

***'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. It is frequently the case that 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 United Kingdom, recent neighbourhood regeneration strategies have been characterised by a strong focus on the physical aspects of renewal. This approach has been beneficial in terms of producing improvements to the general quality of residential life, however there remains a lack of focus on stigma as a distinct neighbourhood problem.

Based upon qualitative research that explored the experiences of two Scottish housing estates and a literature review, this paper suggests that although stigma has been acknowledged and addressed in recent urban regeneration programmes these have underestimated the enduring nature of stigma. This is based upon the finding that stigmatising 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 suggests that 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 maintaining the quality of residential life and the long-term vitality of stigmatised urban neighbourhoods.

Key words: Stigma, exclusion, neighbourhood regeneration

Introduction

This paper begins with an explanation of how understandings of the spatial nature of urban disadvantage have invariably involved a focus on the negative and dysfunctional aspects of neighbourhood life. It then refers to the generally accepted explanation for the origins of stigma in neighbourhood studies, namely as an outcome of the negative impact of structural, economic transition and urban decline. The broad characteristics of urban regeneration policy in the United Kingdom are also outlined. The features of neighbourhood stigma in the two case studies are then discussed and the paper explains how regeneration activity has exerted positive change locally. Reasons for the continued presence of poor reputation and stigma in the case studies are then explained in terms of a process where local perceptions have merged with broader, societal understandings of urban disorder and problem residents that in turn contributes towards the long term negative reputation in a local context. The paper concludes by explaining how this process relates to the enduring nature of neighbourhood stigma in general and also provides suggestions for tackling this problem in neighbourhood regeneration activities.

Documenting the ‘Problem’ estate

The spatial nature of urban disadvantage has long been documented in terms of being a problematic feature of urban life. This is particularly evident from the mid 19th century, where in western society, the rapid onset of industrialisation and population growth created new forms of urban social organisation and a dependency upon industrial capitalism made the urban work force more vulnerable to the booms and slumps of the economy. This situation is documented well in Engel’s *The Condition of the Working Class in England in 1844* (1845, 1987) where he provides a first hand account of the extreme poverty, disadvantage and over crowded living conditions experienced in working class areas of industrialised Manchester.

In the early / middle years of the Twentieth Century, academic interest in the spatial distribution of urban problems continued, Burgess (1925, 1967) for example identified the ‘zone in transition’, an area of deterioration where traditional norms and social conventions were weakened and was the locus for social problems of poverty and criminality. Wirth (1938, 1961), like many of his contemporaries, regarded urban living to be qualitatively different to the social organisation that was experienced prior to industrialisation and shared their interest in urban problems and deviance. For example, In *Urbanism as a Way of Life* in 1938, (1961) the presence of urban locations in terms of their increased segregation on ethnic and income grounds rather than by choice is highlighted. As Mooney (1999) points out, spatial distributions of disadvantage have frequently been represented in the popular press as being the site of urban disorder, essentially as ‘dangerous places’. The construction of these negative perceptions through mass media plays a critical role in perpetuating the stigmatised reputations of a neighbourhood. In a similar way, Damer (1972, 1989, 1992) concludes from his studies of two Glasgow neighbourhoods that the negative labelling of problem locations and their residents through mass media and other institutional agents has long taken place. Historical negative imagery of the urban poor in wider

society has greatly influenced understandings of some neighbourhoods to the extent that very often these locations and their resident have been demonised in terms of their undesirability and the presence of problematic residential behaviour whether real, exaggerated or imagined. This kind of social labelling exerts a powerful influence over the way these locations are understood in the collective imagination with the result that many urban areas are defined primarily in terms of their stigmatised, deviant status, rather than by other routine, non problematic aspects of neighbourhood life as highlighted for example by Armstrong and Wilson (1973) in their study of the Easterhouse estate in Glasgow where the estates widespread negative reputation greatly outstripped the actual extent of problems. Through these various perceptual processes, notions of the 'problem' neighbourhood have become an ingrained and generally accepted part of the social psyche that has contributed towards the long standing poor reputation and stigma experienced in many neighbourhoods.

Urban change and neighbourhood stigma

Academic explanations put forward to account for the origins of neighbourhood stigma have frequently highlighted the negative impact of broader structural change and economic decline that has translated into spatial disadvantage and local poor neighbourhood reputation. This situation has been exacerbated by a process whereby the social housing sector has become residual and providing mainly for those of low socio-economic status with little or no choice over their housing decisions. A consequence of this has been the emergence of more pronounced patterns of social polarisation existing between tenures. In the U.K, this process accelerated in the 1980s as a consequence of the broad policy objectives of reducing council housing stock and expanding owner occupation (Lee and Murie 1997). This situation continued through the transfer of local authority housing stock to the private sector as well as through incentives that involved a decrease in capital spending and housing subsidy to local authorities and the maintenance of mortgage tax relief (Cole and Furbey 1994). These policy initiatives contributed to the council rented tenure becoming a less attractive housing option and produced widespread change in tenure patterns. In addition, tenants' 'right to buy' their homes was introduced in the 1980 Housing Act (Glennerster 1995). A significant outcome of this policy involved higher income tenants buying better quality homes in more desirable areas, leaving concentrations of low-income households in some neighbourhoods. Lower income households (as measured by receipt of benefits) were increasingly to be found in the council rent sector (Page 1995).

Over the last few decades, the United Kingdom like many other industrialised nations experienced a steady loss of manufacturing employment thereby creating areas of economic and social depression. A corresponding increase in benefit dependent and low-income households has compounded the disadvantage experienced in many urban neighbourhoods. These patterns of social, economic and physical urban neighbourhood decline has in turn contributed to the increased unpopularity and negative reputation of many urban areas (Power and Mumford, 1999, Lupton, 2003). It has become accepted wisdom that stigma is a general feature of social housing and this has been documented at least since the mid 1970s where Griffiths for instance, asserts that 'all council houses carry a social stigma' (1975, p10). More recently,

Parkinson (1998) reinforces this understanding. Similarly, Power and Mumford (1999) implicate the 'general decline of council estates' in producing negative image. Similarly, Dean and Hastings comment on a British trend of 'stigmatisation of social renting in general' (2000, p2). This consensus is also reinforced in a wider context where the issue of image and changing perceptions of social housing estates is a characteristic evident in many urban areas throughout Western Europe and North America. White (1998) for example refers to the stigmatisation associated with residence in the social housing sector in his study of social exclusion in Paris. Murdie (1998) also refers to a similar process in terms of the increasing residualisation of Toronto's Metropolitan Housing Association accommodation where stigma has become a significant feature.

The impact of neighbourhood stigma

Examples of the exclusionary and disadvantaging effects of stigma abound in the academic and policy literature where poor neighbourhood reputation is widely acknowledged as a serious problem that impacts upon the economic, social and psychological welfare of residents. Many studies highlight the fact that neighbourhood stigmatisation is a significant obstacle that prevents resident's access to key aspects of social and economic life including employment, utilities and financial services. For example, McGregor et al's (1998) study of employment and training patterns in Scottish regeneration areas highlights the economic impact of residential stigma, in their study local employers were reluctant to recruit residents from local stigmatised neighbourhoods. Similarly, Dean and Hastings (2000) study of three British neighbourhoods found that residents reported stigma as being a direct barrier to their employment opportunities. It is also commonplace to encounter higher insurance premiums and reduced access to credit facilities in many stigmatised neighbourhoods as Lupton (2003) illustrated in her study into the dynamics of neighbourhood decline in several neighbourhoods in England and Wales.

The negative reputation of a neighbourhood also has a significant capacity to impact upon the way some residents feel towards their immediate environment, their neighbours and themselves. This is the case in Costa Pinto's (2000) study of social housing in Lisbon, where residential self-image was found to reflect the negative attributes and stigma of the immediate environment and external images. In her study, she documents a process of internalisation of neighbourhood image that had translated into resident's self perceptions and feelings of low self-esteem that in turn limited their participation in important social and economic activities. A critical attribute of neighbourhood stigma is evident in its potent capacity to endure and once a negative reputation becomes established it can become a major influence upon the way that a neighbourhood is understood in the external perceptions of those living outside the location. This attribute of stigma has been well documented and the tendency for a negative reputation to last beyond its original source is present in the work of Griffiths (1975), Gill (1977) and in more recent studies (Dean and Hastings 2000). Having been labelled as a problem estate, it is clear that the ensuing negative reputation can outlast the significance of the attribute or event that originally produces stigma and that subsequent perceptions are interpreted within the confines of the original negative label. As explained by Goffman (1963, p19), the broader process of social labelling and stigmatisation inherently involves: 'transformation of the self from someone with

a particular blemish into someone with a record of a particular blemish'. Essentially, the reputation or record of being negatively labelled in the first instance is a powerful source of social stigma in itself and subsequent reinterpretation in a more positive light may prove to be difficult. It is clear in this respect that creation of negative labels are tenacious and can endure.

Poor neighbourhood reputation and urban regeneration

In spite of the widely accepted acknowledgement of the problematic residential outcomes of neighbourhood stigma, and the numerous references made to stigmatised neighbourhoods over the last few decades, in-depth knowledge concerning the intricacies of stigma generally remains limited. Likewise, addressing stigma does not appear to have been rated highly on the urban regeneration agenda. There has also been a generalised underlying assumption present in regeneration strategies that the local reputation of a neighbourhood will be enhanced as a result of broad regeneration strategies taking place (Shaw and Robinson 1998). In such approaches, stigma is generally accepted as being one of many problems encountered in neighbourhoods where decline has taken place with no specific strategy aimed directly at tackling this issue.

This lack of specific focus on stigma reflects the prevalent characteristic of approaches within urban neighbourhood regeneration strategy over the years. For instance, viewed in an historical context, the move away from physical orientated urban policy towards more socially orientated interventions has been slow in developing in the U.K. There has been a longstanding emphasis upon physical renewal and the main thrust of urban policy over the last 50 years has concentrated mainly upon physical and environmental interventions. A major activity within this broad approach has involved clearing cities of problem housing (Keating and Boyle 1986). Subsequent changes in the broader socio economic sphere have evidently instigated policy interventions with an increased focus on the social and economic aspects of urban renewal. In the Scottish context, over the last 20 years or so, there has been an evident shift towards addressing wider social and economic issues within neighbourhood regeneration although physical improvement, essentially a 'bricks and mortar' approach is arguably still a major focus. Over the last 30 years or so, strategies have taken a more comprehensive approach, for instance in the widespread area renewal carried out under the Glasgow Eastern Area Regeneration (GEAR) project initiated in 1976. A major part of the GEAR project involved increasing economic infrastructure and job creation as well as environmental improvement (Cullingworth & Nadin, 1994). The *New Life for Urban Scotland* initiative that was carried out between 1988 and 1995 also involved a broad strategy in its approach to regenerating four of Scotland's disadvantaged and problematic estates in Glasgow, Edinburgh, Dundee and Paisley. With its focus on social, economic and physical regeneration activities, the New Life strategy can be credited as recognising the interdependency of neighbourhood problems and represents a move towards more inclusive regeneration measures however, physical improvement remained a major feature of this approach which included widespread demolition, new build and environmental landscaping.

More recent intervention in Scotland's disadvantaged neighbourhoods has involved a far broader approach than was done previously and this has encompassed social and economic strands and an increased inter agency partnership, as evident in the Social Inclusion Partnership area based regeneration strategies. A major component of this general approach has maintained a focus on housing and environment. Likewise, the Scottish Executive's Regeneration Policy Statement, 'People and Place' (2006) continues on a broad based theme incorporating economic and social components, this approach generally reflects the legacy of physical and environmental interventions in tackling problem neighbourhoods with an evident focus upon building and landscaping. Although there is acknowledgement of the need to transform perceptions of neighbourhoods, tackling this issue does not feature to any degree of significance. It is implied that negative perceptions will be transformed through the broad aims of increasing neighbourhood desirability and fostering civic pride and that this objective will ultimately be delivered through improved physical design (p43).

The case studies

Methods

Data were gathered between 2002 and 2003 as part of doctoral research undertaken in the Department of Urban Studies, University of Glasgow. This involved two in-depth case studies¹ in the city of Dundee, a post-industrial city located on the east coast of Scotland. The neighbourhoods are located on the periphery of the city and compose predominantly social housing built in response to housing shortage and 'slum clearance' activities of the 1960s. Both neighbourhoods had experienced long term deterioration that had taken place as a consequence of broader economic decline and restructuring of the local employment patterns. The neighbourhoods were also associated with long standing poor reputations that were well known in the city and beyond and this has been the case at least since the mid 1970s. Regeneration activity was underway in both neighbourhoods at the time of the research being conducted.

The study took a qualitative approach and involved conducting interviews and focus groups with a broad range of stakeholders from within and outside both neighbourhoods including residents, former residents, non-residents, housing officials and local service providers, these represented a broad variety of experiences of the neighbourhoods and came from various locations, tenures and represented different socio economic backgrounds.

The experience of stigma and regeneration in the case studies

Recent regeneration activity in both case studies paralleled the approach taken in Dundee and generally, Scotland as a whole and this had the broad objective of tackling poverty and social exclusion across the themes of housing, economy, education and training, health, crime, community integration, transport and stabilising population levels (Social Inclusion Partnership Monitoring and Evaluation Unit, 2003). Although regeneration activity in both neighbourhoods had historically utilised an extensive, multifaceted approach, this invariably embraced a strong physical

¹ The two case studies are referred to as the Easthill and Westhill estates in the interests of anonymity.

element that included wide spread demolition, new build and landscaping. Surprisingly, stigma was not approached as a distinct issue, or in any concentrated way, despite the awareness of long standing poor reputation of both neighbourhoods.

The Easthill estate had a long-term experience of regeneration initiated by local authority led action in the early 1980s after which it became included in the *New Life* for Urban Scotland programme carried out over the period 1988 – 1995, this maintained a focus on the areas of housing, environment, health and crime. This approach exerted obvious and beneficial improvements to the estate's housing and environment. Its main objective was to improve the quality of housing and was done through increasing the tenure mix and extensive renewal and new build. Although poor image was acknowledged as a problem there was no specific strategy involved in tackling this issue directly; this point was recognised as a shortfall of the strategy (CRU 1995). No marketing campaign was developed although positive change gained some coverage in the local press and the local authority produced some publicity literature aimed primarily at potential residents that highlighted the improvements to the estate. In addition, sub locations to the north of the estate that had a particularly problematic reputation were renamed. At the time of data collection, regeneration activity in Easthill was nearing completion as part of the Dundee Social Inclusion Partnership 2 (SIP 2), a geographically and thematic focused approach with the strategic aim of tackling social exclusion under themes that included Housing, Employment and Training, Health and Education. Although a key focus of the SIP 2 was the promotion of social inclusion, stigma was not addressed directly in spite of it being a potential obstacle in achieving this objective.

In the Westhill neighbourhood, recent regeneration activity was administered under the Dundee Social Inclusion Partnership 1, which was scheduled to run over the period 2000 to 2007. This approach represented the main focus for urban renewal in the city until Community Planning Partnerships replaced the Social Inclusion Partnerships in 2006. In Westhill, physical improvement constituted a primary objective and is very much in line with the local authorities' long term plans to remove low demand housing (Dundee City Council, Local Housing Strategy 2004-2009). Over the course of the regeneration activity, extensive demolition and the replacement of housing took place. This activity alone has created a marked transformation in the physical layout and appearance of the neighbourhood. Most of the original housing has been demolished and rebuilt with around 700 units for housing association rent and 200 for sale.

As in Easthill, the regeneration of Westhill did not place the issue of poor reputation as a priority in spite of the fact that the estate's poor image in the city been recognised in official literature and in local press reports for many years. Measures were taken to promote positive developments in the wider city although this has been on a relatively small scale, however these efforts have evidently went further towards addressing the management of poor image than the approach taken in Easthill. In Westhill, this has involved the production of publicity literature illustrating the physical and environmental improvements to the estate. Similarly, events taking place in the estate have been covered in a positive way in the local press. In addition, the estate was re-branded as the Westhill Village.

‘On the ground’, the majority of resident and professional informants believed that regeneration activity in both neighbourhoods was an important vehicle for positive change and regarded this as having contributed greatly to a generalised sense of well being in residents. Marked improvement to the physical condition of the estates and had translated into resident’s positive regard for their neighbourhood. Improvements carried out to the housing and environment did seem to produce a palpable ‘feel good factor’. Resident’s attached a greater level of value to an environment that was more aesthetically attractive and there was a sense that residents now took more pride in their neighbourhood:

‘People have their own space, people are taking more care of their own home and garden. We’re now living in a keep up with the Jones society, it wasn’t like that before. I think that can be good and keeps folk in check too. Its better to take pride in your house and your environment and care about the people who live here, that can only be good’ (Retired Male, long term resident, Westhill).

In addition, a significant number of informants were convinced that the reputation of their neighbourhood had improved over the years and believed that this was linked directly to changes in the general condition of the estate. However, a crucial point to make is that while many residents and professionals perceived the benefits of regeneration in a positive way, many were still aware of the negative reputation that the neighbourhood held in the wider city. Similarly, the disadvantaging effects of stigma remained as a problematic aspect of life in both neighbourhoods. Stigma was found to be an important contributor to the experience of disadvantage and exclusion in both case study locations. Many residents had encountered stigma in some form at some point and in the absence of direct experience residents would relate instances where friends, family or neighbours had been faced with problems on account of their stigmatised neighbourhood. The poor reputation of both neighbourhoods influenced residents’ participation in significant areas of their social life, including access to employment, as well as in the level and quality of services experienced. Resident’s belief that they were treated differently in their encounters with housing officials and service providers was evident:

‘As soon as you tell them the post-code that’s enough, you begin to feel that you’re being judged, that they’re thinking- oh god, its one of them...I think that you are treated in a different way because of where you stay’ (Female, 20s, housing association tenant, Westhill).

The stigma of living in the neighbourhoods was also an important factor that influenced the way residents felt about their locality. For example, residents were aware that in the perceptions of those living outside the estates they were viewed negatively as a result of the neighbourhood’s poor reputation. This also exerted a psychological / emotional impact on residents and this factor had a strong influence on resident’s feelings towards their neighbourhood and themselves:

‘You just have to mention the name (refers to name of neighbourhood) and you’re treated like a second class citizen, whether it’s at the council tax office or whatever, they expect a certain kind of person to live here. If you’re that kind of person or not, it doesn’t matter to them, we’re all tarred with the same

brush! We're nobody, we're all just scum to them' (Female, middle aged, housing association tenant, Easthill).

In some instances, blame for the estates bad reputation was attributed to the behaviour of problem residents such as noisy neighbours, or in comers who had been accommodated in the estates less desirable housing. This problem was linked to some scepticism regarding the perceived success of regeneration in Westhill. A minority of residents felt that this aspect of the estate's problems had not been addressed but rather, had been displaced:

'They're moving some of them (problem neighbours) into the new houses, then it will just be the same as before, that's going to be a problem. That's a crazy idea, its not been thought about I don't think. Give it ten years and we'll be back where we started' (Male, 30s, Local Authority Tenant, Westhill).

Negative neighbourhood image as a distinct challenge for regeneration initiatives

It was clear from the case studies that negative reputation was a pervasive aspect of neighbourhood life and seemed to be etched in the minds of those living within and outside the estates. More problematically, it is striking that poor reputation had endured despite efforts to tackle the root causes of decline and disadvantage through extensive renewal activity. This is an obvious reflection of the capacity stigma has to last even after the features that may have given rise to poor reputation had been corrected, individuals and places remained affected by this. In the case studies, the history of problems and decline endured as a powerful basis for outsiders and some institutional agents to label the estates and their residents in negative ways, thereby reinforcing stigma and compounding the disadvantage experienced. Many residents were highly aware of the stigma associated with their neighbourhood and of the fact that this had become a defining feature of the place and the people living there. This point was evident in many residents however this scenario is highlighted clearly in the comments made by one resident:

'Its [the neighbourhood] got a bad name and it sticks... People don't see you as a person they're more interested in where you're from... even if you're a decent person and never been in any trouble you still get seen as a lay about and a trouble maker' (Male, 30s, local authority tenant, Easthill).

External neighbourhood perceptions were found to play a critical role in the maintenance of the poor reputation of the two case studies. The following key attributes of this activity were identified, these were:

- Images of the neighbourhoods were frequently inaccurate and very often, these were based upon distorted versions of the lived reality of the locations. In addition, negative and stereotypical understandings of the neighbourhoods were expressed from people who had limited, or sometimes no direct experience of the neighbourhoods.

- Neighbourhood perceptions were found to be produced from disparate sources of information, including reporting of activities such as anti-social behaviour, visible cues such as physical deterioration through hearsay and mass media such as the local and national press.
- Local perceptions were also influenced by popular understandings and discourse relating to poverty and disadvantage that existed in the wider social sphere. In many cases, these understandings demonised the neighbourhoods and residents in stereotypical and negative ways.

An obvious discrepancy was found between the understandings present in those from outside the neighbourhoods and the lived experience of the estates. In this respect parallels can be drawn with Goffman's (1963) concept of 'virtual and actual identity' (p12). A significant point in this equation is that those living outside the estates held more fixed, negative perceptions of the estates than were found inside the estates. Many outsiders made no distinction in respect to the diversity within the neighbourhoods and this is evident in the presence of idealised or in some cases imagined notions of what might be found in the estates in terms of residents' behaviour. For instance, external perceptions were commonly based on the belief that the estates were essentially places of trouble and predominantly housed anti social residents. An indication of the presence of stereotypical beliefs is illustrated in the comments made by one non-resident who had no direct experience of either of the neighbourhoods:

'It's the kind of place that if you parked your car you'd come back and find it jacked up with no wheels...Not the kind of place you'd want to go to'.
(Female, middle aged, non resident).

External perceptions were often produced in the absence of direct experience of the neighbourhoods. In this vacuum of accurate knowledge, alternative explanations were utilised in order to explain the stigmatised neighbourhoods. This is not suggesting that the estates were entirely void of social problems or attributes that may provide a basis for negative understandings, however it is clear that in the case studies, images of criminality and disadvantage merged, whether intentionally or inadvertently, into conceptualisations of the neighbourhoods as being predominantly being places of trouble. This point also reinforces the problematic issue of the vague and potentially unreliable aspect of non-resident's sources of knowledge about the estates. It was clear that in the absence of direct experience, knowledge was gained through various sources of reporting of events that had taken place in the estates. As in Cohen's (1972) concept of 'deviance amplification', news through mass media or rumours of events taking place involving crime or gangs of youth involved distortion to the extent that this partial and negative information was an important reference point for understanding life in the estates. It is clear that this arousal of public concern regarding the negative features of neighbourhood life perpetuates poor reputation and stigma. This finding emerges in other neighbourhood studies, for example, Armstrong and Wilson (1973) and Foster et al (1996). In these cases, non-residents' perceptions of neighbourhood problems had a disproportionate level of significance beyond the actual extent of problems. Understandings of the neighbourhoods had diverse origins, including the local and national press, television and hearsay based on current and

past events that may or may not have taken place in the estates. In turn, these sources of information are subject to various interpretations that obscure accurate understandings. Residents, non-residents, service providers and mass media were all found to contribute to the process and this was manifest in negative remarks, stereotypical judgements and stories that were often inaccurate. Many residents recognised this activity and the tendency for this process to convey inaccurate and exaggerated negative images:

'It's really the vandalism that's the problem. There's no serious crime like you'd believe from reading the (names local newspaper), I've read about crime- drug dealing, theft and the like. I don't think that's a clear picture of things here' (Female, 20s, housing association tenant, Easthill).

A similar view was expressed in the comments made by a Westhill resident:

'newspapers are bound to spice things up, that's their business, they've got to sell papers. I think the media plays up what actually happens in real life' (Male, 30's local authority tenant, Westhill).

This comment highlights the way in which external perceptions were found to maintain the locations as essentially undesirable, 'no-go' areas. However, an important point is that the reliability of external perceptions was clearly dependent upon the level of direct experience relating to the neighbourhoods. For example, in the instances where non-residents held understandings based on visits to the estates, perceptions reflected more accurate representations of the estates. Similarly, in the case of those who had visited the neighbourhoods, their negative perceptions had been challenged by actual experience:

'If I had listened to what folk had said about it, I wouldn't have went anywhere near the place, it's no way as bad as what people say' (Female, 30s, former local authority tenant, Westhill).

This comment by no means represents an isolated example of this vein of sentiment. This point also suggests however, that negative perceptions can be modified with direct experience and reinforces the benefits of promoting the positive attributes of neighbourhoods in order to improve external understandings of these areas. The dissemination of knowledge regarding positive aspects of the neighbourhoods including news of improvements is obviously essential, however a further dimension to the labelling and stigmatisation process is that images of poverty and disadvantage in mainstream culture are a critical factor in contributing to the perceptions of urban disadvantage in a local context. This was evident in the discourse used by residents and officials that reflected views of the neighbourhoods that had apparent origins in broader societal understandings of poverty and disadvantage gained via mass media. A host of descriptive terminology that carried negative connotations was commonplace when referring to the neighbourhoods and their residents. This is evident for example in the use of words such as 'war zone' and 'ghetto' when referring to the neighbourhoods. One location in particular had been renamed informally with its name taken from a famous war zone. Interestingly, many locals and officials referred routinely to this location using its alternative name. The role of mass media images in constructing local perceptions was clear that this process. The

relationship between local perceptions and knowledge originating from broader sources is evident in other neighbourhood studies. Cole and Smith (1996) for example found in their research of the Bell Farm estate in England that local perceptions of crime were linked to perceptions of crime in wider society. A similar situation is highlighted in Sampson and Raudenbush's (2005) study of African American neighbourhoods in Chicago where perceptions of neighbourhoods and their residents were influenced by local factors such as visible decline and anti social behaviour as well as through knowledge of cultural stereotypes based upon ethnicity and social class, these wider understandings contributed to general understandings of the neighbourhoods as areas of social disorder.

The suggestion that local perceptions are constructed through the acquisition of knowledge in the broader, social sphere is a specific challenge for improving neighbourhood image in respect of where to target information aimed at changing perceptions. Disadvantage and poor image is a disincentive for the development of business and services in neighbourhoods and it is broadly recognised that the application of positive publicity is an important means of tackling this problem. The finding that sources of perceptions are disparate and potentially widespread highlights the need to target a broader audience over and above key stakeholders such as potential incomers and local authority employees and service providers. Also, in recent years the origins of information have become more widespread mainly as a consequence of technological developments. Avenues for the spread of information such as the inter-net have contributed to a far wider variety of potentially competing sources of knowledge than was previously the case. In light of this, the development of ways to address this aspect of image change would need to involve a closer examination of the exact nature of the relationship between local perceptions and broader sources of knowledge as well as exploring appropriate ways to convey information about estates to a potentially wide audience. Success in modifying perceptions may depend upon the ability to fully understand the specific dynamics of neighbourhood images and where best to pitch messages aimed at changing ingrained and stereotypical understandings of disadvantage. Further investigation of this area would benefit from the application of specialist knowledge of marketing as well as understanding the mechanisms underlying audience reception.

In light of the findings highlighted, it is evident that neighbourhood stigma can be tackled successfully. The objective of addressing the combined underlying physical, economic and social factors that produce disadvantage, decline and negative reputation is obvious. Activities that stem economic and physical decline and improve the quality of residential life by improving the economic infrastructure for instance through employment and training measures and promoting local business and services are crucial. These aspects of renewal also have a positive role to play in changing internal images that contribute to building residents self-esteem and positive regard for the estates and other residents. For instance, physical and environmental improvement has an important role to play in correcting the visual images that convey decline and negative perceptions to residents. Finally, the need to change external neighbourhood perceptions by promoting the actual reality of change is clearly implicated. Knowledge of the positive attributes of a neighbourhood needs to be translated to the wider city and beyond as well as focus on key stakeholders.

Conclusions

This paper has aimed to stimulate discussion concerning the benefits of tackling neighbourhood stigma as a distinct component within holistic approaches to regeneration and renewal by referring to the experiences found in two cases studies and a review of neighbourhood studies of stigma. In doing so, attention has been drawn towards key attributes of stigma and the role these play in maintaining disadvantage and exclusion in the neighbourhoods. The case studies demonstrate the dynamics involved in labelling and stigma of the locations and their residents. The processes highlighted can also be understood as mirroring the experience of many neighbourhoods in western urban areas that ultimately become perceived as being chaotic, problematic locations housing equally problematic residents. Although real problems such as crime, vandalism and physical decay may exist in many neighbourhoods, the public focus on these is very often disproportionate to the lived reality and this can cloud more objective understandings of the dynamics involved in producing socio-economic disadvantage and stigmatisation. It is common for problematic attributes of a neighbourhood whether actual or perceived to become a dominant image that further reinforces the stigma and undesirability of such locations. This can complicate residential experiences of exclusion and disadvantage, and has implications in terms of reinforcing neighbourhoods as undesirable places to live in. Stigmatising reputations are clearly a deterrent for in-coming residents and service providers who are crucial stakeholders in maintaining the social and economic infrastructure of these locations.

In the case studies, stigma was largely approached in regeneration activities as being one of many neighbourhood problems. Efforts to change poor image and stigma have been largely viewed by residents and officials as being beneficial although stigma remains as an issue, which is somewhat contradictory. Tackling stigma in the case studies involved relatively small-scale, non-specific activities within broad based, predominantly physical orientated approaches. This reflects patterns of regeneration in general. That is, while these may not have overlooked the problem of stigma and labelling in neighbourhoods entirely, they have arguably, underestimated the capacity of stigma to endure which is a key attributes of this dynamic, multi dimensional process.

In general, interventions aimed at tackling poor image need to reflect the dynamic, interconnected processes involved in the stigmatisation of neighbourhoods and approaches should continue to address the underlying factors that give rise to disadvantage and stigma as well as understand the complex and elusive basis for poor neighbourhood image. Understanding the specific dynamics of a neighbourhood's stigma should be a key objective of regeneration activities in order to better inform effective image management strategies. However, given the limited consideration of stigma in recent neighbourhood regeneration initiatives, this ultimately points to the benefits of placing this issue higher in the urban renewal agenda.

It is evident that negative perceptions can be modified through regeneration strategies but images can become fixed in the imaginations of those living inside and outside neighbourhoods and these images can endure for years after positive change has taken place. This issue may be further compounded by the somewhat complex sources of neighbourhood images that are based on local factors as well as broader social influences such as mass media and popular discourse relating to poverty and disadvantage. As a social process, the activity of negative labelling and stigmatisation represents a generally accepted and pervasive human enterprise and is essentially a reflection of the way that disadvantage and poverty have been viewed historically in mainstream understanding. In this respect, tackling this widespread perceptual activity remains as a specific and substantial challenge.

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