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The Post-Industrial City:
New Economies, Spatial Transformations and New Landscapes

Επιμέλεια
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Περιεχόμενα

Urban Landscapes of Abandonment and Sustainable Regeneration of Inner City Areas: The Case of Newcastle Gateshead, UK

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Περίληψη

Αστικά Τοπία Εγκατάλειψης και Βιώσιμη Αναζωογόννηση των αστικών κεντρικών περιοχών: Η περίπτωση του Newcastle Gateshead, Η.Β.

Το Newcastle Gateshead, όπως και άλλες βιομηχανικές πόλεις της Βόρειας Αγγλίας, γνώρισε σταθερή μείωση του πληθυσμού του από τη μεταπολεμική περίοδο και μέχρι τη δεκαετία του 1990. Οι απώλειες στην παραδοσιακή βιομηχανία συνοδεύτηκαν από μετανάστευση, ενώ σημειώθηκαν επίσης μεταναστευτικές κινήσεις από κεντρικές αστικές συνοικίες σε προαστιακές ή και αγροτικές περιοχές. Το αποτέλεσμα ήταν μια ασταθής αγορά κατοικίας με μεγάλο πλεόνασμα σε κτιριακό απόθεμα. Στο συνολικό αστικό ιστό, οι συνέπειες αυτής της διαδικασίας ήταν ασύμμετρες, επηρεάζοντας με διαφορετικό τρόπο τις διάφορες συνοικίες της πόλης. Στις χειρότερες περιπτώσεις, υπήρξαν περιοχές που ακολούθησαν μια ανεξέλεγκτη πορεία προς την υποβάθμιση και την εγκατάλειψη. Παράλληλα, κύριος στόχος της κυβερνητικής οικιστική πολιτικής του Ηνωμένου Βασιλείου είναι να ενθαρρύνει την κατοίκηση σε περιοχές με υψηλότερες πυκνότητες και υψηλότερη ποιότητα χώρου, καθώς και την ανάπλαση και αναδόμηση πρώην βιομηχανικών περιοχών. Μπορούν αυτές οι πολιτικές να πετύχουν σε πόλεις και περιοχές με μικρή ζήτηση κατοικίας και μεγάλο αριθμό κενών και εγκαταλελειμμένων κτιρίων;

Λέξεις κλειδιά

Αστικός σχεδιασμός, κέντρα πόλεων, χαμηλή ζήτηση στέγης, εγκατάλειψη.

Urban Landscapes of Abandonment and Sustainable Regeneration of Inner City Areas: The Case of Newcastle Gateshead, Uk

Newcastle Gateshead in common with other industrial cities in northern England steadily lost population during the post-war period up to the 1990s. Much migration was in response to losses in traditional industries; however, within the conurbation there was also migration from inner city areas to more suburban and rural locations. The result was a "loose" urban housing market with an overall surplus of housing stock. The outcomes of this process were unevenly spread, however and affected neighbourhoods very differently. In the worst cases, areas spiralled out of control into decline and abandonment. Meanwhile, the thrust of UK government policy on housing design and location is to get more people to live in urban, higher density, better quality, developments on reused brownfield land. Can such policies really succeed in places where there is low demand for housing and large numbers of existing properties lie empty and abandoned?

Keywords
Urban design, inner cities, low demand housing, abandonment.

1.   INTRODUCTION

Newcastle Gateshead, two administratively separate municipalities increasingly considered together in urban policy contexts, suffered severe economic decline from the early 1970s. Associated with this and in common with other major industrial areas of northern England, there was steady population decline up to the 1990s; though this appears to have now levelled off. This population decline particularly affected traditional working class communities, but the effects were unevenly spread and while some communities remained stable, others spiralled out of control into decline and abandonment. These abandoned areas contrast starkly with more stable neighbourhoods and in particular with a dramatically regenerated and flourishing city core, which has emerged over the past decade and has been key in attracting investment and people from outside the city and for establishing new urban communities, (Robinson *et al.,* 2001; Minton, 2003).

Set against these processes, current government advice has clearly articulated its approach to spatial planning as emphasising brownfield over greenfield sites for development; a requirement for higher density housing developments and; the necessity to improve residential design standards (DETR, 2000; DTLR & CABE 2001). Such ambitions may seem possible in the city core with its cachet of exclusivity, but will it really be possible in those areas where people have clearly decided they do not want to live?

In 2002 Newcastle Gateshead Housing Market Renewal Pathfinder (NGHMRP) was one of nine pathfinder projects set up within England. These projects are partnerships of agencies responsible for crime, housing design and planning, neighbourhood services and business development. The key aim of these projects is to reverse the fortunes of low demand housing areas. Pathfinder programmes are aimed to be evidence based, ODPM (2004) and to this end in 2003 NGHMRP commissioned a review of literature of low demand housing followed by a series of citizen workshops on housing perceptions and choice pertinent to the pathfinder area and set within the framework of current academic and practice research.

This paper is a brief review of that research and aims to explore some of the tensions revealed by the work.

2. ATTITUDES TO HOUSING LOCATION IN THE UK

Contemporary housing research and literature in the UK can generally be divided into three locations:

i. the city centre and new waterfronts
ii. inner cities, often linked to research on stigmatised local authority built estates and
iii. suburban development, often related to speculative new build. This is admittedly a gross over simplification, but it is a useful device to sort out a very wide range and varied coverage of material.

Most work on the transformation of city core and waterfronts has been essentially positive. The (re)population of these areas has been typically associated with well-educated and well paid home owners, with a predominance of young single people, (Oakes and McKee, 1997). Within such areas the re-use of redundant commercial and institutional properties has been recognised as adding confidence to regeneration schemes and levering in private investment, (Garrett, 2003; Heath and Oc, 2001).

Also related to urban regeneration recent research has suggested that developments on urban brownfield sites have often been of higher quality than greenfield new build. Such developments have generally been better integrated with their local context and have displayed innovative urban design solutions. Tiesdell and Adams (2004) suggest this is motivated by the differences in processes in the two types of development and that in essence on brownfield sites investment in better design was a necessity rather than choice.

In terms of inner cities there have been a number of studies which suggest that positive image management and marketing can overcome negative attitudes to the external appearance and design of stigmatised social housing, (Dean and Hasting, 2000; Niner,

2000). Negative associations to stigmatised housing, however can be the longest-lasting, (Power and Tunstall, 1995) and though external appearance is only one factor here, it does have a significant effect, (Doling and Ford, 1996). High rise has been seen as a particularly problematic issue in the UK, yet even here some commentators assert that there are opportunities for transforming tower blocks into viable and sustainable housing for a variety of households (Church and Gale, 2000) though more balanced views stress the necessity of matching location, accommodation, tenure mix and property management regime with the aspirations of potential residents, (Towers, 2000). Not all literature on inner areas is negative, however, or associated with local authority estates. Jesmond, an area of 19th and early 20th century terraced housing in Newcastle for example, has been highlighted as an exemplar of high density inner urban living and yet the same review points out the irony that similar terraces in Newcastle's "West End" were being demolished because no-one wanted to live there, (DTLR & CABE, 2001).

Literature relating to suburbia suggests people move to suburban estates because of affordability and a perceived increased quality for family life (Mulholland Research Associates, 1995; Forest *et al.*, 1997). There is also work critical of the quality of urban design in UK suburbia (Gwilliam *et al.,* 1998), however and recent research found that public attitudes towards the design and construction of contemporary homes may be at odds with the standard product range of many developers (Andrews *et al.,* 2002). It is rare, however, for speculative developers themselves to question the economic and social stability of their developments, though the recent involvement of mass house builders in more experimental housing might be an indication that at some levels this is occurring.

Finally, less area based, in recent years literature has been produced on sustainable neighbourhoods. Exemplars, such as the Greenwich Millennium Village are well reviewed (Hansen, 1999), but overall consumer reactions to sustainable housing are under researched. There is a growing body of evidence that consumers are increasingly drawn to sustainable technology, though this does not seem to translate to housing choice (Holdsworth, 2003); though in the UK housing market, this may be caused by a simple lack of choice.

3.   CONCEPTUALISING LOW DEMAND AREAS

There are three interwoven narratives around the concept of low demand housing which relate to the demographic, economic and social dynamics of these areas (Bramley *et al.*, 2000). Much migration out of northern UK cities from the 1960s to 1990s was in response to losses in traditional industries and the opportunities of employment in other regions, primarily the South East. Within the conurbation and its immediate rural environs, however, there was also migration from inner city areas to more suburban locations (Champion,

1996; King, 2001). The result of these processes was a "loose" housing market with an overall surplus of housing stock, however, the outcomes of this were unevenly spread and effected particular neighbourhoods extremely differently, (Holmans and Simpson, 1999).

The worst affected areas were those that traditionally housed relatively low-skilled working class communities; generally either 19th Century terraced stock, or later local authority built estates i.e. a specific housing type, or tenure. This has led to an obsolescence narrative which suggests the problems of these areas are rooted in the over-supply of these types of stock. The argument highlights the changes in people's aspirations for those who have successfully moved from industrial employment to the service sector and is found most readily in policy documents, such as the North East Housing Strategy (David Cumberland Housing Regeneration Ltd, 2003). This narrative, however, does not explain why areas of similar stock have experienced very different fortunes; nor why modern and well built stock in Newcastle's West End has faired worse than older poorer stock elsewhere in the city.

Power and Mumford (1999) have identified a cumulative series of pressures, which eventually "tip" estates over from being less popular into a steep decline of non-viability. In their view long-term, deep-rooted stigmatisation often lies behind processes that end as a physical manifestation of social exclusion. The dynamics of these neighbourhoods is often complex and they display multiple layers of social deprivation, crime and disorder. In such neighbourhoods in Newcastle's West End there is often a churning of short distance and short-term moving among residents looking to avoid social and personal problems which they eventually find inescapable and this process ejects them to another neighbourhood altogether, leaving a dwindling population of long term residents behind, (Lowe *et al.*, 1998).

Though the issue has been highlighted for more than half a decade, the fortunes of many areas affected by abandonment have not significantly changed over this time. In 1999 Power and Mumford though sceptical of trickle down theories, suggested that the impact of city centre regeneration might spread over to inner areas, but unfortunately in Newcastle Gateshead if anything the reverse of this seems to be true. Prices in property hotspots have out-performed national averages; seemingly spinning out of control almost as much as the abandonment in less fortunate neighbourhoods; creating even greater social polarisation.

4.   THE SUSTAINABILITY DEBATE AND SHIFTING POLICY

While the context of low demand housing was emerging government policy became increasing influenced by the sustainability agenda and concepts of the compact city with key elements of reducing energy consumption and travel. Academic research underpinning

this policy shift focussed on specific links between residential densities/urban densities and transportation use; strategic planning; building energy use and the provision of community infrastructure. These combined to create a convincing case for a European wide trend against suburban development and a rejuvenation of collective urban living, (Burton and Jenks, 1998).

There has been criticism from the UK housing development industry, however, that the emphasis on brownfield ignores the question of whether this land is where people want to live, (House Builders Federation, 2000). Tensions exist between official policy and developers ambitions in terms of raising densities and the UK public's scepticism about higher densities is recognised, (Farooki, 2001). Moreover, recent research suggested some developers have focused more on high density than good design, Nathaniel Lichfield and Partners (2003) suggesting the UK is a long way from achieving a "step-change" in the quality of residential developments, the third strand of government policy.

5. NEWCASTLE GATESHEAD CITIZEN WORKSHOP RESEARCH

The Newcastle Gateshead research adapted an approach developed previously by the Urban Task Force. A series of citizen workshops were carried out with members recruited from existing citizen juries. Volunteers were divided between Gateshead and Newcastle and split between those with households with children and those without. The groups were then further divided down in focus groups of 7 to 8 participants.

The workshops were then divided into two sessions, the first exploring general conceptions of suburbia, city centre and inner city and what these terms meant to the participants. In the second half of the workshop facilitators adopted an advocacy role for each of the housing typologies reviewed in the first part of this paper and which it was felt provided a possible housing solution within the pathfinder area. Within each type a series of key overlapping themes were explored relating to the nature of the properties themselves, architecture/image; internal space; privacy and amenity; management and security; external issues; car parking; community; density; the relationship to neighbourhood; financial issues; cost; investment and; overarching issues such as sustainability; and marketing and promotion. The following sections overview some of the key points raised in the workshops.

5.1. The Image of the City

When asked about their perceptions of terms city centre, inner city and suburbs in relation to Newcastle Gateshead there was a great deal of consensus among participants. Suburbs and the city core were often associated with physical attributes so that suburbs were allied

with "peace and quiet" and "access to the countryside" while the city centre was "lively" a place for "shops and leisure". The term "inner city" was viewed entirely perjoratively associated with social and economic problems, crime and anti-social behaviour. Such perceptions were much more important than geographical location in defining what was labelled "inner city". To this end, areas which naturally fall within the geographic location of the inner city, but did not fit the socio-economic criteria associated with the term had to be labelled something else, and groups used expressions like "an early city suburb" or, "an extension of the city centre".

While the term inner-city was generally avoided by participants, many inner areas were clearly perceived as desirable places to live. A participant who had moved to a modern suburb lamented leaving an area of modest 19th Century terraces east of the City Centre, "*we used to have a lovely old terraced house ... I wish I could go back, but the prices have gone up so much I can't afford to*". This suggests that such housing was not only popular, but out performing the market for more modern suburban stock. Why some inner areas like this were popular and rising in value while other similar areas in different parts of the city had declined rapidly was not something many participants felt they could explain. One group thought that areas of poor quality slum housing had tainted an area even though the properties they cited had been cleared for forty years, clearly supporting research highlighting the deep rooted nature of stigmatisation.

The regeneration of the City core and water front includes a wide range city centre residences, ranging from housing association flats for moderate rent, to million pound penthouses. The overwhelming impression however was that it was "...*an expensive area full of luxury yuppie flats*", or at least very expensive compared to many suburban locations. Such accommodation was not so much seen as a home as more temporary accommodation associated with a certain stage in your lifecycle; a common association between the trendy interior design of these places and hotels seemed to validate the impression of temporary, dormitory living, "*they stay there* (in city centre apartments)... *but we live in our houses and our gardens*" (emphasis added).

5.2. Alienated by Marketing

One of the key problems with the image of the city centre undoubtedly came through from marketing material for various city centre developments. Much marketing material was heavily criticised for portraying unrealistic, or too idealised urban lifestyles. The overriding use of young trendy imagery in relation to schemes in and next to the city centre created a remarkable amount of alienation among the untargeted groups; this only served to reinforce people's opinions that city centre living was a transitory and "dormitory" lifestyle

and unsuited to older people, or families. The collective impact of this material cannot be underestimated as many of the images relating to developments in Newcastle Gateshead are widely distributed, in essence reinforcing messages about who should live where.

5.3.   The Stigmatisation of Tenure

Housing for rent was seen as an option only for those who couldn't afford owner occupation. People generally equated rented housing with either local authority stock or poor quality privately rented houses. As a consequence people associated renting with people being less inclined to maintain or invest in their property, less committed to an area or community and "transitory" residents. Participants living in social housing clearly did not feel that they and their neighbours had less commitment to their neighbourhood; a view also supported by empirical research. Nonetheless, this was a real and prevalent perception and generally owner occupiers were strongly antagonistic to mixing tenures, viewed as "the planners playing social engineers".

Not all mixed tenure areas were unpopular; however, one area with council houses and privately rented properties pepper potted around otherwise owner occupied 19th century terraced houses was of particular interest. The tenure mix is not obvious as the properties were originally built as speculative development; with some having since been purchased and managed by the city council. The area is successful and popular, which would suggest that a subtle mix of housing tenure in an area can be unnoticeable in many instances and not a substantive issue in owner occupants housing choice.

5.4.   Regenerate, or, Sweep Away?

Opinions were extremely divided among participants as to where existing buildings in the low demand housing areas, both existing housing stock and other buildings, should be refurbished, or demolished. Some people felt that the housing stock often so tainted by stigmatisation that demolition and a fresh start was the only answer, but this was not a universal view. There was more agreement, however, that it was a minority of residents themselves, who were the cause of problems "once you got rid of the anti-social neighbours, the likes of those houses would be ideal"; and that some reworking and modernisation was all that was necessary to much of the stock. There was also agreement on the need to create a critical mass of refurbishment to create confidence and that variety and choice within areas and that individual refurbishment schemes of landmark buildings were seen as potentially fruitless.

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5.5. Embracing a Sustainable Future

Although there was an inherent conservatism about both location and housing type there was also a more general feeling that the housing market may change radically over the next few generations. Many participants felt there was an urgent need to educate people more about sustainable technology and felt that the government was failing severely in this area. They also felt that emergent generations of home buyers might be living very differently than themselves in the future. Also though families were innately conservative in their choice of geographical location in the discussion there was a far more calculated approach to over-coming the remaining risks of family life, such as the influence of traffic, security and community and many of the underlying ethical values attached to sustainable housing. This might best be described as a willingness to take "pro-child", or "pro-family" risks. Families certainly claimed to place priority on property as "home" rather than investment and that financial aspects, such as profits due to property outstripping markets norms, were of secondary importance. Overall this group suggested far more willingness to consider radical designs in their chosen neighbourhood challenging the notions that there is blanket passivity across all demographic and socio-economic groups in relation to sustainable housing as suggested by some recent studies (Holdsworth, 2003).

6. CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

The key issue that emerged from the work was that overcoming the deep-rooted stigmatisation that low demand areas suffer from was seen as key to changing people's perception and ensuring a sustainable future for these areas. The physicality of these places, however, inner urban locations and older housing stock may be receiving too much attention in official policy decisions. In Newcastle Gateshead areas of almost identical housing stock have diametrically opposed fortunes. Though opinion was divided, people didn't necessarily see the demolition of low demand areas as achieving anything positive and arguments that these areas need to be demolished to develop more standardised modern housing in order to attract house purchasers, does not seem to be supported by the research.

The research was admittedly limited to understanding the qualitative views of existing residents in Newcastle and Gateshead and is therefore limited in its scope and application. However, the over-view of research in this field reveals significant gaps and work certainly suggests, while people continue to buy certain types of houses in popular locations it does not necessarily mean this housing meets their aspirations for the future, or even currently, or that there is no future for areas of low demand. While people recognise their deep-rooted conservatism in terms of where they chose to live, they also appear

open to embrace notions of change. Sustainable design was an issue which generated much interest and debate. What people felt was lacking here was clear and politically endorsed guidance over the issue. Guidance from central government in particular was felt to be non-existent. Remodelling some low demand areas as sustainable housing demonstration projects was felt to be an exciting and worthwhile avenue of exploration and a way to provide better housing for future generations. In this respect this work is somewhat of a departure from other low demand research and may at least in part suggest a sustainable future for these areas may be possible.

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