Urban regeneration and policies of ‘social mixing’ in the UK: a critical assessment

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Introduction

• Since the 1970s various policies of ‘urban regeneration’ have been set up by successive British governments to address problems of inner city decline (economic decline, concentrations of deprivation, social problems etc…)  

• In 1997 the arrival of the New Labour party changed the orientation of urban policies significantly, after 20 years of Conservative policies.

• New approaches to the regeneration of urban areas: integrated social, physical and economic regeneration; attraction of the middle class back to the ‘inner city’; concept of ‘mixed communities’.
Introduction

- The concept of ‘mixed communities’ or ‘social mix’ through ‘housing mix’ has played a central role in the urban regeneration and housing policies of the previous UK government.
- **Key assumption:** mixing the type of housing and therefore bringing middle income groups in poor urban areas leads to greater ‘social mix’ and to positive effects for (poor) urban residents.
- A number of policies and measures to stimulate the ‘mix’.
- Mixed and contradictory evidence… and huge debates amongst researchers…!
- Lessons for Catalunya?
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Socio-spatial and ethnic divisions in British cities: the London case
Spatial differentiation and spatial ‘segregation’ are the spatial expression of social and economic inequalities prevalent in capitalist societies.

The UK is a highly unequal nation... and London a highly unequal city.

London exhibits strong patterns of socio-spatial and ethnic ‘segregation’.

The urban landscape reflects inequality and social difference: ‘sink estates’, gated communities, luxury developments, gentrified neighbourhoods, ethnic enclaves etc...
In 2008: 13.5 million people in the UK were living in households below the low-income threshold = 22% of the population.

The Hills Report, January 2010, *An Anatomy of Economic Inequality in the UK*: richest 10% are now 100 times richer than the 10% poorest

... highest level of income inequality since Second World War.

Uneven geography of incomes... [http://www.hnm.org.uk/maps.html]
• Inner London is deeply divided: it has the highest proportion of people in low income… but also the highest proportion of people on a high income.
• 2 out of 5 children (41%) under the poverty line (60% of the median income)
• 25% of children live in households where no one works
• 1 out of 4 old people under the poverty line
• 2005: 15-19% of employed people earn less than the £7.05/hour living wage
• **Housing costs** are a significant factor putting pressure on people with a low income.

• Over the last decade, the poorest tenth of the population have, on average, seen a **fall** in their real incomes **after** deducting housing costs.
The proportion of people in low income in Southern England (particularly London) is much higher on an 'after deducting housing costs' measure than on a 'before deducting housing costs' measure.

Source: Households Below Average Income, DWP; the data is the average for 2005/06 to 2007/08; UK; updated Aug 2009.
The housing issue in the UK has exacerbated social, economic and spatial disparities in the city.

Changes in public housing:

- Post-war years: public housing (built by local councils, thus called ‘Council Housing’) was a privileged tenure.
- Decline in the public housing stock began in the 1980s: privatization; no more construction of public housing, transfer to ‘housing associations’.
- In 1981: 31% of the UK stock... In 2000: below 17%.
- Social housing is now widely seen as only for those unable to gain entry to owner-occupation and those ‘at the bottom of society’.
- ‘Residualisation’: only for the very poor…?
- Half of all people in social housing are in low-income households compared to one in seven of those in other housing tenures.
Almost half of all people in social housing are on low incomes compared to one in seven of those in other housing tenures.

![Bar chart showing the proportion below 60% of median income, after deducting housing costs.](chart)

Source: Households Below Average Income, DWP

Scope: GB
Year: 2004/05
Updated: Apr 2008
The housing issue in the UK has exacerbated social, economic and spatial disparities in the city.

Changes in the private housing market:

- Policies supporting home ownership (rate now >70%)
- Before 2008, huge increase in housing prices due to various factors: problems of affordability.
- Insufficient rates of construction, and inadequate production by private sector.
- ‘Market-led’ gentrification in high-demand areas has led to the rapid displacement of low-income tenants and the rapid transformation of neighbourhoods into high-income areas.
The problem of ‘affordable’ housing:

• The production of affordable housing in the UK is nearly entirely dependent on agreements between local authorities and private developers…

• A specific mechanism in the UK planning system: ‘Section 106 agreements’ (planning obligations), through which local authorities get money or contributions from private developers as a condition for planning permission (schools, parks, social housing %).

• A highly criticised system, before the crisis… and even more so afterwards!

• The crisis stopped many construction and urban development projects.

• Quantity of new housing built decreased 50% in 2009 (to 1921 levels!)
What about ethnic segregation in Britain and London?

• In the UK, ethnicity is defined on the basis of self-identification. Very different systems in other European countries...

• A question on ‘ethnic group membership’ was introduced in the UK census in 1991.

• Ethnicity is DIFFERENT from nationality or place of birth!

• 2001 census: ethnic minority groups = 4.6 million or 7.9% of the total population.
• Mass immigration post-1945: West Indies, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, sub-Saharan Africa, since 2000s Central and Eastern Europe
• Half of the total minority ethnic population are Asians of Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi or other Asian origin.
• 25% of minority ethnic people described themselves as Black.
• 45% of the UK ethnic minority population lives in London.
• 2/5 of people from ethnic minorities live in low-income households, twice the rate for white people.
• Nearly half of Bangladeshi and Pakistani households are in poverty.
The geography of ethnicity in London

• In 2001 about 40% of London’s population was ‘from an ethnic minority’ (30% born outside the UK).

• Ethnic groups tend to cluster in specific areas...

• ... but those areas remain very mixed (= they contain different ethnic groups).

• Patterns of clustering and concentration differ widely between ethnic minority groups.

• Unlike the Black experience in the US, no single ethnic group has been particularly segregated in Britain.

• There are no ‘ethnic ghettos’ in London…
Map 2.1 Percentage of ethnic minorities in London, 2001

Source: 2001 Census, Standard Table ST101
Produced by Data Management and Analysis Group
Greater London Authority
Map 2.2 Percentage of people who were White British, 2001
Map 2.9 Percentage of people who were Indian, 2001

Source: 2001 Census, Key Statistics: Table KS06
Produced by Data Management and Analysis Group
Greater London Authority
Map 2.14 Percentage of people who were Black African, 2001
Changes in the housing market have particularly affected ethnic minorities...

- Because of their low income = less opportunities on the housing market.
- Under-represented in home ownership (difficult access to finance), over-represented in rental sector + overcrowding and poor housing conditions.
- Evidence of discrimination in housing allocation: individual discrimination in the private sector; institutional discrimination in the allocation of council housing.
- From the 1980s onwards, gentrification processes have reduced the available housing stock in the rental sector in certain neighbourhoods with high ethnic population.
Urban regeneration policies under the New Labour governments (1997-2010):
seeking to achieve ‘mixed communities’
1997: return of (New) Labour to power (until 2010).

New urban policies:

(i) New area-based policy initiatives to address ‘social exclusion’: ‘New Deal for Communities’ (1998-2008); National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal (integrated urban regeneration in the poorest neighbourhoods)

(ii) A new agenda on the ‘Urban Renaissance’ and the creation of ‘Sustainable Communities’
  • 1999: Report “Towards an Urban Renaissance”.
  • 2003: Sustainable Communities Plan: build four new settlements in the Southeast of England to accommodate a burgeoning population and tackle housing affordability.
Objective of the ‘Urban Renaissance’ agenda:

• … getting middle class back into inner cities…
• … at the same time, tackling inner city deprivation.
• Key ingredients: high quality public spaces, good architecture and design, public transport; high density, mixed-use development.
• Context: slow ‘reurbanization’ of inner cities.
• Inspiration: ‘New Urbanism’ + continental European ‘success stories’ of mixed-use, high-density urban renewal schemes (*el modelo Barcelona!*).
• A key concept in the discourse on the urban renaissance: ‘mixed communities’ (i.e. households of different income and socio-economic status) to be created through ‘mixed tenure’ (e.g. status on the housing market).
• Ethnic mix not directly addressed (political reluctance…)!
Social mix policies in the UK

- In a democratic and marked-based system, no means to ‘force’ the mix and impose patterns of mobility!
- But various tools, in particular related to housing policies:
  - regeneration of problematic social housing estates: demolition of some blocks, rebuilding of private housing and promotion of home ownership to attract middle class households
  - ‘Housing Market Renewal’ (North): demolitions + diversification of the housing stock + introduction of a ‘critical mass’ of affluent incomers to recreate ‘demand’.
  - Using the planning system: Section 106 of the UK’s Town and Country Planning Act 1990 allows local authorities to negotiate with private developers for a certain amount of affordable units in new developments in exchange for planning permission.
Aylsbury estate, London
‘Housing market renewal’ area, Liverpool
Urban policies for ‘social mix’ as an instrument to fight segregation and poverty: contradictory evidence and big debates!
Social mix policies: the underlying arguments

- Idea of ‘mixed’ and ‘balanced’ communities is an old one in English urbanism (Garden Cities, New Towns).
- The objective of ‘mix’ (of different income groups in the same urban space) is perceived as ‘desirable’ for various reasons!
- Based on the sociological notion of the ‘neighbourhood effect’ (or ‘area effects’): concentration of poor, or ethnic, people in specific areas (e.g. public housing estate) is bad, as it reinforces and perpetuates poverty and exclusion and prevents social mobility.
- Spatial concentration of people from ethnic minority groups, especially deprived people, may reduce their opportunities for integration, as it tends to perpetuate the marginal economic position of ethnic minorities.
Reasons:

– Quality of public services: poor quality of inner-city schools (London) and ‘exit strategies’ from middle-class families;

– Lack of ‘social capital’, socialization, peer pressures and ‘bad’ role models (e.g. ‘sink estates’ and youth crime in the UK);

– Lack of public transport: negative influence on job opportunities (Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans: reminder about levels of non-car ownership in the US!);

– Stigmatization (post-code discrimination in France - “Le 93”).
Social mix policies: the underlying arguments

- Policy implications: we need to ‘deconcentrate’ poverty… and one way of doing that is by introducing a form of ‘social mix’ in poor areas, e.g. getting higher income groups to live there (in general the debate is not so much about bringing poor people in rich neighbourhoods!!).

Assumptions about causal relationships:

- More housing mix → more social mix (and ethnic mix) → more opportunities for upward social mobility for the poor…

How is this supposed to happen?

- “role-model” and exemplary behaviours (socialization/decrease in violence)
- Pressures by the middle class to improve local services (public spaces, schools)
- Increasing social interactions leading to better information about jobs
Social mix policies: examples from Europe

Specific policies to increase the ‘mix’ of certain areas:

- Netherlands: differentiation of the housing stock in Dutch social housing areas
- France: Loi ‘Solidarité et Renouvellement Urbain’ (2001): imposing quotas of social housing construction to municipalities (poor implementation…)
- USA: ‘Moving to Opportunity’ programme (enabling individual mobility to ‘better’ neighbourhoods by giving low-income households vouchers to rent private dwellings in ‘richer’ areas)
- UK: mixing tenure (= mix between different types of housing - socially rented, privately rented, privately owned, ‘intermediate’). No explicit dispersal strategies in the UK with regard to ethnic minorities since the 1970s!
In the UK...

- Reluctance of real estate developers and house builders: architectural design reproduces “mini-segregation” at the level of the site.
- Reluctance of buyers/prejudice (e.g. stigma attached to social housing in the UK).
- Where are the spaces of interaction between different social groups? Parallel lives or shared spaces?
- The problem of SCHOOL MIX!
- The problem of ethnic discrimination is ignored.
- Little or no policy tools to stop the ‘decreasing’ mix of inner city neighbourhoods under high pressures from gentrification!
Social mix policies: do they work?
Very mixed and controversial evidence!

UK studies have shown evidence of positive impacts:
- Less stigmatisation of particular areas;
- Improvement in housing, public spaces and sometimes services, and thus residents’ satisfaction;

... but little or no evidence of:
• Increased social interaction (different social worlds, consumption, socialisation and schooling practices… school segregation remained strong!);
• Or better job opportunities or improvements for lower income groups.
• Did not ‘make the life chances of the poor any better’ (Cheshire, 2007).
Social mix policies: critiques

In some cases, ‘mixing’ policies can even have negative impacts on local communities:

- Breaking social networks and endangering ‘ethnic’ businesses, leading to more class or ethnic conflicts (‘Mug a yuppie’)
- Some degree of concentration may benefit migrants and/or the poor: family networks, small ethnic businesses… can support the process of socio-economic integration or mobility.
- Scientific evidence from the American Moving to Opportunity programme: poor people suffer if they move to richer neighbourhoods.
- Public space ‘renaissance’ strategies geared at attracting middle-class consumers or residents are often associated with new mechanisms of social control and surveillance: CCTV, displacement of youths, homeless…
Social mix policies: critiques

Strong critiques AGAINST such ‘mixing’ policies: inefficient… or even negative!

“State-sponsored gentrification”; “gentrification as explicit policy strategy”; “Revanchist Urbanism” (Lees, 2003).

A radical conclusion (Economist Paul Cheshire, 2007):

• Such policies are useless as they are treating the symptoms of problems of inequality rather than tackling the causes…‘Faith-based Displacement Activity’?

• Policy should focus on income redistribution and ‘changing those factors which make and keep people poor’.

• Focus on ‘people’ rather than places.
Conclusions and lessons for Catalunya
• 30 years of area-based urban regeneration programmes in the UK have shown that such programmes have a relatively small effect on the reduction of inequalities between places… and between people.
• There are local ‘success stories’ and many inner cities have improved physically and economically…
• … but often at the price of displacement or gentrification of particular neighbourhoods.
• Urban policies in Britain have been rather unsuccessful at eradicating socio-spatial disparities in a long-term perspective (e.g. no dramatic change in the relative ranking of the most deprived areas in England on the Indices of Multiple Deprivation).
• Specific policies of ‘mixing’ through housing have, at best, small positive effects; often no effects, or even negative ones.
• Does it mean we should give up area-based initiatives or programmes of ‘neighbourhood regeneration’? And in particular those seeking to increase ‘social’ and ‘housing mix’?

• One of the main problems of ‘area-based initiatives’ is that they often seek to solve problems which have their roots outside the city!
  – structural economic change / labour market dynamics
  – changing role of the welfare state
  – inflated housing market
  – discrimination in various spheres

• We should not give up ‘area-based policies’… but be very aware of their limits… and potential negative effects…
Lessons for Catalunya?

• Do not over-rely on ‘area-based’ regeneration programmes to solve the problems of migrants in the city…
• Mainstream welfare and integration measures are strongest tools to reduce inequalities in the long run.
• *Llei de barris*: important to analyse which type of transformation of neighbourhoods is happening? Improvements for existing population or gentrification? Need for strong monitoring and evaluation of public interventions in ‘space’.
• Set up instruments to preserve the ‘mix’ where it exists! Control mechanisms that preserve the mix that exist in many neighbourhoods of Spanish and Catalan cities… (e.g. debates on ‘pisos tourísticos’ and ‘gentrification’ of Ciutat Vella)
‘While social processes may become manifest in a certain residential stock in a neighborhood, as rising levels of social segregation or as local spatial concentrations of poverty, that does not necessarily imply that they are also caused by or being problems of the housing stock or of the neighborhood composition’ (Musterd, 2002: 140)
Some references…


