to the practitioners which will enable them to improve their practice.

A great deal of ink has been spilled at various times by people seeking to define what is meant by the "urban" to which one might expect urban policy to apply. An equal amount has probably been spilled on looking for definitions of "policy." Not so long ago Castells defined the "urban" through public policy – for him the "urban" was where collective consumption took place, and collective consumption was effectively understood to be the consumption services provided through the welfare state (Castells 1977).

Unfortunately such a circular definition – however elegant – is not very helpful for our purposes, since many of the policies that are not "urban" in this sense help to define the experience of urban life (including policing and economic development, as well as transfer payments through the social security and benefits systems). Equally important, spending on some programs (such as education and health) would qualify as collective consumption, but they are generally only seen as "urban" when specific area-based initiatives are launched. While it is tempting, as Blackman (1995) suggests, to try to capture all the initiatives that affect people living in cities as urban policy, there is a real danger that this will make the notion virtually meaningless. Since the vast majority of people in North America and Europe live in cities or urban areas – and most of the rest are dependent on cities for employment, income, and cultural activities – then almost every piece of social (and economic) policy could be reinterpreted as urban policy.

There is, however, at least one feature of urban policy that makes it highly distinctive. Other social policies are concerned with the delivery of services or the provision of support to "clients," "users," "consumers", or even "customers." Urban policy, by contrast, focuses on places and spatially delimited areas or the groups of people associated with them. Its problem definition starts from area rather than individual or even social group, although, of course, a concern with an area is often used as a coded way of referring to a concern about the particular groups which are believed to be concentrated in it. Instead of solving the difficulty of definition, however, this merely compounds it. It remains necessary to define the area – in practice different "urban" policies define their areas or territories differently. Although an area focus provides a useful starting point for analysis it also masks a very wide range of policy initiatives, concerned with dramatically different definitions of the problem faced either by urban areas or by those living in them.

Complexity and Coherence

It is possible to identify six main strands in the development of urban policy in Britain since the 1960s. Each of these also implies a different understanding of the "urban problem," yet it is the uneasy coexistence and changing balance between them that helps to define the nature of urban policy at any one time. Urban policy is the product of a complex interweaving of meanings, producing a changing pattern but with recognizable continuities.

Race

The issue of race has been like a thread running through urban policy in Britain (from Enoch Powell to Scarman and beyond). It underpins many of the specific understandings reflected in the other clusters, often as an unspoken subtext. Race has been a central element in the discourse that has defined the inner-city crisis or problem in British cities.

A racialized urban pathology was a crucial element in generating Britain's urban policy. The Urban Programme of the 1960s was an explicit response to fears about racial tensions in British cities. These fears were reinforced by the imagery of urban race riots – as usual in British policy discourse the US experience was presented as a frightening warning of what would follow unless action was taken. In a series of speeches in 1968 Enoch Powell prophesied that Britain's inner cities would be transformed into "alien territories." "Like the Roman," he said, "I seem to see the River Tiber foaming with blood" (Smithies and Fiddick 1969: 43). The response of Prime Minister Harold Wilson was to promise the introduction of an Urban Programme alongside increasingly tight immigration control. The very concentration of households with members whose origins were in the so-called New Commonwealth was identified as evidence of multiple deprivation.

The language of race was downplayed as urban policy developed through the 1970s into the 1980s. It only had a "walk-on part" in the 1977 White Paper, which emphasized economic regeneration, and was denounced as inherently "racist" by John Rex because it did not take the needs of Black communities into account. Rex (1988: 3) argued that by incorporating a strategy of "population replacement carried out in the name of 'dispersal and balance'" the new strategy effectively meant

clearing the Black population out of the inner city, even if it was never directly expressed in those terms. The urban riots of 1981 and 1985 helped to force the issue of race explicitly back on to the agenda, particularly in the wake of the Scarman Report on the Brixton riots. But they only seem to have done so temporarily. The "traditional" elements of the Urban Programme (focused on voluntary/community initiatives which were taken up by members of minority ethnic groups) were given a brief reprieve, only to disappear later in the decade. Spending on the "traditional" Urban Programme became a very small element in the overall inner-city program.

But "race" has not completely disappeared. It is still there as an important undercurrent. Even if formal urban policy programs are presented as color blind "everybody knows" that the inner city, the urban, equals Black (see, e.g., Faith in the City 1985). To some extent this has been translated into other aspects of social policy. Debates about the "underclass" have often been used to raise concerns about the parenting practices of members of some minority ethnic groups (particularly those from African-Caribbean backgrounds) (see, e.g., Murray 1990; Law 1996: 53–8). Similarly, although there has been an increasing reluctance to develop "racially" targeted initiatives, it is assumed that members of such communities are likely to benefit disproportionately from initiatives designed to improve access to training and education. Paradoxically, the construction of urban policy as color blind has helped (as in the US) to ensure that the label "urban" is widely understood to mean "Black." As Keith and Cross (1993: 8) notes in another context: "What appears at first glance to be missing, the centrality of race . . . turns out on closer inspection not to be missing at all, only unspoken."

Managing dangerous places

The "dangerous" nature of urban areas has been a recurrent theme of policy debates, and one of the key tasks of policymakers has historically been to deal with them, either by making them safer or by removing any threat to more "respectable" areas. Different forms of policing are also urban policies and the planning system can effectively operate to imprison some people in the dangerous places in which they live, while apparently "protecting" others.

Urban areas in the twentieth century have frequently been perceived as places of disorder, as threatening or dangerous places, both for those who live in them and for those who rely on them as places of production and consumption. The discovery of "mugging" as a specifically inner-city (and "Black") phenomenon in the early 1970s was simply one reflection of that (Hall et al. 1978). As Keith and Rogers (1991: 120) note, the inner city has effectively been "cast as alien normally via the stigmata of race or socialism, the locus of criminal delinquency, the site of disorder."

The language of race is an important element in the construction of urban areas as dangerous places, and the identification of dangerous places is also an important element in the construction of Black people as a problem. But the linkages between the urban, crime, and danger are not simply apparent in racialized discourses. The definition of young people – and particularly young men – as "out of control" has also fed into the recent imagery of cities as dangerous (see, e.g., Campbell's [1993] powerful description of young men on the rampage in her discussion of the disorders which seemed to spread across England in the early 1990s). Whatever the

formulation or the location of the "problem" (inner or outer city) the message is clear enough: there are dangerous areas, and people from whom the respectable classes need to be protected (see Graham and Clarke 1996, for a review of the longer history of the relationship between cities and fears of crime). Although it is accepted that those living in such areas are the biggest victims, the main emphasis is placed on defining them as the "other" who need to be managed, if the rest of us are to retain a secure environment.

Policing of one sort or another has always been a key aspect of urban policy, but its profile has become increasingly significant since the early 1980s. Concerns about the policing of urban areas have led to legislation on criminal trespass as well as the launch of neighborhood watch initiatives, policies on street crime, dealing with young people, and the policing of racialized minority groups. In considering the role of policing strategies as a factor in the Brixton riots of 1981, the Scarman Report also confirmed the wider importance of policing as an urban policy (see also Keith 1993). The "Safer Cities" initiative launched in the late 1980s has explicitly highlighted the issue of urban crime, setting out to mobilize "communities" in the fight against crime (Walklate 1996). Resources are made available to protect and make safe, although this initiative itself confirms fear. So, for example, the use of CCTV and the development of private shopping malls help to create "safe" spaces, but they also help to establish the existence of other places as unsafe, as well as excluding certain behavior as unacceptable (see, e.g., Fyfe 1997: 257–8).

Urban planning (private as well as public) is used as a form of social control, for example through zoning and policies on housing density. At local level policies on lighting, traffic management, and protected space have all been developed in response to fears about crime. Private and public policies help to construct areas of protected/defended housing while marginalizing those who live in others. On the one hand large-scale redevelopment, sponsored by urban development corporations and other agencies, serves to renew and redefine some areas of the city, bringing them back into use (see, e.g., Byrne 1997), while others – the peripheral estates and other areas of social housing – become sinks for the poor and the delinquent, places to be managed and to be presented as terrible warnings to the middle classes and the respectable (disciplined and ordered) poor.

Community and social welfare

Many of the problems of contemporary society, from poverty to welfare seem to have been symbolically and practically consigned to the inner cities and peripheral estates. As a result urban policy has also been expected to take on the role of revitalizing the moral basis of British society.

Urban policy emerged in the context of an attempt to save the Keynesian welfare state, by redefining and restructuring it. In the British context, its origins can, perhaps, best be understood as one of the last gasps of a social-democratic project. The "modernization" strategy associated with the governments of the 1960s and early 1970s incorporated urban policy as one of its strands. In the late 1960s, urban regeneration, community work, and locally based provision were presented as alternatives to traditional forms of welfare and to traditional forms of planning and urban renewal. Notions of multiple deprivation drove understandings which stressed both the possibility of targeted provision and of self-help. The role of ideas

which stressed "individual, family, and community malfunctioning" was clear alongside the almost religious fervor associated with the ambition to regenerate communities and encourage individual self-improvement (Higgins et al. 1983: 7, 14–19). This was later caricatured as the "social pathology" approach, that is, one which put the blame for inner-city problems on the behavior of those suffering from them (see, e.g., CDP 1997), but its significance as an alternative to traditional forms of welfare intervention is not so easily dismissed. The Blair government's "New Deal for Communities" announced in 1998 with its focus on revitalizing neighborhoods without effective local social and economic networks is merely the latest example of such an approach.

In the 1970s, academic analysis stressed the importance of collective or social consumption as defining urban policy, while community politics was understood as the politics of social reproduction (involving new social movements, often led by women; see, e.g., Cockburn 1977). Despite a shift in emphasis towards policies of economic regeneration and renewal at the end of the decade, the issue of community has continued to play its part in the language and sometimes in the practice of urban policy. It has increasingly been reintroduced as part of the process of redefining welfare in ways which highlight personal and collective (nonstate) responsibility. The report of the Commission on Social Justice (1994: 309) highlights the continued salience of such arguments in suggesting that "communities do not become strong because they are rich, rather they become rich because they are strong" (see also DETR 1997; Social Exclusion Unit 1998).

Notions of community have also been strongly mobilized around the community enterprise movement. Self-help through the market has been presented as a way forward, particularly for those areas unlikely to attract investment from the outside. The growth of community businesses in Scotland in the 1970s and 1980s has been widely documented and the Scottish example is the one which has been taken up to underpin the case for the development of community enterprise throughout the UK (see, e.g., Hayton 1996; Pearce 1993: 5–11). The more extreme claims for the success of community enterprise have increasingly been questioned and Hayton (1996) notes that it is difficult to discover the significance of "community" involvement and empowerment in practice. For our purposes, however, the point is not to make any judgment about the value of community businesses as the basis of a development strategy. It is rather to highlight the revival of forms of self-help in the field of local economic development, as well as in urban policy more generally. Much of this, of course, predates the election of a Labour government in 1997, but it is consistent with the approach increasingly being adopted towards welfare issues since then. This approach to urban policy is, in the words of the Commission on Social Justice (1994: 224), about finding ways of giving people and communities a "hand-up rather than a hand-out." It confirms that welfare is no longer about compensating for structural inequalities, but about helping people to operate more effectively in the labor market or in developing their own forms of social or community enterprise (see, e.g., Thake and Staubach 1993).

Developments in urban policy have often prefigured wider restructuring in the field of social welfare. It is in the urban arena, for example, that the increasingly close relationship between economic and social policy has been most apparent, in the move from "welfare" to "workfare," from a discourse of universal benefits to

one of targeting, flexibility, and skills training (see also discussions of social and civic entrepreneurialism in Leadbetter 1997; Leadbetter and Goss 1998).

Coordination, partnership and multi-agency working

A belief in the importance of effective collaboration, partnership, and a comprehensive approach to urban problems, which cuts across traditional organizational divisions, runs through the history of urban policy in Britain, yet each new policy generation seems to be condemned to rediscover and identify this anew.

Urban policy incorporates an implicit and sometimes explicit critique of the organizational settlement associated with the Beveridge welfare state in the UK (Hughes and Lewis 1998, chs. 1 and 2). The "old" professional and departmental structures of the welfare state have regularly been dismissed as incapable of tackling urban problems. It is argued that more effective collaboration and a comprehensive and all-embracing approach will provide a way forward. In their report for the Department of the Environment, Robson et al. (1994: 52) approvingly note the comment that "Urban problems are multi-faceted: departments are not." They stress that more "interagency collaboration" is needed, pointing to what they see as the success of schemes "operating within defined areas," where "there has been scope to develop more integrated programs involving training, job creation, environmental and infrastructural improvements" (Robson et al. 1994: 52). This is not the place to question these conclusions, although it is worth recalling the sceptical comments of Edwards and Batley (1978: 245) who warn that an emphasis on comprehensive approaches and coordination may simply serve to mask the lack of an effective policy.

From the inception of the Urban Programme in the late 1960s to the introduction of the Single Regeneration Budget in the 1990s, the rhetoric of urban policy has consistently been couched in these terms. In the 1970s, the Community Development Projects were succeeded by the Comprehensive Community Programmes and those in turn were overtaken by the Inner City Partnerships spawned by the Inner Urban Areas Act. Each promised area-based coordination, albeit of a different sort and often at rather different spatial scales. One of the justifications for setting up the Urban Development Corporations in the 1990s (particularly in London's Docklands) was that the existing local authorities had proved unable to develop a coherent and comprehensive set of policies (see, e.g., Imrie and Thomas 1999). The Blair government's Social Exclusion Unit is only the latest in a long line of initiatives which promises the possibility of "joined-up thinking" in urban policy, expressed, for example, in the strategy proposed for neighborhood renewal (Social Exclusion Unit 1998). Because of the stress on areas (rather than "client" groups or service delivery) the practice of urban policy has always been characterized by an emphasis on coordination, multi-agency working and area-based teams. Not only have policy analysts consistently complained about a lack of coordination and stressed the need for a holistic approach, but initiative after initiative has been launched with the claim that this is what will be achieved.

Alongside an emphasis on coordination between agencies (and sometimes within them, across departmental and professional boundaries) there has been a stress on the importance of partnerships of one sort or another. The notion of partnerships is – of course – itself an elusive one, but it implies that no single agency is capable of

Figure 44.1 Heron Quay – London's Docklands (© Steve Pile)

tackling urban problems effectively. Partnership has been presented as a panacea – whether it is between statutory agencies of one sort or another, between statutory and voluntary agencies, between community and state, or between public and private sectors. So, for example, in the words of a Discussion Paper on regeneration programs prepared by the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions: "The advantage of partnerships is that if properly constituted and run they are more suited to implementing the bottom-up approach to regeneration than a single central or local government organisation. They can help to promote ownership of regeneration activity within local communities" (DETR 1997, para. 5.2.1).

Economic decline

Cities have frequently been used as metaphors for wider economic decline, and as a result urban policy has since the late 1970s increasingly been oriented toward economic regeneration – a model for the rest of society. Urban areas provided

powerful symbols of the wider problems of manufacturing decline, with all the imagery of derelict land and empty buildings. The poverty of local residents could be more or less directly linked to factory closures and economic rationalization.

Since the mid-1970s Britain's problems have largely been described in terms which stress economic failure. This also found a powerful expression in the language of urban policy (particularly reflected in the notion of inner-city "regeneration"). The emphasis shifted, so that the problem was reinterpreted: not so much to do with the pathology of residents (or at least not only that) but the failure of cities as productive units, and as generators of wealth (see, e.g., Lawless 1981: 8; Atkinson and Moon 1994: 75). Urban policy was transformed to fit with a wider national political rhetoric of economic regeneration – public–private partnership and infrastructural investment (also reflected in muted form, for example, in the National Enterprise Board). Such a definition of the problem, of course, also allows for the possibility of subtle confusion in identifying the aims of policy, encouraging the building of alliances around vague slogans in which it is possible to believe that aims and ambitions are shared between government and community, local and national or global business, and business and community. The extent to which these ambitions are shared is perhaps less clear.

Elements of the economic analysis were taken up and reinterpreted with some glee by the Thatcher governments: the structural problem was reinterpreted as a lack of entrepreneurialism and the need to "free" enterprise from state restrictions (e.g. reflected in the launch of enterprise zones; see, e.g., Anderson 1990). Just as the Labour strategy for the late 1970s constructed urban areas in terms which fitted well with the government's broader understanding of the "British" problem (i.e. the need for economic modernization and regeneration) so the Conservative strategy of the 1980s constructed urban areas in terms which fitted well with their understanding of the "British" disease (i.e. broader dependency culture, lack of enterprise).

So urban policy also shifted towards a program of privatism (Barnekov et al. 1989), and the celebration of an enterprise culture. The state-led partnerships so beloved of the 1978 legislation were transformed into supposedly private-sector-led models. The role of urban policy was to assist with wealth creation, with emphasis being placed on the (re)creation of markets in inner urban areas – making those areas work productively again as sources of profitable production (see, e.g., Byrne 1997). Higgins et al. (1983: 83) quote the aims of Urban Programme circulars in the early 1980s to make "inner cities places where people wish to live and work." The implication was that those currently living in the inner cities might not be capable of leading the campaign for renewal. It is perhaps not surprising that the main emphasis of the urban development corporations (particularly the flagship London Docklands Development Corporation) was on property development and infrastructural spending rather than "community empowerment." Partnerships with business agencies were rather more significant than those with community organizations of local government (see, e.g., Imrie and Thomas 1999).

Cosmopolitan possibilities

Alongside a rhetoric of decline and disorder, there is also a continuing rhetoric which constructs cities as places of opportunity. Historically, of course, opportunity – particularly for those moving to cities – has often been seen as one of their key

defining characteristics, but the economic and cultural vitality of urban areas has generally been underplayed as urban policy has developed since the 1960s. In the last decade, however, the balance has shifted. The cultural capital of cities is now frequently emphasized in the process of place marketing and the redefinition of urban policy as a form of entrepreneurialism.

There has been a dramatic explosion of global place marketing – every place wants to be someplace, and some places want to be world cities – although local authorities have been involved in forms of promotional activity over a much longer period. Urban politics has increasingly become a politics of growth. This has meant that the governance of cities has become more entrepreneurial and apparently more attuned to global market forces (see, e.g., Mayer 1995). The rise of urban entrepreneurialism can be seen in the intense interurban competition for high-profile events and feature developments, such as the Olympics or the European City of Culture, but this is just one reflection of the phenomenon. In the process of place marketing, the marketeers attempt to build on existing ("locally rooted") traditions and understandings to reposition places along lines which fit with the limited range of images preferred by managers, upmarket tourists and potential investors (Kearns and Philo 1993). In this context, the role of cities as cultural centers has now been widely recognized and strategies which seek to build on this recognition have now been developed in the most unlikely places (from Glasgow to Huddersfield). Cultural policy has been mobilized as a key element in the development of broad-based policies for urban regeneration throughout Europe (see, e.g., Bianchini and Parkinson 1993).

The urban development corporations of the late 1980s and early 1990s were also associated with a flood of image building and the commitment to prestige projects as symbols of renewal, what Edwards (1997: 826) has described as a "new urban glamour policy" – the London Docklands Development Corporation had Canary Wharf, Cardiff has plans for an Opera House, Liverpool had Albert Dock and the Tate Gallery. Place marketing has been institutionalized with the launch of initiatives such as City Pride. There has been a shift in emphasis away from dereliction, decline, and decay, towards one which stresses the cosmopolitan potential of urban areas.

Urban Policy and the Urban Experience

Although it is possible to identify these clusters of meaning separately, it is important to recognize the ways in which they interact in practice. They amount to a repertoire of urban polices which are utilized in different ways at different times, helping to generate fluid understandings of what makes places urban. In other words it is important not to follow those who argue for a more or less linear progression in the development of urban policy – from pathology to economic structure and (maybe) back again. Changes can be identified that reflect and shape the restructuring of the welfare state – with urban policy playing a key role in the making of a new (post-Beveridge, postwelfare) settlement (see, e.g., Hay 1996; Hughes and Lewis 1998).

The "progress" of urban policy has been crablike, moving first in one direction then in another, drawing on different elements of the repertoire at different times. Urban policy is a changing mix of initiatives, reflecting a changeable set of priorities

and policy fashions, many of which owe little to the changing needs of urban areas and their residents. But shifts in approach within this ever changing policy field may also have dramatic effects on urban residents: they may be defined as pathological or victims of a dependency culture; criminals or victims of crime; as congenitally incapable of being entrepreneurial. Cities may be defined as economic failures (which may mean that moving out is the solution); as the homes of unskilled labor, and the unemployable or workshy (from lone parents through the long-term sick to young working class – or Black – men); or as the home of *flâneurs* and cafe society (which is not much fun if you are on the outside while the cultural elite has its fun); and so on. In other words, urban policy is not an innocent form of intervention, but itself helps to shape and define its object of intervention.

Urban policy is both socially produced and helps to make the urban problem seem natural, taken for granted. Dominant understandings of urban policy both reflect and influence the ways in which people experience urban living; urban policies help to define the urban "problem" or even the urban "crisis." They are not just responses to those problems but help to constitute them.

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