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Towards an Urban Renaissance in New Labour's Britain

Fragmentation or sustainable reurbanisation of British cities?

»There is a certain poetic injustice in the withdrawal of the middle classes from central neighbour-hoods in the late 19th century and their subsequent recolonization of these areas within the past half-century«.[1]

»Our aim is to make urban living a positive experience for the many, not the few; to bring all areas up to the standard of the best; and to deliver a lasting urban renaissance«.[2]

INTRODUCTION

Following nearly two decades of Conservative government in the United-Kingdom from 1979 to 1997, the victory of New Labour at the 1997 General Election heralded a promise for change in policy orientations, in particular in the field of social and urban policies. The New Labour government, under the leadership of Prime Minister Tony Blair, has put cities at the core of its agenda, launching new initiatives in urban renewal to address urban deprivation and social exclusion as well as championing a new agenda for the Urban Renaissance of British cities. The expression »Urban Renaissance« became central in the UK policy discourse following the publication of an influential report in 1999, *Towards an Urban Renaissance*[3]. The concept refers to a »revival of urban environments, in the image and reality of their physical, economic and social infrastructure, accompanied by a greater environmental awareness and responsibility«[4]. The Urban Renaissance discourse marks a renewed political interest in the inner cities and their role in the British economy. It has however been critically analysed by academics and urban regeneration actors for its potentially ambiguous effects on various social groups in the city and on urban socio-spatial polarisation patterns.

This contribution will critically analyse the Urban Renaissance agenda championed by the New Labour government in the UK since 1997. The paper will first outline the urban demographic trends of the past decades in the UK to set the context for the challenges faced by British inner cities in terms of socio-spatial polarisation. The urban policy initiatives taken by New Labour will be briefly described. The New Labour agenda for an Urban Renaissance will then be critically analysed from the perspective of its long term capacity to address the socio-spatial polarisation of British cities. The contribution will thus

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1 *Rowland Atkinson*, Gentrification in a New Century. Misunderstood saviour or vengeful wrecker? The many meanings and problems of gentrification, in: Urban Studies 40, 12, 2003, S. 2343–2350.

2 *John Prescott*, Foreword by the Deputy Prime Minister, in: Department of the Environment, Transport and The Regions (DETR), Our Towns and Cities. The Future. Delivering an Urban Renaissance, White Paper presented to Parliament by the Deputy Prime Minister and Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions by Command of Her Majesty, London 2000, available at URL <http://www.odpm.gov.uk/index.asp?id=1127167> [accessed on 28.02. 2006].

3 Urban Task Force, Towards an Urban Renaissance, London 1999.

4 *Christopher Cadell/Nicholas Falk*, Living places: urban renaissance in the South East, London 2000, available at URL <http://212.100.250.130/index.asp?id=1144890> [accessed on 27.06. 2006].

explore whether new urban policies geared at encouraging a ›back to the city‹ movement from the middle class can foster social integration and social mix, or whether they have the potential, on the contrary, to contribute to the fragmentation, gentrification and social polarisation of British inner cities. In order to address this hypothesis, the article will propose a critical reflection on the content of the Urban Renaissance discourse, its underpinning ideology and the vision of urban space and urban living which is being promoted.

I. Recent demographic trends in UK cities: from counterurbanisation to reurbanisation?

1. *Counterurbanisation, deindustrialisation and socio-spatial polarisation in British inner cities*

Urban demographic trends in the UK since the Second World War have been characterised by a continuous ›urban-rural shift‹ exacerbated by deindustrialisation and the shift to a service economy. This process is referred to as »counterurbanisation«, which corresponds to two different phenomena: suburbanisation and metropolitan decentralisation, i. e. shifts *within* an urban region between inner and outer areas; secondly long distance patterns of population shifts between urban regions and small self-contained settlements.[5] The concept of ›urban exodus‹ is sometimes used to describe these major migration movements away from cities in the UK. All large cities and conurbations have lost population and all other areas have experienced a steady growth. The 1960s and early 1970s were the most intensive decade of population decline in London and the major conurbations. The pace of population deconcentration diminished in the 1970s and continued throughout the 1980s and 1990s at a slower pace.[6] After experiencing a net decline in population throughout the 1960s and 1970s, London, as an exception, started gaining population again during the 1980s. This is partly the result of international migrations to London rather than a strong reversal of the pattern of net migration outside the city.

This counterurbanisation trend is due to changes in the structure of the economy and in the geography of employment.[7] From the 1970s to the late 1990s there has been a widespread reduction in employment in cities in contrast to a general increase in employment in the rest of the country, partly due to deindustrialisation. Manufacturing job losses have been the most important source of employment decline in cities. Between 1960 and the early 1980s, all major industrial conurbations in the UK (Glasgow, Newcastle, Liverpool, Manchester, Sheffield and Birmingham) lost between 25 and 50 per cent of their employment. Inner cities were the most affected. In parallel, the service sector has expanded everywhere, but much faster in non-urban areas than in cities. Within cities, the rise of the service sector did not offset the losses experienced in the industrial sector in absolute terms due to a ›skills mismatch‹.

In large cities, pockets of poverty have expanded because the rate of decline in employment has exceeded the decline in population: unemployment consequently increased significantly in these areas in comparison to others. This has led to *spatially concentrated*

5   *Anthony Champion* (Hrsg.), Counterurbanization. The changing face and nature of population deconcentration, London 1989.

6   Ebd.; *Atkins u. a.*, Urban trends in England: last evidence from the 1991 Census, London 1996.

7   *Atkins u. a.*; *Ivan Turok/Nicola Edge*, The jobs gap in Britain's cities. Employment loss and labour market consequences, Bristol 1999; *Alan Townsend*, The urban-rural cycle in the Thatcher growth years, in: Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers 18, 1993, S. 207–221; *Alan Townsend*, Geographical trends – towards rural areas?, in: *Alan Townsend*, Making a living in Europe. Human geographies of economic change, London 1997.

pockets of unemployment and reduced activity rates in urban areas.[8] The gap between unemployment rates in cities and in other areas was much wider in the 1990s than in the previous decade. Some cities are now facing problems of housing abandonment, due to factors specific to particular neighbourhoods in combination with wider demographic trends.

The crisis of inner cities has been worsened by the counterurbanisation process, because cities have increasingly struggled to retain their more affluent residents. Britain's largest cities have lost higher-income residents at a faster rate than people in lower-paid work through migration to the ›shires‹. Migrations in and out of cities are age- and socially selective: people flowing out of cities are disproportionately aged 30 to 44, with children, employed in professional and managerial occupations, owner-occupiers and white. The exception to this pattern is London, which does better in holding onto its higher status workers, but loses more of its ›intermediate‹ workers (workers on middle to low incomes, such as nurses, school teachers, policemen and social workers). People flowing in cities are mainly younger people (age 16 to 29), and in London mainly migrants from overseas. As more affluent and mobile people leave the larger cities, this reinforces social and economic polarisation between urban and rural areas and tends to increase spatial segregation by social class. The loss of highly qualified labour force in cities also represents a potential threat for the economic competitiveness of cities.

2. Changing socio-demographic trends and reurbanisation: back to the city?

In the 1990s non-urban districts were still growing faster than urban areas. However, between 1991 and 1997, the population of many ›metropolitan cities‹ actually increased.[9] In others the decline slowed down. It has been argued that this might signal the beginning of a process of ›re-urbanization‹ of British cities. In Central Manchester, the resident population has grown from 30 in 1998 to 6.000 in 2000 (mainly single or couples without children in professional occupations and students).[10] The process of re-urbanisation is fuelled by the ›urban‹ orientation of growing sectors in the new economy such as banking and finance, media and arts, leisure and tourism.[11] Besides, residential preferences are changing as a consequence of changing household forms and population structure. Rising transport costs and congestion might also encourage inner city living.

»The cities and conurbations have seen a growth in total employment in the 1990s. In the main this comes from adapting more successfully to attract and retain a higher proportion of the growing sectors of the economy. Birmingham, Leeds and Manchester attracted jobs in private services including finance. Some of the common factors in those relatively more successful places include the role of the city as a regional centre and the strength of local higher education institutions. There is also a strong contribution from cultural activities and tourism. Some of the cities developing most strongly have begun to market themselves as ›24 hour cities‹. These positive developments depend in part on the wider improvement in the economy. They are not yet shared by all the major cities. It is encouraging however that similar changes are seen in the United States. There the core cities are beginning to grow, although still less quickly than the suburbs, and unemployment is falling in the central cities.«[12]

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8 *Townsend*, Making a living, S. 198.
9 *Atkins* u. a.
10 Department of the Environment, Transport and The Regions (DETR), Our Towns and Cities. The Future. Delivering an Urban Renaissance, White Paper presented to Parliament by the Deputy Prime Minister and Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions by Command of Her Majesty, London 2000, available at URL <http://www.odpm.gov.uk/index.asp?id=1127167> [accessed on 28.02.2006].
11 *William Lever*, Re-urbanisation – the policy implications, in: Urban Studies 30, 2, 1993, S. 267–284; *Paul Cheshire*, A new phase of urban development in Western Europe? Evidence for the 1980s, in: Urban Studies 32, 7, 1995, S. 1045–1063.
12 DETR, Urban Renaissance, Chapter 2.

It is probably too early to state whether reurbanisation will be a sustainable, long-term trend in British cities, since »the continuing process of economic transformation [...] creates the potential, but not the necessity, of a new phase of growth in urban cores.«[13] The 2005 government report on the State of the Cities draws prudent conclusions on that matter.[14] The reurbanisation process seems to have intensified again following a slow-down in the mid-1990s. Furthermore, there are major differences between the south and the north of England in terms of demographic and employment performances.[15] London and Leeds are the two cities which have displayed the highest growth in employment be-tween 1991 and 2001, followed by Manchester.[16]

One important factor in the debate on the future of the reurbanisation trend is the pro-jected increase in the UK population, in particular the projected increase in the number of households. According to the most recent projections, the number of households in England is expected to increase from 20.9 million in 2003 to 25.7 million by 2026, an increase of 4.8 million or 23 per cent, representing an average annual growth of around 209.000.[17] Most of these additional households will be one person households in the older age groups. About 60 per cent of the projected household growth is within the East, Lon-don, South East, and the South West.[18] This is the continuation of a very long-standing trend over the last century towards a reduction in the size of households and families. The steady growth in the number of households is due to rising divorce rates, later marriages, an ageing population, and higher standards of living. As a result the number of households has grown at a much faster rate than population growth.

Household projections are used as a basis to evaluate future housing needs. There is a clear discrepancy between the number of housing units being built every year and the anticipated housing needs based on demographic projections. This mismatch between supply and demand is likely to increase, which opens the prospect for an increasingly po-larised housing system, with negative social and economic consequences.[19] Government projections have therefore triggered a major planning debate in the UK since the mid-1990s on the need for, and location of, new residential developments.[20] The majority of new households which will form over the next 20 years will be small and childless and may therefore be keener to live in an urban milieu.[21] Various studies have analysed the residential preferences of different household types and show that interest for inner city living is increasing, in particular among higher socio-professional categories.[22] However,

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13 Ebd.

14 Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM), State of the Cities. A Progress Report to the Delivering Sustainable Communities Summit, London 2005, available at URL <http://www. odpm.gov.uk/index.asp?id=1127502> [accessed on 28.02.2006].

15 Ebd., S. 20.

16 Ebd., S. 24.

17 Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM), Projections of households for England and the Regions to 2026. ODPM Statistical Release 2006/0042, London 2006, available at URL <http:// www.odpm.gov.uk/index.asp?id=1002882&PressNoticeID=2097> [accessed on 15.03.2006].

18 Ebd.

19 *Alan Hooper*, Housing requirements and housing provision. The strategic issues, in: *Michael Breheny/Peter Hall* (Hrsg.), The people. Where will they go? National report of the Town & County Planning Association Regional Inquiry into housing need and provision in England, London 1996.

20 *Michael Breheny/Peter Hall* (Hrsg.), The people. Where will they go? National report of the Town & County Planning Association Regional Inquiry into housing need and provision in England, London 1996.

21 Urban Task Force.

22 Urbed, Mori Social Research and the University Of Bristol, But would you live there? Shaping attitudes to urban living, London 1999; *Jane Todorovic/Steve Wellington*, Living in Urban Eng-

other pieces of research suggest that residential preferences remain strongly anti-urban, especially among families with children.[23] This is due to negative prevailing attitudes towards city living (high costs, pollution and congestion, poor quality of urban services, crime) and the continuous »lure of the rural idyll«. A study was carried out on the issue of how people acquire or form their opinions about ›urban‹ versus ›suburban‹ and ›rural‹ lifestyles, in order to understand how variations in these factors can influence the balance of considerations which determine people's locational preferences towards urban living[24]. The study concludes that, if appropriate policy measures are taken, a larger part of the population can be encouraged to ›come back to the inner city‹. However, is the idea of ›urban living‹ and the ›compact city‹ acceptable to the vast majority of the population? Can public policy influence the cultural and residential preferences of the population? The New Labour government is optimistic on this point.

As land is becoming an increasingly scarce commodity and as there has been constant opposition to the location of new developments on green field sites, the government's response to projected housing needs has been based on the key principle that new development should as much as possible be located on urban brownfield sites, thereby reducing the need to travel and minimising the loss of open countryside. This approach has permeated the Government's strategy before New Labour came into power: the Housing White Paper of 1995 set a target of 50 per cent of all new housing developments to be located on re-used urban sites by the year 2005.[25] This target has been quickly met, which raises the issue of the location of future developments, in particular in the South East of England and in London where the pressures are very strong, leading to a major increase in house prices and land values.[26] It will prove impossible to accommodate all projected housing needs on urban brownfield sites.[27]

II. NEW LABOUR'S URBAN AGENDA: TACKLING SOCIAL EXCLUSION AND ENCOURAGING AN URBAN RENAISSANCE

»The ›inner city‹ is a representation which serves as a focus for politics and policy. It is a public issue which represents a constellation of social worries, to do with urban poverty, squalor, ill-health, deprivation, decay, crime, social disintegration, and social polarization.«[28]

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land. Attitudes and Aspirations, London 2000, available at URL <http://www.odpm.gov.uk/index.asp?id=1127167> [accessed on 28.02.2006]; *Tim Heath*, Revitalizing Cities. Attitudes toward City-Center Living in the United Kingdom, in: Journal of Planning Education and Research 20, 2001, S. 464–475; A*ndrew Tallon/ Rosemary Bromley*, Exploring the attractions of city centre living. Evidence and policy implications in British cities, in: Geoforum 35, 6, 2004, S. 771–787.

23 *Dominic Stead*, Promoting an urban renaissance in England and the Netherlands, in: Cities 21, 2, 2004, S. 119–136.

24 Urbed u. a.

25 Department of the Environment (DoE) and Welsh Office, Our future homes. Opportunity, choice, responsibility. The Government's Housing Policies for England and Wales, London 1995, available at URL <http://www.archive.official-documents.co.uk/document/doe/ourhomes/ourhomes.htm>

26 The average price of a flat/house in England has gone over the symbolic threshold of £200,000 in February 2006 (a bit less than 300,000 euros), from £150,000 in the East Midlands to £300,000 in London – 440,000 euros). *The Guardian,* Average home ›costs £200,000‹, in: The Guardian, Money supplement, 20.02.2006.

27 *Michael Breheny/Peter Hall*, S. 51; Urban Task Force.

28 *Susan Mac Gregor*, The inner-city battlefield. Politics, ideology and social relations, in: *Susan MacGregor/Ben Pimlott* (Hrsg.), Tackling the inner cities. The 1980s reviewed, prospects for the 1990s, Oxford 1990, S. 64.

As New Labour came into power in 1997, many voices urged for major changes in urban policy, including a stronger role for local government, the end of competitive bidding, more democratic and open partnerships, community-led regeneration and greater integration of regeneration funds with mainstream government funding.[29] Thatcherism left a strong imprint on urban policy in the UK.[30] The Conservatives believed in the primacy of the private sector and market forces to tackle the economic, industrial and urban crisis of Britain, as opposed to most forms of public intervention which were considered inadequate and undesirable. The post-war consensus on Keynesian economic management and the role of the Welfare state was broken. The New Right analysis of urban renewal problems was based on the assumption that the power of the market had to be ›unleashed‹ to cure the inner city problem. Local authorities and their intervention into the planning system were seen as parts of the problem. It was assumed that the benefits of economic and property-led regeneration would ›trickle-down‹ to all parts of the city and benefit the local population through job creation. The role of the State was to create a favourable investment climate to attract private capital through brownfield site decontamination, land assembly, tax incentives for investors and simplification of planning regulations. The private sector was given a larger role in urban regeneration and central government curbed or bypassed the power of local authorities through various means. Although the New Right strongly attacked the interventionist role of the State, its ideological programme paradoxically required the involvement of the State through subsidies, fiscal inducements and infrastructure investments in Urban Development Corporations and Enterprise Zones.

From the late 1980s onwards, numerous academic studies and independent evaluations have started to show the shortcomings and failures of property-led regeneration, in particular the limits to the so-called ›trickle-down effect‹.[31] The social cost of flagship projects such as the Docklands in London was highlighted, in terms of gentrification and displacement in particular. The ›rolling back‹ of the State as provider and manager of social housing through the introduction of the ›Right to Buy‹ policy and through massive stock transfers to housing associations has also led to a process of marginalisation and ›residualisation of council housing‹ in the UK.[32] This means that social housing now accommodates

29 *Phil Allmendiger/Mark Tewdwr-Jones*, Post-Thatcherite urban planning and politics. A Major Change?, in: International Journal of Urban and Regional Research 21, 1, 1997, S. 100–116; CITY 2020, Final Report of the Enquiry into Urban Policy, Keith Vaz MP, London 1997; Local Government Association, Realising the Potential in Urban Areas – A Framework Document for an Urban Policy, London 1998.

30 *Andrew Thornley*, Urban planning under Thatcherism. The challenge of the market, London 1993; *Rob Atkinson/Graham Moon*, Urban policy in Britain. The city, the state and the market, Basingstoke 1994; *Phil Allmendinger/Huw Thomas* (Hrsg.), Urban planning and the British New Right, London 1998; *Nick Oatley* (Hrsg.), Cities, economic competition and urban policy, London 1998; *Steven Tiesdell/Phil Allmendinger*, The New Right and neighbourhood regeneration, in: Housing Studies 16, 3, 2001, S. 311–334.

31 *Michael Parkinson*, The Thatcher government's urban policy. 1979–1989, a review, in: Town Planning Review 60, 1989, S. 421–440; *Paul Lawless*, Urban policy in the Thatcher decade. English inner-city policy, 1979–1990, in: Environment and Planning C 9, 1991, S. 15–30; *Ivan Turok*, Property-led urban regeneration. Panacea or placebo?, in: Environment and Planning A 24, 1992, S. 361–379; *Pasty Healey*, Property-led urban regeneration. An assessment, in: *Patsy Healey/Simin Davoudi/Solmaz Tavsanoglu* (Hrsg.), Rebuilding the city. Property-led urban regeneration, London 1992; *Rob Imrie/Huw Thomas*, The limits of property-led regeneration, in: Environment and Planning C 11, 1, 1993, S. 87–102; *Patrick Loftman/Brendan Nevin*, Prestige projects and urban regeneration in the 1980s and 1990s. A review of benefits and limitations, in: Planning Practice and Research 10, 314, 1995, S. 299–315; *Keith Shaw/Fred Robinson*, Learning from experience. Reflections on two decades of British urban policy, in: Town Planning Review 69, 1, 1998, S. 49–64.

32 *Michael Pacione*, Urban geography. A global perspective, London 2001, S. 216–217.

high concentrations of low-income groups, creating highly visible pockets of poverty, exclusion and deprivation in British city centres.

As a result of deindustrialisation and the restructuring of the welfare state under the Conservatives, the 1980s saw a substantial increase in poverty in Britain as well as an increasingly unequal distribution of income. According to a large-scale study of living standards carried out over thirty years[33], from the 1950s to the mid–1970s, the number of people in poverty fell from 5 million to around 3 million. In 1992 it was estimated that 13.7 million people were living on or below income support level, 24 per cent of the population compared with 14 per cent in 1979. Between 1979 and 1988, the total real income of the poorest tenth grew by 9.5 per cent compared to an increase of 31.8 per cent for the population as a whole.[34] By the end of 1999, it was estimated that approximately 14,5 million people were living in poverty in Britain, i.e. 26 per cent of the population, a percentage which doubled since the early 1980s.[35] Out of 58 million people in Britain, 9,5 million cannot afford adequate housing and 8 million cannot afford an essential household good.[36]

In response to this massive increase in poverty and inequality in British society, New Labour put ›social exclusion‹ at the heart of its discourse. New Labour's ideology is based on the »Third Way«, which rejects either only the free market or only the State to organise people's welfare.[37] New Labour's aim is to change British social policy away from passive income maintenance towards the active promotion of employment, investment and opportunity (the ›Welfare to work‹ agenda).[38] Many of its policy initiatives bear the clear imprint of a social development model. Investment in education and health are seen as paramount, community rebuilding through partnership-based economic renewal and the promotion of social capital through neighbourhood renewal are all explicit priorities.[39] In the field of urban policy, New Labour has right from the start displayed a strong commitment to the regeneration of British cities through a series of initiatives to tackle social exclusion in the most deprived neighbourhoods of the country and a new discourse on sustainable Urban Renaissance. Table 1 (in annex) provides an overview of the initiatives taken by the New Labour government since 1997 in the field of urban policy, regeneration and planning.[40]

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33 *Alissa Goodman/Steven Webb*, For richer for poorer, in: Fiscal Studies 15, 4, 1994, S. 29–62.

34 *Fred Robinson/Nicky Gregson*, The underclass. A class apart?, In: Critical Social Policy 34, 1992, S. 38–51.

35 *David Gordon/Ruth Levitas/Christina Pantazis u. a.,* Poverty and social exclusion in Britain, York 2000, available at URL <http://www.jrf.org.uk/bookshop/eBooks/185935128X.pdf> [accessed on 15.03.2006].

36 Ebd.

37 *Rob Imrie/Mike Raco* (Hrsg.), Urban renaissance? New Labour, community and urban policy, Bristol 2003, S. 6–7; *Anthony Giddens*, The Third way. The renewal of social democracy, Cambridge 1998.

38 *Martin Powell*, New Labour, new welfare state. The ›third way‹ in British social policy, Bristol 1999; *Steve Buckler/David Dolowitz*, Theorizing the third way. New Labour and social justice, in: Journal of Political Ideologies 5, 3, 2000, S. 301–320; *Martin Powell*, Evaluating New Labour's welfare reforms, Bristol 2002.

39 *Martin Evans*, Britain. Moving towards a work and opportunity-focused welfare state?, in: International Journal of Social Welfare 10, 4, 2001, S. 260–266.

40 This table was compiled on the basis of data available on the website of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, the ministry in charge of planning, housing, urban renewal and urban policy (formerly known as Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions, or Department of Environment). See URL <www.odpm.gov.uk>

1. New area-based initiatives for urban renewal

Immediately after the 1997 election, the New Labour government set up a new ministerial body, the Social Exclusion Unit, which aimed at coordinating all policies addressing social exclusion and monitoring progress towards defined targets (such as reduction in crime levels, decrease in homelessness, reduction in child poverty rates …).[41] Two new area-based initiatives in urban renewal were then launched by the government: the *New Deal for Communities* in 1998, targeting 39 of the poorest neighbourhoods in the country, and the *National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal* in 2001.[42] These programmes are characterised by a new political language of social inclusion and a more integrated, ›people-based regeneration‹[43], as opposed to ›property-led regeneration‹ which had been the hallmark of the Conservative approach to urban policy.

»The 1997 General Election gave every appearance of a break with the familiar policies and practices of the previous two decades. A value shift seemed to take place, from materialism to a more caring society, from social exclusion to social inclusion, and from private accumulation to concern for the public realm (or at least a new mixture of the two). These shifts were expected to have a major impact on all areas of Government and indeed to the way in which both central and local government and agencies attached to them went about their work. Urban and environmental policy, regeneration programmes, and funding regimes would all be affected. At a grass roots level in urban areas in particular, it was expected that the centralising tendency of government, the imposition of property led renewal, and of top down planning, would be halted and put into reverse.«[44]

The new initiatives are characterised by a number of key principles: target resources on the most deprived areas, tackle exclusion on several fronts (health, crime, housing, education, and employment), set up partnerships between the public, private sector and civic society, restore leadership to local authorities, foster better cooperation between government departments in policy implementation, and support capacity-building among disadvantaged groups.[45]

2. A new agenda for the Urban Renaissance of British cities

In 1998, the government appointed an Urban Task Force chaired by the leading architect Richard Rogers to identify the causes of urban decline in England and recommend practical solutions to bring people back into cities, towns and urban neighbourhoods. This was seen as a necessity to tackle the negative social and environmental impacts of counterurbanisation trends. The Urban Task Force published its analysis report in 1999: *Towards*

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41 Social Exclusion Unit (SEU), Bringing Britain Together. A National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal, London 1998; Social Exclusion Unit (SEU), National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal. A Framework for Consultation, London 2000; Social Exclusion Unit (SEU), A new commitment to neighbourhood renewal. National strategy action plan. London 2001, available at URL <http://www.socialexclusionunit.gov.uk/publications.asp?did=33> [accessed on 15.03.2006].

42 *Moira Wallace*, A new approach to neighbourhood renewal in England, in: Urban Studies 38, 12, 2001, S. 2163–2166.

43 *Bob Colenutt*, New Deal or no deal for people based regeneration?, in: *Rob Imrie/Huw Thomas* (Hrsg.), British Urban Policy. An evaluation of the Urban Development Corporations, London 1999, S. 233; *Alan Cochrane*, New Labour, new urban policy?, in: *H Dean/R Sykes/R Woods* (Hrsg.), Social Policy Review 12, Newcastle 2000; *Rob Imrie/Mike Raco*, Urban Renaissance; *John Hills/Kitty Stewart* (Hrsg.), A more equal society? New Labour, poverty, inequality and exclusion, Bristol 2005.

44 *Colenutt*, S. 234.

45 *Evans*.

an Urban Renaissance.[46] The report argues that urban policies are not just about bricks and mortar, but about improving people's prosperity and quality of life. It contains over 100 recommendations to encourage an Urban Renaissance, covering design, transport, management, regeneration, skills, planning and investment. The report has been very influential and the term Urban Renaissance has permeated policy discourses and documents ever since.

Following the conclusions of the Urban Task Force report, the government published an ›Urban White Paper‹ setting the agenda for urban policy: ›*Our towns and cities: the future*‹ explains how the government aims to bring about this Urban Renaissance.[47] This strategy aims to respond to three distinct objectives simultaneously: accommodate the additional 4,8 million households forecasted in the UK by 2026, revitalize cities in crisis, and create more sustainable patterns of urban settlements inspired by the ›compact city‹ idea.[48] In 2003, the government subsequently presented its plan to tackle the housing issue – the ›*Sustainable Communities plan*‹.[49] This long-term programme of action proposes a differentiated approach to the housing question between the south-east of England and the north. In the south, four ›growth areas‹ are identified[50] in which 200.000 new homes and 300.000 new jobs are to be created by 2016. The *Thames Gateway* is one of these growth areas, one of the biggest regeneration projects in Western Europe. In the north, a programme of ›Housing Market Renewal‹ has been set up in nine areas to address the problem of housing abandonment and decline in specific neighbourhoods of Liverpool, Manchester, Newcastle …

The urban agenda of New Labour therefore includes two dimensions: an ›urban renewal‹ priority focusing on tackling social exclusion in the poorest urban areas in the country, and an Urban Renaissance agenda fostering the physical, aesthetic and economic regeneration of all cities.[51] These agendas are potentially complementary, but also contradictory, as will be discussed later. New Labour's Urban Renaissance agenda is a positive step change following decades of negative political and media discourse on the inner city. However, the Urban Renaissance discourse has been critically analysed by academics and regeneration practitioners who have highlighted its potentially ambiguous effects on urban communities, in particular in terms of gentrification, fragmentation and polarisation.

In order to examine this hypothesis, we will first proceed to a critical analysis of the elements of the Urban Renaissance discourse, in particular the vision of ›urban living‹ and urbanity which are embedded in this discourse. This will be based on a review of recent British academic research on the Urban Renaissance agenda.[52] We will then look at the implementation of the Urban Renaissance strategy and, although it is too early to assess the long-term impacts of New Labour's urban policy on British cities, we will high-

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46 Urban Task Force.

47 DETR, Urban Renaissance.

48 *Heath*.

49 Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM), Sustainable communities – building for the future, London 2003, available at URL <http://www.odpm.gov.uk/index.asp?id=1139868> [accessed on 28.02.2006].

50 Potential for growth in these four areas by 2031 according to the Sustainable Communities Plan: *Thames Gateway*: 120,000 housing units and 300,000 new jobs; *Milton Keynes – South Midlands*: 370,000 homes and 300,000 jobs; *Ashford:* 31,000 new homes and 28,000 new jobs; *London-Stansted-Cambridge*: 250,000 to 500,000 new homes.

51 *Adam Holden/Kurt Iveson*, Designs on the urban. New Labour's urban renaissance and the spaces of citizenship, in: City 7, 1, 2003, S. 57–72; *Alan Cochrane*.

52 *Claire Colomb*, ›Urban Renaissance‹ et politiques de régénération urbaine au Royaume-Uni – vers une revitalisation durable ou une gentrification accélérée des centres villes britanniques?, in: Sociétés Contemporaines, special issue on Renouvellement urbain et gentrification, forthcoming, 2006.

light some of the tensions and contradictions within the implementation of the renaissance agenda.

III. URBAN RENAISSANCE, FRAGMENTATION AND SOCIAL POLARISATION IN BRITISH CITIES

1.   What vision of urban space? Some critical reflections on the ›good city‹ promoted by the Urban Renaissance discourse

The key ingredients of the Urban Renaissance vision promoted by the Urban White Paper rely on high quality, well designed public spaces and high density, mixed-use developments supposed to encourage more ›sustainable communities‹. Beyond the rhetoric, a number of academics have proposed a critical reading of the Urban Renaissance discourse. The geographer Loretta Lees, in particular, suggests »a discursive approach to urban policy« based on the premise that »the cultural politics of representation and meaning are inseparable from the formal politics of governance and decision-making«.[53] The discourse on the Urban Renaissance is actually underpinned by a series of assumptions and principles which altogether form a specific vision of urban space and urban living. The »rhetoric of apparent diversity, density and sustainability« needs to be challenged »in both its execution and foundation«.[54]

A review of recent British academic research on the Urban Renaissance agenda has highlighted four key elements underpinning the Urban Renaissance discourse:[55] the construction of a new ›urban idyll‹, the myth of social and functional mix, the myth of the ›local community‹ and the rhetoric of good urban design as tool for the recreation of public space and local citizenship. We will briefly describe these four elements and the contradictions or tensions on which they are built.

a) The construction of a new ›urban idyll‹

The Urban Renaissance discourse, either in policy or marketing documents, relies on a specific imagery of the ›good city‹ – an imagery of ›urban pioneers‹, well-designed public spaces encouraging a café culture and civilized behaviours, loft living, consumption-driven cosmopolitan urban culture.[56] This discourse is based on the construction and the promotion of a new ›urban idyll‹[57] which aims to counteract the traditionally anti-urban residential preferences of a large part of the British population and the attachment to the ›rural idyll‹. A number of themes traditionally associated with the countryside have been reinterpreted in an urban context to shape a new discourse on urbanity: local community, nature, heritage, the village.[58] Heritage, in particular, is reinterpreted within the context of cities formerly dominated by manufacturing industry – once derelict warehouses, dock-

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53 *Loretta Lees*, Visions of Urban Renaissance. The Urban Task Force Report and the Urban White Paper, in: *Rob Imrie/Mike Raco* (Hrsg.), Urban Renaissance? New Labour, Community and Urban Policy, Bristol 2003, S. 62.

54 *Rowland Atkinson*, The evidence on the impact of gentrification. New lessons for the urban renaissance?, in: European Journal of Housing Policy 4, 1, 2004, S. 107–131, hier: S. 126.

55 *Colomb*.

56 *Lees*, Visions.

57 *Gareth Hoskins/Andrew Tallon*, Promoting the ›urban idyll‹. Policies for city centre living, in: *Craig Johnstone/Mark Whitehead* (Hrsg.), New horizons in British urban policy. Perspectives on New Labour's urban renaissance, Aldershot 2004.

58 *Hoskins/Tallon*; *Bridget Franklin/Malcolm Tait*, Constructing an image. The urban village concept in the UK, in: Planning Theory 1, 3, 2002, S. 250–272.

yards and workshops are now being turned into luxury residential blocks and loft apartments, offices or shopping centres all over the country.

However many authors stress that this imagery displays a very specific aesthetic model, a certain vision of the city which stem from, and promotes certain socio-economic groups in the urban landscape. The socio-economic profile of the new ›urbanites‹ is very specific – young urban professionals, single or childless, with a high disposable income and social, educational and cultural capital. This new imagery therefore seems to serve middle-class professionals involved in the new service economy:

»New Labour's championing of an Urban Renaissance is rapidly establishing pockets of development recognisable as the urban idyll, and this urban idyll is as much a technology of representation as it is a technology for renewal, reproducing guidelines for a favoured kind of urban citizenry, figuratively embracing them in a landscape informed by a bohemian aesthetic while other residents are rhetorically and materially recast as outsiders«.[59]

b) The myth of social, ethnic and functional mix: fragmentation instead of mix?

The discourse on Urban Renaissance is characterised by an apparent desire to recreate patterns of social and functional mix in the inner city, in order to counteract the negative effects of counterurbanisation processes which has left highly spatialised concentration of deprivation in inner cities. However, if we look at the trajectory of previously deprived neighbourhoods which have recently been ›regenerated‹, either through privately-led regeneration processes or sometimes through publicly-funded schemes, the reality of the ›social mix‹ is more than questionable. The micro-geography of those ›regenerated‹ areas often displays a landscape of fragmentation between poverty enclaves mostly associated with social housing estates, and gentrified enclaves in newly built secured developments or blocks of refurbished Victorian houses.

Parts of the East End of London, such as Hoxton and Shoreditch – areas which have been rapidly gentrified over the past ten years – are now characterised by a very wide social mix at the scale of the neighbourhood. However, at a smaller scale, there is a quasi complete separation between the residential units and the social life worlds of different socio-economic groups and categories of local residents – between the refurbished loft apartments around Hoxton Square and Kingsland Road and the decaying social housing estates located a few blocks away. Spaces of socialisation are also different: people tend to shop in different places, recently arrived middle-class gentrifiers do not put their children in local schools … It seems that in many cases, the reality of market-led Urban Renaissance creates a mosaic of »utopian and dystopian spaces« »physically proximate but institutionally estranged«.[60]

Public policy interventions into urban renewal have a number of tools at their disposal to mitigate possible displacement effects, such as quotas of social housing imposed on private developers as condition for the granting of planning permission. However, the implementation of the mix between affordable or social housing and private housing is usually not implemented at the scale of the building or of the block, but at the scale of the wider plot. Socially rented or affordable housing might often get the less attractive part of a site. Urban ›regeneration‹ can therefore often lead to the creation of a micro-geography of poor and rich enclaves with few social interactions.[61] Although Britain has not

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59 Ebd.

60 *Gordon Macleod/Kevin Ward*, Spaces of Utopia and Dystopia. Landscaping the contemporary city, in: Geografiska Annaler 84 B, 3–4, 2002, S. 153–170.

61 *Mark Whitehead*, The urban neighbourhood and the new moral geographies of British Urban policy, in: *Craig Johnstone/Mark Whitehead* (Hrsg.), New horizons in British urban policy. Perspectives on New Labour's urban renaissance, Aldershot 2004, S. 71–72.

yet known the development of ›gated‹, hyper-secure, hyper-segregated communities like in the United States, there is a trend towards the seclusion of new developments and an increase in surveillance and control practices in the ›regenerated‹ public and residential spaces of the inner city.

c) The myth of the ›local community‹

The rhetoric of the ›local community‹ is extremely present in New Labour's discourse on social and urban policy. This focus on ›community‹ has been analysed by geographers, sociologists and political scientists. The assumption is that the revival of citizenship and the activation of communities are key to spearhead urban change: »Integral to New Labour's vision for an Urban Renaissance is the belief that empowered, mobilised communities can and should play an enhanced role in the development and implementation of urban policy agendas. Modernising Britain, in Blairite terms, requires a re-articulation of active citizenship, with the state's role moving from that of a provider of (welfare) services, to that of a facilitator – enabling communities and individuals to take more responsibility for the conduct of their own lives«.[62] The rhetoric of the local community is sometimes associated with that of the ›neighbourhood‹ in urban renewal programmes. The neighbourhood is portrayed as the ideal scale / space for the production of social bonds and social control.[63]

This rhetoric of the ›community‹ raises a number of conceptual and empirical problems: is there such thing as a local community? If so, how can we define its boundaries? What is the ›community‹ ultimately mobilized for? What is the significance of this discourse on the community within the wider political project of the government?

Holden and Iveson note that the White Paper on Urban Renaissance takes an ambiguous position on the existence of ›local communities‹: in some places they seem to pre-exist, in others their development must be encouraged by public action (for example through capacity building funds): »they are to be ›engaged‹, ›included‹, ›involved‹, ›equipped‹, ›led‹ (by a renewed local authority), ›empowered‹, ›enabled‹, ›supported‹, ›revived‹, ›helped‹, ›worked with‹, ›built up‹, ›listened to‹«.[64] This reveals a certain belief, within policy discourses, that part of the problem of urban decline and deprivation is due to a lack of mobilisation of local communities. The narrative of local citizenship and local community participation therefore links together urban decline and ›social degeneration‹. Some authors have pointed out that this implicitly (re)creates a subtle form of pathologising of the urban poor through a distinction between the deserving, competent, empowered and proactive citizens and the others.[65] This is a paradox in the wider New Labour discourse on social cohesion.

Besides, it is difficult to assume the pre-existence of structured or coherent local communities.[66] The social, ethnic and economic profile of inner city residents is usually too diverse to be able to identify a coherent ›local community‹.[67] Even if this was possible, it

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62 *Mike Raco/Rob Imrie*, Towards an Urban Renaissance? Sustainable Communities, New Labour and Urban Policy, Paper presented at Regional Studies Association Conference ›Reinventing the Regions‹, Pisa, 12–15 April 2003, available at URL <http://www.regional-studies-assoc. ac.uk/events/pisa03/racoandimrie.pdf > [accessed on 28.02.2006].

63 *Whitehead*.

64 *Holden/Iveson*, S. 63.

65 *Imrie/Raco*.

66 *Barry Schofield*, Partners in power. Governing the self-sustaining community, in: Sociology 36, 3, 2002, S. 663–683.

67 *Ash Amin*, Ethnicity and the multicultural city. Living with diversity, in: Environment and Planning A 24, 2002, S. 959–80.

does not imply that this ›community‹ will be structured and organised enough to pursue its own interests and agenda.[68] In spite of the rhetoric of partnership and community participation, the practice of empowerment and participation in local urban renewal partnerships is sometimes limited by the impossibility to build consensus in very heterogeneous neighbourhoods, by the mobilisation of participation channels by organised interests which are not necessarily the most representative or the most in need, and by the dominance of regeneration professionals (public or private) in the process.

Finally, a number of authors emphasise the political instrumentalisation of the concept of community mobilization in the wider context of the changing role of the Welfare State. The role of civic society, local communities and of the Third Sector[69] is recast within the Welfare State transformation process, in a combination of neo-liberal and neo-communitarian approaches.[70] Community participation helps to legitimize and implement urban renewal programmes in a context where the role of the State is transformed, reduced, and in which individuals and social groups have to play a bigger role in their governance.[71] This is part of the wider project of ›social liberalism‹ of New Labour.[72] However, some authors note that »the political narrative of community and individual responsibility« deliberately deflects attention away from the structural and economic causes of poverty and the wider issue of unequal wealth distribution in a capitalist society.[73]

d) Good urban design, the renaissance of public space and the revitalization of local citizenship

»Imagine strolling through a dockland area digesting Friday's lunch one summer's afternoon. You cross paved walkways punctuated with illuminated water features and hear the liquid patter of a fountain's droplets overlaying the hum of a not-too-distant business district winding down for the week; you negotiate the clutter of plastic art planted sporadically in the concrete and circle a twelve-foot anchor drenched in treacle-like gloss paint; you approach an arcade and hear people conversing around brushed steel tables of coffee houses whose interiors invoke an impression of Latin-American Moderne. Drinking expresso, soy latte, or the finest bottled Belgian beer, these people are part of the new British metropolitan bohemia and while your cynicism compels its condescension you secretly fancy yourself as a member.«[74]

The Urban Task Force Report[75], the Urban White Paper[76], the Sustainable Communities Plan[77], all emphasise the key role of good urban design and quality public spaces in the delivery of an Urban Renaissance for British inner cities. The underlying argument is that a well-designed space will encourage ›civilized‹ behaviours, foster social interactions, and reduce the motivations and the opportunities for anti-social, deviant or criminal be-

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68 *Imrie/Raco*, S. 29.
69 The ›Third Sector‹ refers to organisations which are between the market and the state, not fully in the private or in public sector. This includes for example voluntary organisations and community groups. The Third Sector European Policy network defines the Third Sector as »those organizations which are self-governing and constitutionally independent of the state; do not involve the distribution of profits to shareholders; and benefit to a significant degree from voluntarism« (available at URL <http://www.lse.ac.uk/collections/TSEP/Default.htm> [accessed on 27.06.2006]).
70 *Nicholas Fyfe*, Making Space for ›Neo-communitarianism‹? The Third Sector, State and Civil Society in the UK, in: Antipode 37, 3, 2005, S. 536–557.
71 *Raco/Imrie*; *Holden/Iveson*.
72 *Holden/Iveson*.
73 *Imrie/Raco*, S. 30.
74 *Hoskins/Tallon*, S. 25.
75 Urban Task Force.
76 DETR, Urban Renaissance.
77 ODPM, Sustainable Communities Plan.

haviours. This is rooted in a body of American and British literature on the links between the physical environment and human behaviours[78] which has been very influential on police and planners' thinking alike. The assumption underpinning this diverse literature is that the shape, design and appearance of the built environment can influence, positively or negatively, people's behaviours and interactions. The »broken windows theory«, in particular, assumes that if small offences in public space are left unaddressed, this provides an encouragement for individuals to commit bigger crimes.[79]

Another (related) argument is that there is a strong link between the restoration of quality urban public spaces and the recreation of a sense of identity and local citizenship, illustrated by Richard Rogers' quote »People make cities but cities make citizens«.[80] In most policy documents mentioned above, it is argued that an active form of local citizenship will only emerge if citizens are involved in the design of their environment – streets, squares, open spaces.[81] However, Holden and Iveson highlight a crucial paradox in the role of urban design in the Urban Renaissance process: »the paradox at the heart of New Labour urban policy is that a good-quality urban public realm is seen to be necessary for fostering social cohesion and community, and yet improvements to the quality of the public realm seem to require the prior formation of social cohesion and community which are found to be wanting in many existing towns and cities.«[82]

Good public space is therefore both the outcome of a successful Urban Renaissance as well as a tool for mobilizing communities to deliver this Urban Renaissance.[83] The urban design process itself is presented as a mechanism to resolve this tension. A new Quasi-Governmental organisation, the *Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment* (CABE), has been set up to champion ›good‹ urban design and has become a very powerful actor in regeneration projects across England. A new class of mobile urban design professionals has emerged, whose role is to ›help‹ and ›steer‹ local communities and local decision-makers in formulating ›their‹ vision of Urban Renaissance.[84]

The imagery of good public spaces refers to a ›civilised‹ urbanity, in which human behaviours and encounters are encouraged and framed by well-designed public spaces. It should be noted that »the desired Urban Renaissance was largely built on a European model of high quality urban public space and design using high density, mixed-use development to encourage what were felt to be more sustainable forms of community«.[85] This vision is underpinned by powerful examples of regeneration from abroad perceived, and marketed as, success stories: Barcelona, Bilbao, Copenhagen, Baltimore … The discourse on urban regeneration is thus being internationalised.[86]

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78 *Oscar Newman*, Defensible Space. Crime Prevention through Environmental Design, New York 1972; *Oscar Newman*, Creating defensible space, Washington D.C. 1997; *Richard Schneider/ Ted Kitchen*, Planning for crime prevention. A transatlantic perspective, London 2002. Richard Schneider and Ted Kitchen's synthesis on the various bodies of theory which have linked urban form, the environment and human behaviours (Defensible space theory, Crime Prevention through Environmental Design, Situational Crime Prevention, Environmental Criminology, New Urbanism) is an excellent introduction. The book also presents the practical implementation of these principles in the US and the UK.

79 *James Wilson/George Kelling*, Broken windows, in: The Atlantic Monthly, March 1982, S. 29.

80 Quoted in *Holden/Iveson*, S. 58.

81 Ebd., S. 58.

82 Ebd., S. 66.

83 Ebd., S. 69.

84 Ebd., S. 66.

85 *Atkinson*, Impact of gentrification.

86 *Mike Raco*, Assessing the discourses and practices of urban regeneration in a growing region, in: Geoforum 34, 1, 2003, S. 37–55; *Rowland Atkinson*, Impact of gentrification; *Holden/Iveson*, Designs on the urban, S. 57.

The influence of the American ›*New Urbanism*‹ movement in this discourse is highly visible. New Urbanism has been a reaction against the visible failures of modernist urban planning – urban sprawl, social breakdown, car dependency and in the United States, neglect and decay of city centres. New Urbanism aims at restoring quality public and residential spaces at a human scale to generate a sense of community. John Prescott, the Deputy Prime Minister in charge of urban policy, often refers to this model in his speeches. However academics have highlighted the negative consequences of the implementation of the New Urbanism model in the United States[87], which has »in practice involved the polarisation of urban communities, the formation of gated enclaves, the institutionalization of punitive strategies and crude conceptions of the relationship between urban forms and urban behaviour«.[88]

A number of American and British authors have highlighted the practical consequences of the revitalization of public spaces and the ›renaissance‹ of city centres and have demonstrated that this ›renaissance‹ is often associated with new mechanisms of control of space.[89] These mechanisms can be ›soft‹ (architectural design, ›eyes on the street‹ and self-surveillance of the local residents) or rely on harder surveillance techniques, such as policing by public or private security forces and video-surveillance. In the UK, the rise of CCTV (Close Circuit Television) has raised academic attention – the UK being the country with the highest number of cameras per inhabitants.

In contradiction with the social inclusion rhetoric of many urban renewal programmes, the practical processes of social control associated with the physical regeneration of urban space can therefore actually stimulate processes of exclusion and marginalisation.[90] The vision of the ›good city‹ often excludes the groups perceived as a threat or those who cannot participate (through material consumption) in the new regenerated urban spaces.[91] Some authors, focusing on a ›disciplinary‹ reading of the production and management of public space, argue that this represents a re-regulation of the urban poor.[92] Often the physical exclusion of specific groups or individuals only means displacement towards other (usually deprived) areas.[93]

2. Gentrification as a strategy for Urban Renaissance?

The Urban Task Force Report and the Urban White Paper both pursue two objectives: getting middle classes back into inner cities and tackling inner city deprivation. The assumption is that a return of the middle classes to the inner city is an important way of reducing concentrated poverty and its long-run effects, as well as rehabilitating run-down housing.[94] But is one the solution for the other?

As described above, a number of authors have ›deconstructed‹ the vision of the emerging ›good city‹ central to the Urban Renaissance discourse[95], showing that it is very much a

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87 *Raco*, S. 244; *Nan Ellin*, Postmodern Urbanism, New York 1999; *Macleod/Ward*.
88 *Raco,* S. 244.
89 *Holden/Iveson*, S. 57; *Jon Coaffee*, Urban renaissance in the age of terrorism. Revanchism, automated social control or the end of reflection?, in: International Journal Of Urban And Regional Research 29, 2, 2005, S. 447–454.
90 *Craig Johnstone*, Crime, disorder and urban renaissance, in: *Craig Johnstone/Mark Whitehead* (Hrsg.), New horizons in British urban policy. Perspectives on New Labour's urban renaissance, Aldershot 2004, S. 91.
91 *Davina Cooper*, Regard between strangers. Diversity, equality and the reconstruction of public space, in: Critical Social Policy 18, 4, 1998, S. 465–492; *Holden/Iveson*, S. 67; *Hoskins/Tallon*.
92 *Gordon Macleod/Kevin Ward*, Spaces.
93 *Schneider/Kitchen*, S. 113.
94 DETR, Urban Renaissance, S. 110.
95 *Lees*, Visions.

middle-class vision of idealised city life. The discourse on Urban Renaissance views the »civilized middle class« as role model and saviour of the inner city neighbourhood[96], but at the same time it avoids the class constitution of the processes which are encouraged.[97] As pointed out by Loretta Lees[98], this has led a number of critics to label the Urban White paper a »blueprint for gentrification«, a »gentrifiers' charter«[99]; »state-sponsored gentri-fication«[100]; »gentrification by the back door«; »gentrification as explicit policy strategy«; »Revanchist Urbanism«[101]. Several academics have cast a very critical eye on the Urban Renaissance agenda and have associated it with the notion of ›Revanchist Urbanism‹ de-veloped by Neil Smith[102] to describe the ›reconquest‹ of the inner city by middle classes in the United States.[103]

   Gentrification, a term coined by the British sociologist Ruth Glass in the 1950s, has been the focus of scholarly attention since the beginning of the 1970s. The debates on the definition and scope of gentrification will not be discussed here. Gentrification refers to »a process of socio-spatial change whereby the rehabilitation of residential property in a working-class neighbourhood by relatively affluent incomers leads to the displacement of former residents unable to afford the increased costs of housing that accompany re-generation«.[104] Lees, in her discursive analysis of the Urban Renaissance discourse[105], argues that the vision embedded in the Urban Task Force report is »remarkably similar to visions of gentrification«, although the term of ›gentrification‹ is never used in policy documents. But what does ›similar‹ concretely means? A real, conscious policy objec-tive? A negative side-effect? A badly understood process?

   It is thus crucial to clarify the link between public policy and gentrification processes. In order to do that, it is crucial to distinguish between the positive and negative social impacts of gentrification because »it allows us to assess the validity of the current direc-tions that policy is taking«.[106] This article will not discuss the vast amount of literature on the impact of gentrification, but will take as a basis a review of English language em-pirical research on gentrification between 1962 and 2001[107] which concludes that in spite of the positive impacts that gentrification may have at local level, it has had largely negative impacts on many neighbourhoods, in terms of population displacement, social conflicts over the ownership of local space, social costs of local household dislocation, and so forth.

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96   *Atkinson*, Gentrification in a new century.
97   *Lees*, Visions.
98   Ebd.
99   *Tim Butler/Garry Robson*, London Calling. The Middle Classes and the remaking of Inner London, Oxford 2003.
100 *Atkinson*, Impact of gentrification.
101 *Neil Smith*, New Globalism, new urbanism. Gentrification as global urban strategy, in: Antipode 34, 3, 2002, S. 427–450.
102 *Neil Smith*, The New Urban Frontier. Gentrification and the Revanchist City, London 1996; *Smith*, New Globalism.
103 *Simon Wheelan,* Britain. Labour's proposed urban regeneration plans highlight the growing social divide, World Socialist Web Site 2000, available at URL <http://www.wsws.org/articles/ 2000/dec2000/urba-d11_prn.shtml> [accessed on 28.02.2006]; *Neil Smith*, New Globalism; *Gordon Macleod*, From urban entrepreneurialism to a »Revanchist city«? On the spatial in-justices of Glasgow's renaissance, in: Antipode 34, 3, 2002, S. 602–624; *Macleod/Ward*; *Holden/Iveson*; *Rowland Atkinson/Gary Bridge* (Hrsg.), The new Urban Colonialism. Gentri-fication in a global context, London 2004.
104 *Pacione*, S. 200.
105 *Lees*, Visions.
106 *Atkinson*, Impact of gentrification, S. 108.
107 *Atkinson*, Impact of gentrification.

The question therefore is whether urban policies ›recognise‹ gentrification and its negative impacts, and whether they openly encourage, mitigate or discourage the process. What is the relationship between the Urban Renaissance agenda and gentrification processes in British cities? The role of public policy discourses and programmes in processes of gentrification has recently been brought to the fore by various authors in the United States[108] and in Great Britain.[109] This is explained by the fact that »public policy designs as well as the systemic facilitation of gentrification are taking place at a much wider scale than was the case even a few years ago«.[110] Atkinson discusses whether it is possible to label the Urban Renaissance agenda of New Labour an explicit strategy of gentrification and concludes that »it remains a debatable point as to whether the Urban Renaissance and array of area-based initiatives represent an explicit strategy of gentrification even if the unintended consequences may yet be similar«.[111] However, he points out that »amidst the raft of area-based initiatives and the vision of mixed-use and sustainable community development, it is possible to detect a more familiar language of urban pioneers and revitalisation to which many scholars of gentrification have been so sensitive«.[112]

This issue should be addressed in a differentiated way depending on the geographical context. The problematic of urban renewal and Urban Renaissance is extremely different between the south-east of England and the centre and north of the country. In the southeast, the State appears to try and tackle overheated housing markets and rapid gentrification while in the north, gentrification seems to be promoted as a strategy for housing and economic renewal.[113] In Greater London and the south-east, the primary issue is one of growth management in a context of restricted land use resources and excessive demand for housing which has led to ›overheating‹ in the housing market. The gentrification of inner London Boroughs has pushed lower-income families further away from the city centre (i. e. Essex). However, a lot of middle class families cannot access ›affordable‹ housing in Greater London any longer. The lack of affordable housing has become a political issue labelled as the ›key workers‹ question – doctors, nurses, teachers who cannot afford to live in Greater London with a family any longer. In the south-east of the country, gentrification is therefore primarily fuelled by market-led processes in a context of high demand and scarce land resources. Public policies can incidentally contribute to accelerate the process locally by raising the profile of an area, for example through a flagship project like the ›Tate Modern‹ on the South Bank of the River Thames in London. Research has shown that major regeneration schemes, publicly or privately funded, have often been a key element in accelerating gentrification processes. In many cases, the mechanisms available to anticipate and mitigate the displacement effects of gentrification processes are limited, apart from social housing quotas. The ›Sustainable Community Plan‹ in the south-east of England is a strategy to tackle the housing issue by accommodating growth within or near existing urban areas or in designated new growth corridors. It is presented

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108 *Elvin Wyly/Daniel Hammel*, Islands of decay in seas of renewal. Housing policy and the resurgence of gentrification, in: Housing Policy Debate 10, 1999, S. 711–771; *Smith*, New Globalism.

109 *Atkinson*, Impact of gentrification; *Stuart Cameron*, Gentrification, Housing Redifferentiation and Urban Regeneration. ›Going for Growth‹ in Newcastle upon Tyne, in: Urban Studies 40, 12, 2003, S. 2367–2382; *Holden/Iveson*; *Imrie/Raco*; *Lees*, A reappraisal; *Loretta Lees*, Visions; *Loretta Lees*, Policy (re)turns. Gentrification research and urban policy, in: Environment and Planning A 35, 2003, S. 571–574; *Tom Slater/Winifred Curran/Loretta Lees*, Gentrification research. New directions and critical scholarship. Guest editorial, in: Environment and Planning A 36, 2004, S. 1141–1150; *Atkinson/Bridge.*

110 *Atkinson*, Gentrification in a new century, S. 2343.

111 Ebd., S. 2347.

112 Ebd., S. 2346.

113 *Atkinson*, Impact of gentrification, S. 126.

as a potential solution for the housing affordability issue. But at the same time, the potential impact of the Olympics 2012 on the gentrification of East London is already a key focus of concern among academics, activists and local residents.

In the centre and the north of England, policies to encourage an Urban Renaissance are linked with the need for economic regeneration of those regions and cities which have since the 1970s been confronted with economic and demographic decline. Low housing demand has in particular led to large-scale housing abandonment in some parts of Liverpool, Manchester or Newcastle. In these areas, the aim of the government is to try and recreate a viable housing market through selective demolition, renewal, new construction and ›housing differentiation strategies‹ (the ›Housing Market Renewal‹ programme). The aim is to diversify the types of housing on offer and get a critical mass of middle-class households to settle down into these areas to stop the spiral of decline. Some academics have thus wondered whether »there is some evidence to suggest that many of the more deprived major cities in the UK are pursuing gentrification as a strategy of renewal«[114], building on the successful revitalization of the city centre of Manchester in the 1990s.

In the Northern part of the UK, regeneration practitioners and policy-makers thus seem to view gentrification as a model of neighbourhood development and method for resolving regional inequalities.[115] Cameron analyses the urban regeneration strategy of Newcastle under the label ›*Going for Growth*‹ as a strategy of ›positive gentrification‹ through the re-differentiation of the housing supply imported from the Netherlands.[116] The author highlights the tension which exists between the objective of Urban Renaissance of the city as a whole and the objective of urban renewal in deprived, declining neighbourhoods: potential conflicts arise from the necessity to attract a critical mass of wealthier residents and the necessity to maintain and involve local existing residents. The practical implementation of the current housing market renewal have caused concern among local residents, especially when it involves the demolition of homes, part of which being either structurally sound or still occupied by working class families who have spent most of their life in the area. »These activities seem to be redefining the gentrification scenario in the UK context and bring to the fore the possibility of a new round of community dislocation that was so familiar in areas like the East End of London in the 1950s.«[117]

However it could also be argued that upward neighbourhood changes in areas with high vacancy rates, derelict land and poor quality social housing might mean that »gentrification does not represent the zero-sum game that it may in major cities with overheating property markets.«[118] Atkinson points out that in areas of acute housing decline, several factors might limit gentrification processes through housing renewal policies: perceived lack of regional attractiveness among young and affluent groups, poor architectural heritage of many housing estates; the growing involvement of community based housing organisations; the emphasis on social diversity enshrined in planning guidance (PPG3).[119] The actual practices through which ›housing market renewal‹ will be implemented and the involvement of existing residents will be crucial in determining the directions taken by the housing renewal programmes. Atkinson concludes, however, that a strategy of ›renewal‹ based on gentrification is more likely »likely to avoid social responsibilities than to deal with the structural causes of regional and city economic decline and poverty«[120]

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114 *Atkinson*, Gentrification in a new century, S. 2346.
115 *Atkinson*, Impact of gentrification, S. 119.
116 *Cameron*.
117 *Atkinson*, Gentrification in a new century, S. 2346.
118 *Atkinson*, Impact of gentrification, S. 125.
119 *Atkinson*, Gentrification in a new century, S. 2347.
120 Ebd., S. 2346.

in the North of England, which are linked to the massive deindustrialisation of British cities from the 1970s onwards.

Conclusion

It might be too early to judge the overall impacts of the urban initiatives taken by New Labour on the living conditions and welfare of urban dwellers across the UK. It has been shown, however, that in spite of a new rhetoric of social inclusion and initiatives in favour of poorer neighbourhoods in UK cities, the New Labour urban policy agenda, in particular the new discourse on Urban Renaissance, has the potential to increase the fragmentation and social polarisation of inner cities. The dual agenda pursued by the government – urban renewal and Urban Renaissance – is ambiguous: the Urban Renaissance agenda, the Sustainable Communities Plan and the Housing Market Renewal programme can be seen as »socio-economically selective instruments«[121] which have the potential to »drive a model of housing and urban change which will be both socially inequitable and promote gentrification and displacement.«[122]

Current urban policy cannot be equated with gentrification. Several authors have nonetheless argued that in certain contexts, gentrification seems to be used as a strategy of urban policy »which see middle-class recolonization as an important ingredient in future economic and urban success«.[123] In practice, local urban regeneration agendas remain often dominated by market-led and economic competitiveness objectives, in high-growth areas[124] or in more depressed areas.[125] This often leads to ambiguous effects on various social groups – in particular in terms of gentrification.

There are successful and relatively inclusive cases of urban regeneration in British cities which have delivered a real ›renaissance‹ for cities and neighbourhoods in decline while benefiting existing communities. But many weaknesses remain in the concrete implementation of the Urban Renaissance agenda because of the unsolved tensions and paradoxes within the Urban Renaissance project. The tensions within the urban policy agenda are a reflection of the wider contradictions within the ›Third Way‹ ideological project.[126] Some authors highlight the paradox of a rhetoric of social inclusion accompanied by »the relentless privatization of the public services on which poorer communities depend«, which has »a much bigger impact on the lives of many urban residents than any government regeneration scheme«[127]. They stress that other policy initiatives taken by New Labour in the field of health, education and welfare benefits may potentially have long-term negative impacts on patterns of deprivation and exclusion.[128]

This leads us to conclude with the wider question of whether it is possible to pursue policies geared towards encouraging a ›back to the city‹ movement and an Urban Renaissance without displacement and fragmentation. A degree of ›return to the city‹ from the

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121 *Lees*, Visions; *Atkinson*, Impact of gentrification, S. 124.
122 Ebd., S. 124.
123 *Atkinson*, Gentrification in a new century, S. 126; *Atkinson*, Impact of gentrification; *Lees*, Visions; *Atkinson/Bridge*.
124 *Raco*.
125 *Cameron*; *Kevin Ward*, Entrepreneurial urbanism, state restructuring and civilizing ›New‹ East Manchester, in: Area 35, 2, 2003, p. 116 –127; *Colenutt*, S. 243.
126 *Holden/Iveson*, S. 57; *Ruth Levitas*, The Inclusive Society? Social Exclusion and New Labour, Basingstoke 1998.
127 *Raco*, S. 246.
128 *Paul Watts/Keith Jacobs*, Discourses of social exclusion – an analysis of Bringing Britain Together. A National Strategy For Neighbourhood Renewal, in: Housing Theory and Society 17, 1, 2000, S. 14–26; *Hills/Stewart*.

middle-class seems to be desirable for social, economic and environmental reasons – how to encourage it without generating the displacement of other residents[129], or creating an increasingly fragmented urban micro-geography of wealth and deprivation?

The analysis of policy discourse and policy documents can perform an ›early warning‹ role to highlight the contradictions and tensions of the Urban Renaissance agenda. Rigorous academic inquiry and more empirical research on specific case-studies is now necessary to study the detailed impacts of new urban policies on various socio-economic groups and contribute to policy evaluation and reformulation.

Table 1: New Labour's initiatives in urban policy, urban regeneration and planning policy, 1997–2006

1997	Creation of the Social Exclusion Unit (now part of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister – ODPM) http://www.socialexclusion.gov.uk/
1998	Creation of the ›New Deal for Communities‹ programme, to tackle multiple deprivation in the poorest neighbourhoods in the country focusing on five key issues: poor job prospects; high levels of crime; educational under-achievement; poor health; problems with housing and the physical environment. http://www.neighbourhood.gov.uk/page.asp?id=617
1998	Setting up of an ›Urban Task Force‹ chaired by Lord Richard Rogers to examine the causes of urban decline in British cities and recommend solutions to bring people back into towns and cities.
1999	Establishment of 8 Regional Development Agencies in the English Regions (+the London Development Agency) to co-ordinate regional economic development and regeneration. http://www.consumers.gov.uk/rda/info/
1999	Urban Task Force Final Report »Towards an Urban Renaissance«. Executive summary at http://www.renewal.net/Documents/RNET/ Policy%20Guidance/Towardsurbanrenaissance.pdf#search='%C2%93 Towards%20an%20Urban%20Renaissance%C2%94
1999	Creation of English Partnerships, the national regeneration agency which addresses the regeneration and remediation of brownfield land, housing shortages, affordable housing and the problems of abandonment and decay. http://www.odpm.gov.uk/index.asp?id=1128081 http://www.englishpartnerships.co.uk/
1999	Creation of Urban Regeneration Companies in England. http://www.odpm.gov.uk/index.asp?id=1128224 http://www.urcs-online.co.uk/
2000	Publication of the Urban White Paper »*Our Towns and Cities: The Future – Delivering an Urban Renaissance*« http://www.odpm.gov.uk/index.asp?id=1127168

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129 In the US context, this question has been addressed by *Maureen Kennedy/Paul Leonard*, Dealing with neighborhood change. A primer on gentrification and policy choices. Washington, DC 2001, available at URL <http://apps49.brookings.edu/dybdocroot/es/urban/gentrification/ gentrification.pdf> [accessed on 15.03.2006].

2000	Establishment of an Urban Policy Unit within the government.
2001	Publication of ›*A New Commitment to Neighbourhood Renewal: A National Strategy Action Plan*‹, setting out the Government's vision for narrowing the gap between deprived neighbourhoods and the rest of the country. http://www.neighbourhood.gov.uk/page.asp?id=908
2001	Creation of the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit, responsible for overseeing the Government's comprehensive neighbourhood renewal strategy. http://www.neighbourhood.gov.uk/
2002	ODPM sets up Working Group on »Cities, Regions and Competitiveness« focusing on the Core Cities (the regional cities outside London).
2003	Publication of the »Sustainable Communities plan« to tackle housing supply issues in the South East and low housing demand in other parts of the country. http://www.odpm.gov.uk/index.asp?id=1139868
2003	Designation of ›Growth areas‹ to deal with housing supply issues in the South-East of England. http://www.odpm.gov.uk/index.asp?id=1140039
2003	Creation of ›Housing Market Renewal Pathfinders‹ in the North of England. http://www.odpm.gov.uk/index.asp?id=1140273
2004	Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, New Planning legislation reforming the planning system (system of plans and development control) for England and Wales.
2005	Urban Task Force report: »*Towards a strong urban renaissance*« (without ministerial blessing this time!) Available at: http://www.urbantaskforce.org/UTF_final_report.pdf
2005	Publications of ›State of the Cities: a progress report‹ http://www.odpm.gov.uk/index.asp?id=1127502
2005–2006	Consultation paper on new Planning Policy Statement 3 (PPS3) on housing.
2005–2006	Barker Review of Land use planning, independent review of land use planning, focusing on the link between planning, housing and economic growth.