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Title: **Leading Urban Policy in Complex Times: A critical analysis of the practice of regeneration of actors in UK regeneration policy**

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ABSTRACT

UK Regeneration exists amidst a 'burgeoning' literature which states an ongoing desire to improve the outcomes of urban policy (Henderson, Bowlby and Raco 2007). But concerns about the symbolic nature of urban policy leave this aspiration somewhat wanting (Atkinson 2000, Wilks-Heeg 1997, Mossberger and Stoker 1997). Stone (2002) suggests that the gap which exists between intention and outcome creates a policy paradox which is rooted in an overly rational focus on policy goals. What emerges from this debate is the contradictory nature of urban policy which is subsequently re-produced in the form of ambiguity and 'linguistic debates' about the way that problems have been framed and leads to suggestions that the 'real' meaning should be 'unpicked' using narrative approaches (Lees 2003, Harris 2008, Atkinson 2008). However, the suggestion that policy now exists in post-modern era of governance (Richards and Smith 2003) leaves urban policy goals in a rather complex and woolly context. Indeed, Diamond & Liddle (2005) note how Urban Renaissance, with its transformation of urban governance through partnerships and joined up working, has left actors having to make sense of these new forms of governance. In response, this paper offers a critical analysis of the complexity of urban policy by exploring how actors involved in the design, delivery and management of UK regeneration policy manage to lead in such complex times. Here, using Ladau and Mouffe's (2001) notion of discursive absence or 'lack' it is suggested that the presence of three discourses associated with the pursuit of private enterprise, public enterprise and community enterprise, exist in the form of 'Nodal Points' corresponding to City Regions; Narrowing the Gap and Community Capacity. They are each 'temporarily' bound together through an array of 'floating signifiers' but they also exhibit lack in the form of inherent contradictions and tensions. Importantly, what a Laclavian analysis suggests is that the presence of lack across all 3 discourses is representative of the bureaucratic struggles which emerge as a result of a new right hegemony which commodifies all aspects of work and social life and which actors manage by emotionally investing in one discourse over another. This is in keeping with the suggestion by Raco (2005), that what currently exists is not a dominant ideology, but a more pluralist one, based on the presence of multiple discourses and calls for new ways of managing regeneration in the context of these increasingly complex times.

INTRODUCTION

Despite a perpetual desire to improve the outcomes of regeneration, concerns about the symbolic nature of urban policy have left this goal rather wanting (Atkinson & Moon 1994, Wilks-Heeg 1996, Mossberger and Stoker 1997, Atkinson 2000, Brannan et al 2006). The criticism that regeneration doesn't always do what it says on the tin is rooted in an ongoing critique about the failure of urban policy to tackle the root causes of deprivation (Lawless 1989, Diamond & Southern 2005, Roberts & Sykes 2005). As a result, there is a burgeoning literature which catalogues the unintended consequences of regeneration, demonstrating the poor impact of regeneration initiatives on efforts to improve health (Thomson et al 2006, Thomson 2008, Parry et al 2004); the negative impacts of gentrification in efforts involving housing-led regeneration (Kleinman & Whitehead 1999, Atkinson, R 2004, Lees and Ley 2008) and the social exclusion associated with urban renaissance (Raco 2005, Fuller & Geddes 2008, Hughes 2004).

One explanation for the failure of policy outcomes is the reliance on overly rational policy goals which fail to account for the more human elements of policy, such as equity, freedom or the democratic public voice (Stone 2001, Hajer & Wagenaar). Such explanations bring into question traditional approaches to the analysis of policy outcomes, which rely on rational assumptions about how policy is made (Hill & Hupe 2009). Here, it is suggested that the ambiguity which subsequently forms between policy intentions and outcomes, should be deciphered using more narrative approaches which seek to surface the implicit assumptions, rather than those formally stated in policy statements (Harris 2008, Atkinson 2008). This has resulted in a wave of new 'interpretive approaches' which seek to explore the way that past urban policy problems might have been framed in somewhat circular and symbolic ways (Atkinson 2000, Wilks-Heeg 1996, Mossberger & Stoker 1997, Brannan, John and Stoker 2006). Hence the urban policy literature is replete with studies of the 'framing of urban policy' by so called 'higher level discourses', most notably in Keynesian, neoliberal and third way terms (Wilks-Hegg 1996, Furbey 1999, Atkinson 2000, Mossberger & Stoker, Brannan et al 2006).

Such claims, built around constructivist notions of 'framing' (Rein & Schon 1993, Fischer 1993, Hajer 1993) suggest that policy problems are based on a 'convincing storyline or narrative which serve to 'structure and limit what may be told or said and....acted upon' (Atkinson 2000, p214). According to Stone (1989) this involves a process of 'image making where beliefs about blame, cause and responsibility are attributed by those in power in order to legitimize a particular course of action'. Here, it is suggested that the extent to which an issue is perceived as a problem is dependant upon the way that issues are defined within differing material, political and ideological contexts (Wilks-Heeg 1996, Atkinson 2000).

“Narratives attempt to project a particular version of reality, seeking to organize it in a certain manner while simultaneously attempting to mask or deny contradictions within that reality and limit our perception of such contradictions – a form of closure or what is termed a strategy of containment” (Atkinson 2000, p:213)

Drawing on ‘new institutionalist’ ways of thinking, this suggests that organisations can be studied by examining the ‘formal and informal rules, norms and conventions through which social action is shaped’ (Newman 2001, p26). Such theorists believe that whilst states can play an important role in ‘diagnosing societal problems’ and ‘framing’ policy responses to them, it can also place constraints on the type of policy that is formed (John 2003, Skocpol 1995). Indeed, March and Olsen (1984) explain how subsequently different constitutions or laws might make some policies more palatable but they can also exclude certain decisions from being made by way of exclusionary laws. From an urban policy perspective, this would indeed suggest that institutions can become tied to a particular set of rules which then frame the way that policy that is produced (Atkinson 2000). This helps to ‘keep issues on or off the agenda’ by ‘internalising structures’ and ‘setting boundaries’ within which the dominant discourse can function (p217):

“...in relation to policy, particular narratives structure and limit what may be told or said and how reality is thought represented and acted upon...narratives are not free floating but linked to political formations and institutional organisational forms” (p213). “Political actors deliberately portray them [problems] in ways calculated to gain support” (Atkinson 2000, p:214)

However, recent ‘shifts away’ from traditional, hierarchical forms of administration towards a greater drive for greater productivity and customer focused activity have resulted in new systems of governance emerging, involving the state through ‘steering rather than rowing’ (Osbourne & Gaebler 1992). As a result, according to Bovaird & Löffler (2003) a new ‘civil society’ has emerged, thus increasing the range of partners in the delivery of public services. This has brought with it the need for more complex negotiation of values through discourse (Hill 2002, Bovaird & Löffler 2003, Newman 2001) (see table 1 below).

Goal	Legislation driven	Service driven	Citizen driven
	Legal conformity	Competitiveness	Community/ quality of life
Perspective	State	Public sector	Civil society
Type of control	Hierarchy	Market	Networks
Logic	Legal	Economic	Political

Table 1 (from Bovaird and Loffler 2003 p19)

Bound up in this paradigmatic shift towards a network governance approach are emergent debates about the new role of power in state institutions and the extent to which it is distributed in the hands of a few (elitist) or more pluralist way across many actors (see table 2). For instance, in acknowledging a general shift away from representative democracy towards a more participative one, Hill (2005) notes the developing need for government to seek approval from the public for decisions made, in order to 'stay in office' (p27). This increasing consultation of the public as consumers of services (i.e. as parents, tenants, patients etc) has led to a situation whereby policy decisions are allegedly now made in negotiation between government and the public.

Bringing this discussion in line with earlier debates about the ongoing failure of urban policy, implies that shifts in policy implementation away from problem solving towards a broader concern about governance brings discussions of the socio-political context centre stage (Newman 2001, Hill and Hupe 2009). What this means is that instead of having a concern for the unintended consequences of urban policy, instead we might be better placed to explore the tensions and contradictions which emerge as a result of more complex policy environments. According to Newman (2001), such tensions occur as a result of 'over-simplifying' the transition from hierarchy and markets towards a network approach when there is much potential for the continuation of old ideas in tandem with new ones (p26):

"This narrative presents an over-simplified view of change in at least two respects. First, it tends to over-read the extent of embeddedness of change and underestimate the importance points of continuity with past regimes. So for example, in highlighting the prevalence of networks and partnerships in Labour's policy approach, important aspects of its continued reliance on markets and hierarchy may be overlooked. Secondly, narratives of change which imply a shift from the 'old' to the 'new' tend to tidy away some of the complexity of the process" (Newman 2001, p26).

Here Newman (2001) observes how such shifts in ideology rarely constitute a simplistic transition from one idea to another, but rather signal an amalgam of ideas which contain both 'new' as well as 'old' ideas from the past. This suggests that during periods of change, instead of 'new' higher level discourses actually replacing 'old' ones, there is evidence to suggest that they co-exist at the same time, generating a whole host of tensions and contradictions with which actors have to grapple. As a result, Newman (2001) suggests that in order to understand the way that ideology interacts with 'the relationship between ideologies and discourses, the constitution of identity and social action' (p30) we must turn to more critical theories of governance which take account of the socio-political context in which decisions are made. This suggests that instead of studying the way urban policy has been framed and symbolically reproduced in the form of linguistic debates, in the context of

shifting patterns of governance, we should be exploring the contradictions and tensions produced and how actors seek to manage these (Diamond & Liddle 2005).

In adopting a critical approach to exploring the 'lived experience of actors', the aim is to show how, faced with leading in such complex times, actors invest much passion and energy in promoting different approaches to regeneration despite also being faced with associated unintended consequences which negate the outcomes of regeneration from being met. The results are explained in terms of Laclau and Mouffe's theory of socialist hegemony, which suggests that instead of a neo-liberal dominant ideology, what now exists is rather a 'new-right hegemony' which pervades all aspects of social life and thus prevents regeneration policy from reaching its full identity in terms of outcomes. This is in keeping with findings of Raco (2005) and Fuller and Geddes (2008) who suggest that what exists now is so much a dominant neoliberal ideology but a more pluralist approach based on the involvement of multiple actors.

With this question in mind, this paper draws from empirical research undertaken with over 50 regeneration practitioners working across three UK cities in a Midlands region undergoing industrial decline in order to explore the existence of such 'multiple models', the tensions and contradictions produced and how they might be managed. Data was collected over a 5 month period, beginning May - September 2009 using semi-structured interviews which were recorded and transcribed verbatim using digital recording equipment. The sample was drawn using a process of 'snowballing' which helped to identify some 50 staff involved in the design, delivery and management of regeneration across 3 UK cities in a Midlands Region. These included the following:-

- Regional Bodies (i.e. Government Office for the Regions; Regional Centre of Excellence);
- Regeneration Partnerships (Private sector Developers; Town Planners; Architects)
- Local and District Councils; (Economic Development Officers/ Regeneration Services Managers/ Elected Members/ Community Involvement Networks; Local Strategic Partnership Managers);
- Area-Based Initiatives (i.e. Neighbourhood Renewal, New Deal for Communities and Neighbourhood Management Pathfinders)
- Third Sector Providers (i.e. VCS Providers, Community Activists; Community Volunteers/ Paid Community Workers).

The paper is divided into three sections, the first provides some background to critical approaches and Laclau and Mouffe's approach; the second discusses the findings from the study and the third section offers some discussion in the context of these shifting patterns of governance.

METHODOLOGY

Using critical approaches to surface contradictions and tensions

The increasing importance of language in the study of organisational reality reflects a growing interest in the role of human meaning making in policy analysis. Hence, whilst traditional forms of policy analysis might seek to inform policy makers of an anticipated policy outcome, discourse analytic approaches are premised on policy not being transparent, but interpreted differently by different actors (Yanow 1996):

“Discourse: an ensemble of ideas, concepts, and categories through which meaning is given to phenomena and which is produced and reproduced through an identifiable set of practices” (Hajer 2006, p156).

Such approaches reflect a general shift towards a more ‘linguistic turn’ and a growing concern with studying the nature of language and the rules which must be adhered to in order for communication to take place (Howarth 2000, p17). In addition is a concern for how these rules might be affected by the societal structures in which social phenomena are allegedly embedded:

“Apparently unrelated events can be made intelligible by reference to a formal system of relationships” (Howarth 2000, p17).

However despite allowing for the study of all manner of artifacts associated with written, spoken and visual media including newspapers, the radio, TV and the web as well as conversations and interviews, the suggestion that language is inseparable from the social events in which they occur (Fairclough 2003) surfaces debate about the nature of social reality and its constitutive form. This means that in studying ‘what actors say and do’ through discourse analysis, there are numerous approaches which can be taken to understanding discourse depending on ones ‘ontological’ approach, or view of the world (Howarth 2000, Howarth and Torfing 2005, Cederstrom & Spicer 2007). Indeed Howarth (2000) distinguishes these terms, noting how positivist approaches centre around the notion of ‘cognitive framing’ or shared ways of seeing and doing; realist approaches view social objects as having causal power; Marxist approaches (which draw on realist perspectives) focus on how structures cause ‘uneven distributions of power and resources’; and post-structural approaches highlight the ‘incomplete and contingent’ nature of discourse (Howarth 2000, p3).

It is in this emergent critique about the structural nature of discourse (referred to as the ‘crisis of Marxism’) that some note a shift away from a ‘linguistic turn’ towards a broader ‘discursive turn’ in recognition of the shift that has taken place from bureaucracy and markets and their institutionalist and constructivist approaches towards a more network based view of society (Newman 2001). Drawing on Derrida, Torfing (2005) suggests that ‘the

consequence of giving up this metaphysical idea of a transcendental centre which structures the entire structure whilst itself escaping structuration is that everything becomes discourse' (p8). As a result, post-structural approaches to discourse adopt an anti-essentialist stance by refusing 'to take pre-given social structures or subjective interests as its privileged starting point' (Torfing 2005). It is this 'undecided' view of the social world which defines post-structural theory, through its rejection of any prior assumptions of the social world, which might privilege one form of knowledge over and above another.

Laclau and Mouffe (1985) also talk about the precarious nature of post-structuralist accounts of discourse, and introduce the process of articulation to show how actors assign meaning in place of this lack of a structural centre. Seeking to build on structuralist, post-structuralist and Marxist critique, Laclau and Mouffe (1985) attempt to show how the 'precarious nature' of discourse is 'always threatened by something that is external to it'. They do this by developing perhaps the most comprehensive account of discourse by offering a 'political theory of discourse' based around the notion of 'social antagonism', 'political subjectivity' and 'hegemony' (Howarth 2000, p106). Here they suggest that because of the contingent and 'precarious' nature of discourse (i.e. it is not bound up in a particular social structure or dominant ideology) the meaning of discourse can never be fixed. However, in seeking to reach full identity, actors subsequently seek to foreclose and suture such discourse by drawing together ideas in temporary form using nodal points and floating signifiers which are subject or 'contingent to' change because of the shifting nature of the political context:

"Discourses are contingent and historical constructions which are always vulnerable to those political forces excluded in their production, as well as the dis-locatory effects of events beyond their control" (Laclau 1990, p31).

Unlike that of other discourse analysts' then, Laclau suggests that discourse has a more negative content (rather than a positive content, as with constructivist forms). These constitute a range of possible meanings which stretch from 'something more' (i.e. a vast array of concepts) to something less (i.e. a disarray of unlinked concepts). Laclau and Mouffe (1985) suggest that it is in this process of brokering between these different concepts that meaning is actually assigned. Indeed it is through attempts to find the 'relational links' between these concepts that the notion of ambiguity appears as an 'elusive form of rationality' (Laclau and Mouffe 2001, p93). Laclau's theory of hegemony then is about exploring the non-rational aspects of policy, and the rules which structure this relationship of relational links which serve to give it meaning. Such critical approaches are particularly relevant in the context of research into the governance of urban policy in such increasingly complex times.

Operationalising Laclau and Mouffe's theory of hegemony

Although inherently ideological in its basis, Cederstrom and Spicer (2007) have attempted to operationalise Laclau and Mouffe's approach by seeking to expand and study this notion of lack. Here they suggest that it is in this failure to 'pin-down' a concrete definition where the 'real' social object emerges and the notion of lack emerges, in that it defies a fixed definition or positive, symbolic entity and resists representation. Instead, actors use 'multiple discourses' as explanations which seek to cover up the ambiguity, but leave it 'empty' at the same time with a kind of dual meaning. They suggest that it is possible to look for these multiple meanings or dualisms in the texts and narratives of actors to see where antagonisms subsequently emerge. In Laclau's theory of hegemony, 'nodal points' are said to offer a degree of stability amidst such lack, by offering actors a way of 'believing something which may not actually be possible'. Because of the inherent contradiction, nodal points are held together by an array of 'floating signifiers' which serve to give the discourse meaning. Cederstrom and Spicer (2007) suggest that in searching for such lack there is a need to look for inherent tensions and contradictions in the narrative by asking:

- Where is the lack in this discourse?
- Where are there tensions and contradictions expressed?
- Where do stakeholders assign multiple meanings?
- Which signifier acts as a nodal point (linking together floating signifiers?)
- What key words are used as a 'supreme justification' for the way things work in the field?

With this in mind, the discussion now turns to the findings of the empirical research to show how, drawing from the work of Laclau and Mouffe (1985) and Cederstrom and Spicer (2007), three discourses emerged in the form of different ways of seeing and doing regeneration but how, at the same time, these were inherently constituted of tensions and contradictions which ultimately prevent their goals from being fulfilled.

FINDINGS

Discourse 1: "City regions": Tackling economic inequality through private enterprise

Central to the notion of 'city regions' was a shared view about the causes of economic inequality as rooted in the failure in local economies and the relative power of cities in stimulating local economic growth through competition. This experience was embedded in the collapse of the local automotive industry which had resulted in the closure of several major car plants resulting in a reduction in manufacturing. The impact of such collapse was witnessed at an economic and social level and involved a rapid decline in demand for the local specialist skill-base and the emergence of derelict land and the unexpected job loss of large numbers of the local populace, which was seen to significantly reduce the income of individuals and families:

“We’re an area who has been dependant on manufacturing base which has declined, it’s not been replaced with high skilled employment so wage levels have fallen, skills requirements with employers have fallen” (DS 13, Elected Member, Local Authority, 86)

Solutions to improving economic opportunity involved something of a multi-pronged approach based on the need to build competitiveness with neighbouring cities in order to attract private sector investment, in the hope that this would bring wealth to the city through the creation of new jobs. This need to build competitiveness in a city was based around positioning the city economically in the global market in terms of supply and demand. This was seen to emerge in talk about the importance of ‘city regions’ in securing economic growth through competition with other cities, by promoting its physical, economic and cultural assets:

“The due’s in the name really, regeneration means areas that have seen decline for whatever reason are brought back into economic well-being” (DS 08, Chief Executive, Developer, Private sector)

Contradictions and tensions

However, despite advocating a need to stimulate local economic growth through inward investment, there was evidence the new developments had stalled in the recent economic recession due to a lack of available funding. It also had the added impact of preventing councils from maximising the profits on the sales of land:

“Firstly, the economic position means that regeneration activity is slow, obviously there’s a lack of funding, particularly from grants, which means that schemes are more difficult to bring onto ground. Secondly it means that climate that your working on is expanding rapidly – your getting the tap turned off at the top-end about financing schemes and the other end the group your trying to help is ...” (DS 08, Developer, Private sector, 170)

“The freezing of land sales with recession has stopped investment in street scene projects” (DS 19, Elected member, Local Authority, 243)

In addition to the retention of high earners and efforts to re-position cities in terms of promoting their various ‘offers’, there was also evidence that local people weren’t always able to access the new jobs that had been promised due to jobs not materialising in the way agencies had intended. Some of this was to do with agencies having re-located, bringing existing staff with them. Where an organisation did require new labour, there was often a mismatch between the types of skills held by local population and those required by incoming industry:

“People go on about youngsters, but one thing is their not stupid, they soon understand if those opportunities aren’t revealed and they cannot access them” (DS 08, Developer, Private sector)

In addition, there was also doubt about the real capacity of private sector companies to invest in an area due to most of them having gone overseas, or indeed wanting to re-locate to a new area. This cast doubt on the strategy of relying upon inward investment as a means of improving the economic prosperity of an area :

“The amount of international companies are very limited, even the amount of big companies within this country are very limited. Actually growth comes from a very limited, small area. I’d be very surprised if many companies relocate to the [name of area] outside of a 25 mile radius.” (DS 11, Director, Regeneration, Local Authority)

However, despite the intention of regeneration to create economic opportunities that communities could take advantage of, there was also evidence that deprived communities were hindered from doing so (ironically) because of a lack of opportunity and poor socioeconomic position:

“at the bottom end of [name of place] you had nothing to begin with, you had a very stressed community, lot of issues around settled travelling community and you’d got 3 different outcomes, because basically the community with greatest need was actually the one that was least able to take [advantage of] the opportunities (DS 13, Elected member, Local Authority)

“I think the way that...a city economy works, those that ‘have more’, have a much better chance of making progress, haven’t they?” (DS 11, Director, Regeneration, Local Authority)

Discourse 2: “Narrowing the Gap”: Tackling inequalities in health through public enterprise

Central to the notion of ‘narrowing the gap’ was a storyline about the urban problem being caused by inequality in opportunity or ‘life chances’ as a result of poor socio-economic circumstances. This was bound up in perceived differences in income which were seen to have a negative impact on health by reducing life expectancy.

“I think that regeneration policy has (certainly since Labour) tackling deprivation at its core...at [its] heart, issues around narrowing the gap...between, you know, the most deprived and...most wealthy in society”. (DS 10 Involvement Officer, Local Authority)

Associated with this notion of life chances was a spatial element involving the degree of access to services to improve quality of life. Consequently, solutions to ‘narrowing the gap’

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were seen in terms of improving access to opportunity to a range of public services seen to affect quality of life such as housing, health services, leisure, employment and education, with the aim of reducing the differential in life expectancy:

“It’s just glaringly obvious when you’re in places, the physical environment and the opportunities that offers, the facilities it offers, the work places it offers, the living spaces, the environment is entirely tied with poverty basically, deprivation”. (DS 52, Manager, Area-based Initiative 65-68)

This need to invest in public services was frequently reflected in ABI managers’ talk about the need to bring in new GP services, new leisure services, litter and street cleaning and policing to an area in the belief that it would increase access to public services and subsequently reduce inequalities in health.

“Bringing new services to the area, affordable housing and new housing and potential with the [regeneration initiative] ethos that people could find work within the area and it would make use of Brownfield sites too”. (DS49, Neighbourhood Manager, Area-based Initiative 108)

Efforts to improve public service were also tightly bound to notions of public accountability. This appeared to be in an attempt to demonstrate financial probity and value for money to government, as well as to the electorate:

“Politicians worry about losing the next election primarily..and the pressure that puts on local government staff...because...if [a] local government manager says I will achieve x result, by this time and don’t, then they [politicians] can become very critical of them. Conversely there is no reward...other than professional pride and a wish to improve things...which is very much there amongst service providers and is often under-rated” (DS 37, Manager, Area-based Initiative)

Contradictions and tensions

However, despite a strong commitment to improving the provision of public services, tensions were seen to arise through a failure to coordinate service planning across a range of policy initiatives, including community involvement structures, the ‘cleaner and safer’ agenda and the setting up of accountability structures within a New Deal for Communities initiative:

“ I am surprised by the lack of co-ordination between those new services going in, talking to each other, and that lack of overview and strategic plan of how you’re going to maximise those training and employment learning opportunities between the three...I don’t see that strategy...” (DS49, Neighbourhood Manager, Area-based Initiative 122)

The failure to coordinate service planning resulted in the duplication of existing services and the wasting of resources. One officer described how the introduction of a local government initiative required them to create 8 new community involvement structures to cover the whole city, despite already having a functioning involvement structure in place:

“if we’d been able to take that resource and add it to the resource that we had around the [community involvement structure] we could have added significant value because the health providers, the social care providers all signed up and were already working with the [community involvement structure]. What we’ve had to do is create something independent which sits outside of that...” (DS10, Involvement Officer, Local Authority)

This failure to adequately coordinate service provision manifested itself in a failure to involve communities, thereby removing communication channels with communities and preventing them from being kept informed of progress and the opportunity to take part in service planning.

“We were told that because of the national importance of the [regeneration initiative], the engagement with the population needed to be through a forum set up to ensure communication but once the funding was over, it dosed (DS 49, Neighbourhood Manager, 43)

In one example involving an urban renaissance programme, there was a distinct lack of publicity to communities in the vicinity of the programme, despite it being promoted as bringing new services, including new GP, housing and leisure services to the local area which local communities would benefit from:

“Outside of what we’re instigating there – there is not a newsletter for the [regeneration initiative] that goes to every household. There’s no level of communication to general ‘jo public’ who lives in the surrounding district, albeit there will be press releases and people will read that in the local paper, but in terms of drip by drip communication on it, it’s missing” (DS 49, Neighbourhood Manager, Area-based Initiative 323)

The failure to keep communities informed about new services coming into an area emerged in narrative about ‘local people losing out’ from regeneration, which seemed to have the opposite of its desired effect to reduce inequality by socially excluding residents from the opportunity to participate in activities which would improve their health, as this Neighbourhood Manager working with a local urban renaissance programme describes:-

“The implication from what I’ve said is that...the poorest, [most] excluded in society...should benefit, including those at the margins. You know that’s the theory,

whether it's happened in practice is a different matter" (DS 10, Involvement Officer, Local Authority, 10-16)

Discourse 3: "Building community capacity": Tackling social inequality through social enterprise

Bound up in the notion of 'building community capacity' was a storyline about the urban problem being caused by social inequality built around a perceived lack of understanding of the social and economic circumstances of deprived communities. Central to this shared view was the importance of adopting a flexible 'needs-led' approach in order to creatively 'plug the gaps' in existing mainstream service provision.

The importance of recognising and responding to the complex needs of deprived communities was reflected in a shared experience about the types of groups who were most likely to be experiencing deprivation and an awareness of the social and economic determinants which might lead to social inequality. This included particular reference to groups from Black and Minority Ethnic backgrounds, migrant populations and those with long term health problems and the particular challenges they might face in achieving social and financial inclusion:

"The area I live in, there's a 22% impact in terms of EU migrants. The Polish have left because of the economic downturn, but [we're] left with Lithuanian/ Slovakian groups/ Romanies." (DS 48, Community Activist, 209)

"It's a very mixed area, very diverse in terms of communities. There's a large Punjabi, Sikh community living here but you've also got Afro-Caribbean, but on top of these sort of indigenous BME communities, you've also got newer international communities" (DS 35, Development Worker, Area-Based Initiative, 82 – 86).

Such capacity building often took the form of development work to identify potential gaps in mainstream provision. The key here was in raising awareness of the social and economic circumstances of deprived groups in order to secure grant funding in order to work flexibly to address complex physical, social and economic needs.

"[name of area] has got a number of different Asian communities that have been there for a long time, but still I don't think it is recognised, cos we're still describ[ing] them as white working class and they're not" (DS 10, Involvement Worker, Local Authority, 7-11).

For instance, one actor noted how an emergent problem around cultural differences associated with EU migrants was being interpreted as anti-social behaviour and flagged up the issue with the Local Strategic Partnership in an attempt to raise awareness of the problem and try to secure funding to assist (DS 48, 227).

There was a perceived need to 'plug gaps' in existing government service provision which had failed to address the 'real needs' of people. One VCS provider gave examples of a man who expressed a desire to train as a fireman but couldn't afford the £2,000 fee (DS 42,143); and a man who was turned away at a jobs fair organized at a local supermarket because he had the wrong postcode (272). The general concern in this discursive group lay with bureaucratic government led schemes which failed to listen to people's real circumstances:

"I said to them 'why are you here?' and they said 'if we don't do 30 hours we don't get our money, so we're just stuck here and you know, bored sick' ...there was one young lad and he said...'I can't leave here...'I'm on the New Deal, if I go on this course they'll stop my benefits, so I'm stuck here for 6 months reading newspapers all day.'"
(DS42, VCS Provider, 141 – 148)

In addition to the traditional approach to setting up more needs-led services, typical development work also took on a 'social enterprise approach' involving attempts to secure government grant funding to renovate previously unused derelict spaces into buildings which were suitable for public use. One actor described how SRB and ERDF monies had been secured in order to provide community e-learning facilities and a community café for people to meet and socialize (DS 48, Community activist, Third sector, 5). The success of such projects relied heavily on building an extensive system of community networks including local businesses such as traders and shopkeepers, local community organisations including the church and organisations such as the soroptomists, as well as the public sector:

"We created these networks that cover the whole of the city. There are 90 membership groups and they can vary from an allotment society to a social enterprise, a registered social landlord (RSL) and incorporate training companies (DS 48, Community Activist, DS 48, 277 -280)

Contradictions and tensions

However, despite the commitment of this discursive group to adopting a flexible 'needs-led' approach in order to creatively 'plug the gaps' in existing mainstream service provision, there was evidence of a lack of autonomy surrounding the nature and scale of development work because of a lack of trust on the part of the statutory sector. This manifested in not a curtailment of community involvement in leading certain schemes:

"what happened was the local organisation applied for SRB money and had put together quite a comprehensive programme in terms of regeneration, which the local authority then said....look, we don't want a VCS group running an SRB, so we'll run it. So they took the bulk of it, leaving the community running a small grants programme" (DS48, Community Activist, 11-15)

“There’s a big underlying upset that local providers are losing out to national providers and can’t bid for these contracts” (DS 42, VCS Provider, 246).

Tensions also arose in response to the ‘monitoring functions’ of statutory sector organisations which often held wider accountability functions for the success of service provision to central government. This meant that, despite the perceived independence of actors in this discursive community to respond flexibly, there was often an expectation that they would be subject to the same performance management and monitoring functions of statutory agencies, as this community activist explains:

“You’ve got to tell us. No we haven’t got to...tell you...we deal with local statutory organisations who can’t understand that we’re not part of the city council. Well you know – you’ve got to do it – No we haven’t!” (DS48, Community Activist, West Midlands Region, 472)

This perceived lack of autonomy, often magnified through wider involvement in partnerships with public sector providers, was seen to spill over into other areas of local governance associated with the management of programme activities and the involvement of local people. As a result, the statutory sector was felt to exert control over decision making about the timing and extent of involvement of communities in service planning. This is exemplified here in the setting up of a local area-based initiative which was felt to take on the same form of past initiatives despite its apparent community involvement focus (481):

“Everything had to go through those...area managers and then when NDCs came, that was the same template that was used” (DS48, Community Activist, 494)

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

In adopting a critical perspective, the first narrative can be described in terms of a *neo-liberal discourse* in which deprivation was perceived in terms of tackling economic inequality through attempts to ‘develop city regions’ (nodal point) to growth through competition. Here, regeneration was seen to offer a means of improving economic growth through inward investment (floating signifier); building aspiration and skills (floating signifier) and encouraging entrepreneurial communities to form (floating signifier). This suggests a ‘private enterprise’ approach to UK regeneration. However that contradictions emerged in the form of a lack of economic growth due to recession (contradiction 1); a lack of real jobs due to a local skills mismatch and the re-location of staff with existing skills (contradiction 2) and a failure to generate entrepreneurial communities due to a lack of economic opportunity (contradiction 3) suggests a failure to achieve full identify because of the antagonisms present.

The second narrative can be described in terms of a *public services (or welfare) discourse* in which deprivation was perceived in terms of tackling inequalities in access to service provision though attempts to 'narrow the gap' (nodal point) in life expectancy and quality of life. Here, regeneration was seen to offer a means of improving service provision through securing resources for public investment (floating signifier); community involvement (floating signifier) and performing needs assessment (floating signifier) as a means of demonstrating public accountability (floating signifier). This reflects a 'public enterprise' approach to UK regeneration. However contradictions which emerged in the form of a lack of strategy associated with a failure to co-ordinate service provision (contradiction 1); a lack of community involvement leading to the duplication of efforts and the wasting of resources (contradiction 2) and a failure to communicate the benefits of improvements to services (contradiction 3) are suggestive of a failure to achieve full identity because of the antagonisms present.

The third narrative can be seen in terms of a *communitarian discourse* which placed a high value on adopting a needs-led approach to securing resources for communities. Here the urban problem was seen in terms of a failure to meet community needs through existing mainstream service provision, invoking a storyline about the requirement for development work to build community capacity (NP) by having a thorough understanding of the needs of deprived groups (FS) using networking to develop creative approaches to responding to need (FS) and securing suitable funding in the form of grants in order to plug gaps in service provision (FS). This reflects the presence of a 'social enterprise' approach to UK regeneration. However, in keeping with the other discourses, that contradictions emerged in the form of a lack of autonomy to make decisions about the nature of development work because of the statutory requirements of partner organisations (C1); a perceived lack of trust in responding to needs creatively (C2); and a lack of sustainable funding to co-ordinate a flexible response to needs because of short-term funding regimes (C3) suggest a failure to achieve full identity.

In adopting a critical approach to exploring the 'lived experience of actors', this suggests that faced with leading in such complex times, actors invest much passion and energy in promoting different approaches to regeneration despite their associated tensions which each serve to negate the outcomes of regeneration. However, the presence of these tensions in their contradictory form; albeit through their apparently separate approaches to 'private enterprise'; 'public enterprise' and 'community enterprise' are each representative of market based approaches to regeneration. This can be explained in terms of Laclau and Mouffe's theory of socialist hegemony, which suggests that instead of a neo-liberal dominant ideology, what now exists is rather a 'new-right hegemony' which pervades all aspects of social life and thus prevents regeneration policy from reaching its full identity in terms of outcomes. Such conclusions bring into question the idea that urban policy outcomes are symbolic because of past framing by higher level discourses and are in

keeping with the findings of Raco (2005) and Fuller and Geddes (2008) who have suggested the presence of more pluralist approaches in urban policy based on the involvement of multiple actors.

Bringing this in line with the aims of this paper, this suggests, that in managing to lead, actors make sense of the complexity in urban policy by 'aligning themselves' to these different discourses (or ways of seeing and doing regeneration) even though because of the inherent contradictions and tensions involved, they present an impossible means of delivering regeneration. Albeit, on the face of it, this presents a rather depressing view of the ongoing and limited capacity of UK regeneration policy in its current form, it does however, raise some important questions about the ongoing need to explore the impact of political and institutional change on outcomes for urban policy (D'Albergo 2010). This paper forms the basis of such research by exploring the discursive and affective realm of practitioner involvement in the delivery of urban policy from a critical perspective.

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