

# **‘It’s got a bad name and it sticks...’ – Approaching Stigma as a Distinct Focus of Neighbourhood Regeneration Initiatives**

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## **ABSTRACT**

As a consequence of economic change and urban decline, stigma has become a feature of many neighbourhoods in western post-industrial cities. In many cases, the negative labelling and resulting stigmatisation of a neighbourhood exerts a powerful influence on the material and psychological well being of residents, which contributes towards their experience of exclusion from important aspects of economic, social and cultural life. In the UK, recent neighbourhood regeneration strategies have been characterised by a strong focus on physical and economic aspects of renewal. This approach has been beneficial in terms of producing improvements in the general quality of residential life; however, there remains a lack of focus on addressing stigma as a distinct neighbourhood problem.

Based upon case studies of the experiences of two Scottish housing estates and an extensive literature review, this paper suggests that although stigma has been tackled indirectly in recent urban regeneration programmes these may underestimate the enduring nature of stigma. This is based upon the finding that stigmatised labels can be tenacious and when a negative reputation is established in the wider city and often beyond, this becomes ingrained in external perceptions that further perpetuate the notion of a neighbourhood and its residents as problematic, reinforcing the experience of disadvantage and exclusion. Perhaps more problematically, the negative reputation of a neighbourhood and its residents can become a defining feature, over and above any positive attributes and in some cases a poor reputation can remain years after improvements have been carried out in a neighbourhood.

The paper highlights the ways in which gaining a fuller understanding of the process of neighbourhood labelling and stigma, including its origins and dynamics might better inform practitioners involved in neighbourhood renewal. It is proposed that stigma should be approached as a distinct entity rather than as one of many neighbourhood problems and that placing stigma as a central focus of regeneration activity is beneficial for the long-term vitality of stigmatised urban neighbourhoods.

**Key Words:** stigma, exclusion, neighbourhood regeneration