

Vitality – Not Dependency. Social Relations in Scottish Urban Policy

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ABSTRACT

Economic policy in Scotland is strongly focused on the nation's cities – with key policy documents such as the City Review, Community Regeneration Statement and the recent Regeneration Policy Statement firmly centred on urban growth and vitality. Vitality as economic growth and prosperity is thus the key national project of Government and business elites. *Vitality* is here a fitting term to distinguish projected successful urban futures, as exemplified by Edinburgh and Aberdeen, from the diagnosed ailment from which Scotland has suffered for too long: dependency, and most notably *welfare* dependency of the many people living in particular in its former industrial cities of Glasgow and Dundee.

In such policy discourse cities are equipped with biological characteristics of living organisms (to which other dependents ones should aspire); all the while eclipsing the social conditions and relations on which not only urban fortunes are built. In the specific context of urban Scotland, the importance of an active social policy is key to combat welfare dependency and to promote vitality. Cast as social inclusion – not only in relation to housing but most notably to urban labour markets – such social policy should provide cities and residents fit for economic competition.

This presentation will interrogate the means by which such 'social neo-liberalism' is being produced across national and city scales. It will do so specifically by two related sets of arguments: Firstly, it examines the extent to which organicist notions of vitality underline contemporary urban policy with specific reference to Scottish cities; and secondly to explore the extent to which such vitality can at all be an academic tool for understanding 'the urban', harking back to earlier critiques of the specific constructions of the city and its social relations within a biological (functionalist) frame.

Key Words: Scottish cities; policy discourse; social relations