
Building community capacity under ‘austerity urbanism’: Stimulating, supporting and maintaining resident engagement in neighbourhood regeneration in Manchester

Received (in revised form): 28th March, 2013

Iain Deas

is a senior lecturer in the School of Environment and Development at the University of Manchester. He is co-director of the university's cross-disciplinary Centre for Urban Policy Studies. For over twenty years he has been an observer of urban regeneration policy, its politics and its impact in Manchester and beyond.

Jennifer Doyle

is a post-doctoral research associate in construction management and economics at the Centre for Sustainable Development, University of Central Lancashire. Following several years' experience working in planning practice, in 2012 she completed a PhD (on the social consequences of brownfield regeneration) at the University of Manchester.

Abstract The decline or withdrawal of funding for targeted regeneration initiatives in England, linked to the wider programme of austerity in public finances, presents major challenges for deprived neighbourhoods. Government's expectation is that the demise of most neighbourhood-focused regeneration initiatives will be offset by the increased involvement of a host of local, voluntary and private-sector actors as part of a wider programme of localism in which civil society assumes responsibility for public policy and service delivery functions previously exercised by the state. This paper assesses the scope for and likelihood of this radical transformation by considering the experience of four neighbourhoods in Manchester. Through a programme of interviews with a range of stakeholders, the paper explores the implications posed by recent policy reforms for levels of resident activism and engagement, and considers the degree to which neighbourhood actors can build capacity in order to contribute meaningfully to future regeneration efforts. The paper concludes that sustained intervention is needed to ensure that raised levels of social capital resulting from past policy initiatives do not dissipate. Developing community capacity in deprived neighbourhoods, the paper concludes, requires concerted and concentrated policy intervention that is at odds with government's current emphasis on laissez-faire localism.

Keywords: *Urban regeneration policy, austerity, localism, social capital, community capacity*

Iain Deas

School of Environment and Development, University of Manchester, Oxford Road, Manchester, M13 9PL, UK

Tel: + 44 (0)161 306 6689
e-mail: iain.Deas@manchester.ac.uk

Jennifer Doyle

Centre for Sustainable Development, University of Central Lancashire, Preston, Lancashire PR1 2HE, UK

Tel: + 44 (0)1772 89 4213
E-mail: JDoyle@uclan.ac.uk

BACKGROUND

Community capacity building has been an objective of English urban policy throughout much of its history. The inception of the original Urban Programme in 1968, building on social pathology ideas then rising to prominence, was premised in part on a desire to redress the supposed dysfunctionality said to characterise the dynamics of disadvantaged communities. Subsequently, the Community Development Projects of the early 1970s, informed in some cases by more radical views about the maldistribution of political and economic power and its resultant impact on social disadvantage, sought explicitly to empower local communities and bolster their organisational capacity and ability to challenge the local and national state.¹ Urban policy in the subsequent period has often subordinated the amelioration of social distress to the pursuit of economic development goals. The emphasis of the urban policy agenda throughout much of the 1980s and 1990s was on engineering new economic growth in areas affected by industrial restructuring and the contraction of employment. Yet, there remained a lower-profile interest in deploying policy instruments to encourage individual self-reliance and active citizenship, as an alternative to the putative dependency culture said to prevail in some poor neighbourhoods.^{2,3}

More recently, these types of idea, in amended form, have again been in evidence in urban policy. The Blair and Brown administrations, in their renewed emphasis on using targeted neighbourhood policies as a means of denting social exclusion, stressed the need to cultivate a sense of individual social responsibility, and to build social capital in order to help create more cohesive local relations with which to underpin enhanced economic competitiveness.⁴

Paralleling this on the Left has been longer-standing interest in community and voluntary based organisation as a complement to the state — viewed in some instances as an alternative to the self-interested individualism and disdain for collective organisation that typified the politics of the New Right.⁵

While the focus under Labour was on nurturing local citizen involvement in policy and politics in the context of a strong state, the emphasis on community capacity building under the subsequent Cameron government has again been reorientated. Linked to a wider attempt to revise the relationship between the national and local state and civil society, the emphasis of the localism agenda, rhetorically at least, has been the Burkean one of mobilising local citizens in pursuit of the common good, supplanting the pre-eminent role previously played by the state in formulating policy and delivering services.⁶

This latter shift has had important implications for urban policy. As part of a wider programme of retrenchment as government seeks to reduce public indebtedness, the resources devoted to area-based policy have dwindled. This has continued a longer trajectory of diminishing resources, following in the wake of the previous government's attempts in its final years to rationalise the extensive programme of neighbourhood-based policy put in train by the first Blair administration. The result, for the first time since the advent of the Urban Programme, has been the absence of a national programme of neighbourhood-targeted policy, since the election of the Cameron-led coalition government in 2010. Although other spatial policy initiatives continue to exist — in the form of growth-oriented interventions such as Local Enterprise Partnerships or Enterprise Zones, for example — there is a stark contrast with

the relative largesse of the early years of the previous government, in which the National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal (NSNR) attempted to join up a range of interventions aimed at combating social exclusion.

Part of the argument justifying the demise of national neighbourhood-targeted policy — alongside underlying goals of reducing public spending and shrinking the state — has been that local actors are, in any case, better placed than public institutions to identify local priorities and develop policy accordingly. This forms part of a wider narrative underpinning the localism agenda, which stresses the need to liberate local communities from the sclerotic influence of the state, and which emphasises local discretion, autonomy and creativity as alternatives to the regimented and regularised decision making said to characterise local government. The latter is held to have been exacerbated by the previous government's preoccupation with performance management, resulting in a staidness and uniformity in local policy outcomes that was often at odds with the diversity and complexity of circumstances 'on the ground'.⁷

The case accompanying reforms to urban policy has therefore revolved around a desire — or expectation — that local actors would be able to fill the void left by the contraction of the state in formulating and delivering public policy. This would involve enhancing resources, powers and responsibilities among a wider mix of community and voluntary groups, complementing or displacing local authorities. It would also involve strengthening and extending citizen involvement in social life, notably via increased volunteering and charitable giving.⁸ While this ostensibly radical and potentially far-reaching redefinition of the relationship between state and citizen perhaps bears little relation to a more

prosaic reality,⁹ there is nonetheless a clear attempt to promote a model of policy development and implementation that gives a more central role to community-based actors.

This model presents some potentially profound challenges for the neighbourhoods on which targeted policy has in the past tended to converge. Critiques of government's localism agenda have often highlighted the geographically uneven nature of community capacity, and the differential ability and propensity of local citizen actors to mobilise effectively.¹⁰ While affluent areas rich in social capital and other resources, such as appropriate training and time, are said to be well placed to participate in the policy process, deprived neighbourhoods may lack the same experiences in civic activism, volunteering or participation in social and political life. Equally, disparities in local capacity and willingness to engage with policy formulation and delivery in a productive way may not correlate straightforwardly with area socio-economic circumstances. For some deprived neighbourhoods in particular, injections of public resource over many decades aimed at cultivating resident involvement may in some cases have created rich and vibrant community politics. Indeed, in many instances, a complementary goal of the concentration of resources on an area basis has been to create both formal and informal structures through which citizen involvement can be encouraged.

The potential difficulty emerging from this is therefore that the reduction or withdrawal of public resources for neighbourhood-targeted policy, or the dismantling of structures for community engagement, accentuates inter-area inequalities in meaningful citizen involvement in localist-style regeneration activity. And at the same time, the hesitant and partial nature of macro-economic

recovery in the aftermath of the financial crisis of 2008 may also limit the potential for private-sector investment in regeneration activity to begin to fill the vacuum left by the reduction in public expenditure. In combination, these factors seem likely to act as significant constraints on the prospects for the development of a new organic, locally initiated regeneration to offset the demise of earlier waves of top-down neighbourhood regeneration. The paper explores this contention by drawing upon research on the patterning of social capital in different types of deprived area in Manchester. Based on a programme of interviews with local residents and policy actors, the paper considers the variable nature and form of social capital, and assesses the degree to which, and the ways in which, different categories of neighbourhood are able to contribute to a model of regeneration in which state involvement may be less prominent, resources less abundant, and autonomy for local actors enhanced.

DEFINING AND MEASURING COMMUNITY CAPACITY

The capacity of a local community to mobilise in response to the 'opportunities' resulting from the withdrawal or reduction of regeneration expenditure is determined in part by a neighbourhood's aggregate social capital. Defining the latter has become something of a cottage industry for academics. Following the seminal work of Putnam,^{11,12} researchers have wrestled at great length with how best to define and measure social capital and a host of allied concepts. The purpose of this paper is not to augment this already voluminous literature, but instead simply to explore in broad terms how social capital varies across superficially similar neighbourhoods, and to consider the degree to which this might magnify disparities in the shape and form of

regeneration policy. In doing so, the authors draw on some of the more notable of the many attempts to conceptualise social capital (Table 1). Following, in broad terms, the work of Robert Putnam, social capital was deemed to comprise a mix of: the level of engagement and interest in civic life; the richness of personal social ties and the density and connectedness of local social networks; participation in formal and informal associational structures and organisations; and involvement in and concern about local political issues.

This expansive and inclusive definition was used to inform qualitative research in the form of a programme of semi-structured interviews, conducted in 2011, with community representatives, policy actors, politicians and local residents, recruited via a snowballing selection process. Issues explored in interviews were structured around a basic central issue of the ways in which a neighbourhood's capacity to draw upon its reserves of social capital are determined, how they vary spatially and temporally, and their prospective influence on regeneration efforts into the future. Unlike Putnam, this was explored on a purely qualitative basis, and structured by using questions derived from the Office for National Statistics' Social Capital Question Bank. This covers five aspects of social capital: participation, social engagement and commitment; control and self-efficacy; perception of community level structures or characteristics; social interaction, networks and support; and trust, reciprocity and social cohesion.

Four neighbourhoods with comparable socio-economic profiles were selected, each with recent experience of planning and regeneration policy intervention to support housing development on former brownfield land. This provided a coarse way of controlling for the variable effect of policy intervention, although it ought

Table 1: Key definitions of social capital

Source	Definition of social capital	Resources/ opportunity	Participation/ networks	Social order	Relationships
Bourdieu and Wacquant ¹³	'Social capital is the sum of resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or group by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance or recognition.'	✓	✓		✓
Coleman ¹⁴	'...a variety of different entities having two characteristics in common: they all consist of some aspect of social structure, and they facilitate certain actions of individuals who are within the structure. Like other forms of capital, social capital is productive, making possible the achievement of certain ends that would not be attainable in its absence.'		✓	✓	
Loury ¹⁵	'[Social capital refers] to naturally occurring social relationships among persons which promote or assist the acquisition of skills or traits valued in the marketplace.'	✓			✓
Putnam ¹¹ (p. 169)	'Social capital ... refers to features of social organisation, such as trust, norms, and networks, that can improve the efficacy of society by facilitating co-ordinated actions.'		✓	✓	✓
Coté <i>et al.</i> ¹⁶	'Networks together with shared norms, values and understandings that facilitate cooperation within or among groups.'		✓		✓
Lin ¹⁷	'Resources embedded in a social structure which are accessed and/or mobilized in purposive actions.'	✓		✓	
Field ¹⁸	'Its central thesis can be summed up in two words: relationships matter ... People connect through a series of networks and they tend to share common values with other members of these networks; to the extent that these networks constitute a resource, they may be seen as forming a type of capital.'	✓	✓		✓

to be noted that the confounding effects of multiple policy initiatives are impossible to avoid in areas of intense intervention of the sort that dominate Manchester's inner area. The four areas differed in terms of the precise form of new residential development and their likely appeal to different socio-demographic and income groups; the rationale here was to explore the consequences of different types of housing construction for levels and patterns of social capital. Table 2 lists the key characteristics associated with the new housing developments in each case-study area, and Figure 1 shows their location in Manchester. The dependent variable here

was social capital, and interview discussions held in 2011 explored the ways in which it is stimulated, supported, maintained and replenished, and its links to recent, current and future regeneration initiatives, in comparable neighbourhood settings.

SOCIAL CAPITAL AND COMMUNITY CAPACITY IN FOUR MANCHESTER REGENERATION AREAS

For a number of reasons, Manchester provides an appropriate location in which to explore recent experiences of urban policy, and to examine the degree to

Table 2: Key features of the case-study neighbourhoods

Neighbourhood	Description and focus of regeneration	Principal type(s) of development	Scale	Tenure
Cheetwood	'Stepping stone owners': medium-scale private housing developments attracting 'onward and upward' home owners	Housing	Medium (17 units)	Private
Hulme	'Gentrifying settler owners': large-scale private apartment developments, with some housing, attracting less deprived residents to improve neighbourhoods	Housing, apartments and retail	Large (79 units)	Private
Chorlton Park	'Replicator owners and renters': medium-scale private and RSL developments expanding and replicating existing residential provision through a mixture of housing and apartments	Housing apartments	Large (89 units)	Private and Registered Social Landlord mix
Whalley Range	'First time transient owners': medium-to-large-scale private apartment developments attracting upwardly mobile first-time buyers	Apartments	Medium-to-large (44 units)	Private

which the mobilisation of local social capital might plausibly underpin future regeneration in a context of diminished (and diminishing) resources. Manchester is a city that has been in receipt of all of the major area-based initiatives over a period of more than thirty years. The core city of Manchester alone has benefitted from regeneration support in the form, *inter alia*, of Urban Programme partnership authority status (jointly with neighbouring Salford) (1979–93), an Urban Development Corporation (1988–96), a City Challenge (1992–97) and 12 Single Regeneration Budget schemes (plus a further five with one or more neighbouring authorities) (1995–2007), a New Deal for Communities partnership (1998–2008), an Urban Regeneration Company (1999–), Neighbourhood Renewal Fund resources (2001–08), a Housing Market Renewal pathfinder (again in combination with Salford) (2003–11) and numerous other smaller initiatives.²¹

The prevalence of area-based regeneration initiatives is unsurprising, given Manchester's location at the heart of one of England's largest conurbations, and its position consistently among the most deprived local authorities in England.²² Equally, the city has long been lauded for

its effectiveness in procuring discretionary regeneration and other resources from the European Commission and — to an even greater extent — central government.^{23,24} The combination of effectiveness in luring external funding and a consensus-driven process of building governance capacity has been important in underpinning major regeneration schemes. The most notable is in East Manchester, where a raft of funding initiatives have been marshalled to support what — aside from the major physical development programmes in the Thames Gateway and in London's Docklands and Olympic areas — is probably the most extensive and ambitious of all the regeneration efforts in Britain since the advent of targeted urban policy in 1968. While the effectiveness with which regeneration resources have been deployed in East Manchester and across the city is more questionable, and evidence of successful regeneration rather more sporadic, the city has certainly garnered no little attention, from academics as well as policy makers and politicians.²⁵

Attempts to foster resident involvement have regularly featured, in different ways, as an object of many of the major regeneration policy interventions in Manchester.^{26,27} Their effectiveness in creating stable and durable community

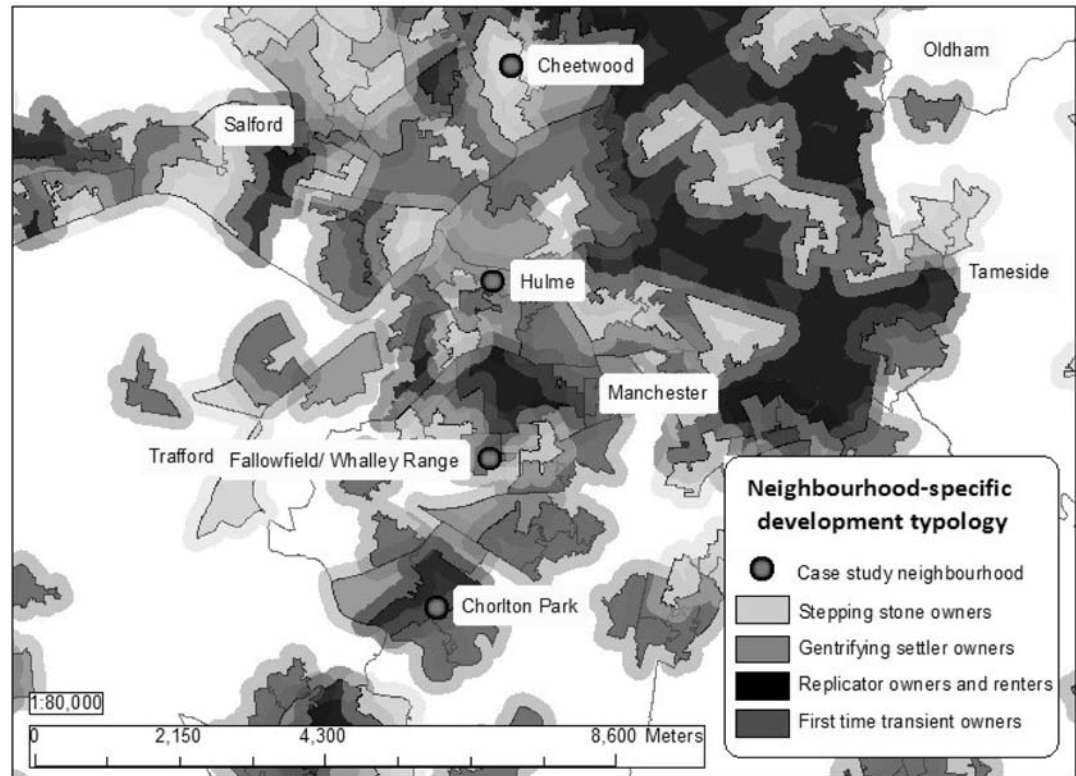


Figure 1: Location of case-study sites across Manchester

Notes: (1) The four categories shown were derived by adjusting the functional typology of neighbourhoods developed by Robson *et al.*,¹⁹ which allocated the 20 per cent most deprived Lower Super Output Areas (LSOAs) to one of four categories ('transit', 'escalator', 'isolate' and 'improver') on the basis of the inter-area patterning of household residential relocations. This was adjusted by: first, drawing upon data from the National Land Use Database for Previously Developed Land to identify reused brownfield sites; and secondly, reviewing the type and extent of housing development via local planning register data. The resultant four category typology is shown in Table 2.

(2) Recognising the limited extent to which LSOA boundaries accord to actual or perceived functional neighbourhood delimitation, the map shows a buffer zone of 200 metres around each area. This represents a five-minute walking time from the boundary of each LSOA, approximating to the desirable and/or acceptable distance to and from lower-order neighbourhood-level services.²⁰

capacity might well be measurable in a context in which many or most of these external policy stimuli have been either withdrawn or reduced drastically in scale. Manchester is therefore an instructive case study choice in that it has been subject to serial policy intervention, but remains a city characterised by numerous instances of localised deprivation. The latter means that a number of neighbourhoods in Manchester offer a potential test bed for the contention that the erosion of external stimuli (in terms of policy initiatives and resources) has limited the scope for the

emergence of localist regeneration which draws on reserves of social capital in deprived areas. The next sections of the paper explore this proposition in more detail by considering: first, the degree to which social capital varies in form and extent across superficially comparable deprived neighbourhoods; second, the difficulties faced in accessing and exploiting social capital; and third, the scope for exploiting social capital for future regeneration policy informed by ideas around localism and austerity politics.

Inter-neighbourhood variation in community capacity and the role of policy

Social capital varies in form and extent across ostensibly similar neighbourhoods with comparable levels of deprivation. This reflects a series of inherited local characteristics, linked in part to the variable legacy of past policy intervention, differential local social, economic and cultural histories, and the uneven distribution of community assets.

Interviews in the case-study areas of Cheetwood, Hulme, Chorlton Park and Whalley Range suggest variation in the precise form of social capital, implying a heterogeneity at odds with crude attempts to categorise different deprived neighbourhoods as uniformly disadvantaged. In Hulme, for example, a long history of community involvement in regeneration is linked to dynamic local politics, expressed through dense networks of representational bodies and a prevalence of vocal and visible community activists. This reflects policy intervention over several decades, most notably in the 1990s via the City Challenge programme and associated community-focused activity under Moss Side and Hulme Partnership and the EU URBAN initiative.²⁸

But while extensive and elaborate endowments of social capital in areas such as Hulme reflect capacity-building efforts linked to long-term policy intervention, neighbourhoods with seemingly similar socio-economic profiles are sometimes characterised by a comparative paucity of the types of structure around which citizen activism and involvement can cohere. Weakly developed levels of social capital in Whalley Range were said by interviewees to reflect in part a less youthful demographic profile than neighbouring Hulme, but also — more significantly — a lack of investment in communal facilities and spaces, linked to the narrow focus of regeneration efforts

on supporting brownfield residential development alone:

‘The trouble is most of the developments in the [Whalley Range] area have been around private sector housing, there has been very little in the way of community facilities ... the things that people care about ... It’s a strange place because there are no community facilities, there is no community centre’ (Local resident interview, 2011)

Across all four case-study neighbourhoods, the variable form and extent of social capital correlates with external stimuli in the form of policy intervention, and with the level and type of third-sector activity. The result is disparity in neighbourhood stocks of social knowledge residing in activists, the density and richness of associational structures, and the range of physical assets such as meeting facilities. The latter, in particular, were repeatedly identified by interviewees as playing a critical role in developing and maintaining resident engagement with neighbourhood issues. The contribution of community amenities and facilities to the formation and sustenance of social capital is important because, as Curley²⁹ notes, ‘neighbourhood resources [are] the most significant predictor of social capital’. Local facilities can enable resident interaction, the development of collective identity and the cultivation of community-minded behaviour that can ultimately become habitual.

Yet there is evidence that the narrow emphasis of recent regeneration in at least some of the case-study areas, and a preoccupation with high-density private housing development on former brownfield sites, in particular, has meant there have been few attempts to provide community assets and facilities. In Whalley Range, for instance, there is little evidence of any sensitivity to the need to foster social capital or develop community

capacity via the provision of relevant amenities. And although housing development in Whalley Range occurred in a deprived area that lacked the type of holistic multifaceted area-based regeneration programme evident in Hulme and elsewhere in Manchester, there have been few attempts to make use of planning gain or any other mechanisms that could conceivably have been employed to ensure provision of community assets. Weak macro-economic conditions are likely to continue to limit the scope for developer contributions to community facilities, whether linked to individual developments via established planning gain mechanisms (section 106 agreements), or in future through pooled and redistributed funds raised via the Community Infrastructure Levy.³⁰

Accessing and exploiting social capital

Where intervention has been associated with positive gains in social capital, it has tended to involve either major area-based regeneration programmes (as in Hulme) or housing development by Registered Social Landlords (RSLs). But even in those neighbourhoods in which, unlike Whalley Range, 'hard' physical regeneration has been accompanied by 'soft' interventions aimed at nurturing social capital and engaging residents in the policy process, there are nevertheless important variations in the perceived accessibility of community facilities. Hulme has experienced sustained investment in a range of different facilities aimed at local, regional and — reflecting the area's history as an area of settlement for residents with Afro-Caribbean roots — national communities. The effect is sometimes to restrict the degree to which different amenities are perceived by end-users as relevant and reachable, restricting accumulated social capital to limited subsets of the local population. For

resident interviewees in Cheetwood, inaccessibility was viewed more as a function of perceived geographical remoteness rather than socio-cultural distance, in that investment in community facilities had tended to gravitate to the wider area of Cheetham Hill. Both cases provide further evidence of the potential role for external intervention in order to manage the distribution of neighbourhood social capital and its accessibility. As Holman and Rydin note, there may be a need for extra-local intervention to develop 'bridging' and 'linking' social capital, prevent insularity within established structures and promote inclusion among residents of heterogeneous neighbourhoods.³¹

There is, then, something of a dissonance between depth and breadth in the accessibility of social capital: even where past policy intervention has stimulated deep reserves of social capital, they tend to reside in particular structures, sometimes restricted to particular geographical areas and on occasion confined to narrow groups of individuals. Within local areas such as Hulme, interview data imply that stocks of social capital are often 'locked-in' to identifiable structures, representing an artificial and unrepresentative resource which — without further external stimulus — would be difficult or impossible to replicate in a way that could support unfunded regeneration activity. As one interviewee noted, residents involved in the policy process to date have constituted 'only a narrow cross-section of the community ... [they] exist very much away from the rest of the people of Hulme' (Local councillor interview, 2011). The widely acknowledged, but often intractable, challenge is therefore to extend involvement in urban regeneration beyond a 'committed few' of serial — and sometimes unrepresentative — participants, whose existence varies across

neighbourhoods subject to differing levels and forms of past policy intervention (Ref. 26, p. 21).

Maintaining and harnessing social capital in a context of urban austerity

The case-study interviews suggest that stocks of social capital are highly dependent on past policy intervention, linked in particular to multidimensional area-based regeneration programmes and/or the efforts of RSLs in respect of social housing. The withdrawal of targeted regeneration funding streams and reforms to social housing finance therefore present major — and potentially existential — challenges to some of the local voluntary institutions around which community capacity in deprived areas has cohered. Across the case studies, interviewees were deeply pessimistic about the scope for offsetting diminishing public- and voluntary-sector budgets and maintaining community resources. There was particular disquiet among interviewees about the abruptness with which comparatively generous regeneration funding had been either reduced or terminated after the national change of government in 2010. New funding streams were said to offer, at best, partial compensation for the withdrawal of resources. The changing nature of funding for the social housing-sector was identified as especially important. Some interviewees noted the potential for RSLs to begin to fill the funding gap left by the reduction in public-sector support for community development and regeneration activity. Others expressed concern about ongoing attempts to promote private funding of social housing, including potential changes in approach adopted by for-profit providers driven by commercial concerns, possessing few local ties and lacking the sense of social responsibility said to characterise most RSLs.

These concerns are important, because community capacity may be key to the ability of deprived neighbourhoods to withstand cuts in targeted regeneration programmes, community development funding and mainstream service spending — especially in a context in which listless economic growth also limits the scope for private-sector-led regeneration. The problem, however, is that what Neal Lawson³² has referred to as a wider ‘social recession’ — sometimes paralleling economic downturn, but on occasion independent of it — acts as a significant brake on the ability of residents in poor neighbourhoods to mobilise, both individually and via collective institutions. This has been compounded, according to interviewees, by the Cameron administration’s consciously passive approach in respect of capacity building. Indeed, as Scott³³ notes, government has been quick to present as a virtue the absence of any type of plan or strategy to promote enhanced civic activism as part of the Big Society, preferring instead to allow the process to evolve more organically and without the stymying interference of the state.

Reflecting this, central government support for extra-state local activism since 2010 has been limited in scale and permissive in tone. It has involved, for example, non-financial support in the form of guidance to help community-based organisations circumvent what is held to be overly bureaucratic regulation, and thereby stimulate a ‘can do’ attitude among citizen volunteers.³⁴ It has also involved attempts to harness what is perceived as untapped private-sector largesse, with government announcing as part of the 2013 budget its intention to reform tax relief provisions to help facilitate enhanced corporate social responsibility³⁵ — following a long history of often frustrated efforts to embed in British cities a US-style culture of business involvement

in resolving problematic urban social and economic affairs.^{36,37} While this model assumes an increased role for both local residents and business elites, where central funding remains it has tended to be restricted in scale, and allotted competitively on a seed corn basis. For example, the lottery-funded Big Local programme — investing some £200m over 10–15 years across 150 neighbourhoods — provides only modest funding to support the type of capacity-building effort that might underpin future localist regeneration. The same applies to attempts in the wake of the Localism Act to promote neighbourhood plans authored in part by local residents, which are underpinned by limited funds of £9.5m over two years, allocated to neighbourhoods on a discretionary basis to a maximum of £7,000.³⁸

While government adopts a largely hands-off approach to community capacity building, employing a mix of exhortation, competitively allocated developmental funding and targeted fiscal incentives to stimulate increased activity among private and voluntary non-state actors, remaining area-based initiatives largely eschew any involvement in neighbourhood social affairs. Whether through new institutions such as Local Enterprise Partnerships, targeted schemes such as Enterprise Zones or projects funded through Regional Growth Fund, the emphasis is squarely on instilling economic growth, with little or no focus on building social capital or involving residents. This is in marked contrast to many of the programmes under the NSNR, where encouraging resident involvement (and sometimes leadership) was an explicit goal — if one realised only intermittently.³⁹ In a context of constricted financial resources, where priorities remain centred on economic growth, support for community groups via targeted regeneration policy is unlikely to be forthcoming.

CONCLUSION: NEIGHBOURHOODS, LAISSEZ-FAIRE LOCALISM AND THE 'DEVOLVED AXE'

The experience of the four case-study areas in constructing and maintaining social capital highlights four main messages in relation to the role of past and future urban policy, and in respect of the wider state–citizen relationship that characterises austerity politics.

First, case-study research demonstrates the dependence of deprived neighbourhoods upon external intervention in support of proactive efforts to develop social capital. Poorly developed reserves of social capital in the Whalley Range case-study area are especially instructive because, although the area has witnessed significant regeneration in the form of housing construction on derelict land, the lack of any accompanying community development efforts mean that social capital is more weakly developed than in areas with comparable socio-economic profiles (notably Hulme), which have been subject to more broadly based urban policy initiatives over much longer periods of time. The implication here is that local resident mobilisation in poor neighbourhoods is unlikely to materialise (or be sustained) unless government operates in a more interventionist manner, providing a countercyclical stimulus to offset localised social recession. This type of resurrected and reoriented spatial Keynesianism,⁴⁰ when directed towards capacity building in deprived areas, might reinforce neighbourhood social resilience. It might increase the ability of local areas to withstand what the New Local Government Network has described as the 'devolved axe': the apparent devolution of power and responsibility to local actors, but in a context of wide-ranging expenditure cuts.⁴¹ Yet the deliberately modest scale and extent of resources on offer from central government prompted

profound scepticism among interviewees about the likely efficacy of support mechanisms introduced after 2010 to excite activity within civil society and pump-prime the model of *laissez-faire* localism envisaged by Whitehall.

A second conclusion is therefore that government needs to consider more effective programmes to maintain existing capacity among community groups, still less enhance it further. Some deprived areas have highly developed and rich cultures of social capital, but the Manchester experience confirms that this often depends upon concerted policy intervention, resource availability, and the persistence of explicit efforts to build community capacity. This applies to areas in which levels of social capital are already raised, and traditions of involvement in regeneration policy are discernible, where the challenge is of preventing disenchantment and disengagement linked to the withdrawal of external funds — and of avoiding the world-weariness that is sometimes a feature associated with long-term intervention of the type evident in regeneration hotspots such as East Manchester (Ref. 39, p. 522). It also applies, conversely, to areas in which resident activism and participation are less well developed, whether policy rich or otherwise. In other words, there is a need to ensure that — to employ the concept developed by Lowndes and Sullivan⁴² — formal state-authored mechanisms for ‘invited’ citizen participation provide a basis for more elemental ‘popular’ involvement of the type envisaged under the government’s localism agenda.

This means thinking about successors to earlier initiatives such as the Community Empowerment Fund, and taking stock of the limited effectiveness of experimental capacity-building efforts (such as the Community Organisers and Community First programmes) that have followed in their wake.^{43,44} Neighbourhood

Community Budgets, established in 2012 on a pilot basis in 12 areas as a mechanism for cross-sector resource sharing and the creation of cross-institutional scale economies, could conceivably operate in future as a flexible and resident-influenced means of delivering services in a coordinated and locally sensitive way.^{45,46} Equally, they follow in a long sequence of abandoned experiments with neighbourhood management and participatory budgeting, and at least part of the emphasis that underlies them centres on maximising efficiency in the use of diminishing resources. This reinforces the potential difficulty of reconciling, on one hand, devolution aimed at increased community activism and involvement in developing and implementing policy, and, on the other, the tendency for central and local government to promote neighbourhood-based organisation of service delivery as part of wider efforts in search of more efficient and cost-effective governance. As Durose *et al.*¹⁰ note, the paradox is that devolution of power and responsibility to sub-local-authority areas can overwhelm neighbourhoods, as local policy actors focus on the complexities and immediate practicalities of coordinating service delivery rather than stimulating and sustaining resident involvement.

The third conclusion centres on the implications of experience across the four case-study neighbourhoods for emerging ideas, in different national contexts, about ‘austerity urbanism’.⁴⁷ A characteristic of the latter, in light of Manchester’s experience, might be the possibility of increased reliance — in view of diminishing public funding to promote capacity building — on locally initiated mobilisation in support of the development and implementation of socially focused regeneration activity. This is a significant departure from earlier periods of British urban policy in which a two-way relationship between state and

citizen, with the former often providing the stimulus for the involvement of the latter, provided the basis on which neighbourhood-based urban regeneration initiatives would develop in ways that accorded to local resident needs and wants. The contraction of direct state involvement means that urban regeneration may become exclusively or largely the province of private-sector funders and local citizens, assuming that market conditions are sufficiently buoyant to provoke some form of developer interest and that local social relations are conducive to the mobilisation of residents. The problem, however, is that neither assumption seems credible for many of the deprived neighbourhoods around which past national regeneration policy has been organised, from which private investors have often shied, and in which resident social capital is either underdeveloped or reliant on continued external inducement. Straitened macro-economic conditions coupled with 'social recession' further limit the plausibility of a localist form of regeneration emerging along the lines championed by government.

In this respect, the experience of Manchester (and other English cities) begins to shed empirical light on austerity urbanism and the ways in which — and the intensity with which — it is expressed in different national contexts. In light of the potential significance of shifts envisaged in state–citizen relationships under localist-style regeneration, it is possible to argue that cities in England may be doubly disadvantaged in respect of the future scope for community capacity building. There is an obvious contrast, on one hand, with the more vibrant tradition of community activism that has been able to develop in many cities in the US, and which successive British governments, pre-dating the emphasis on localism and the Big Society, have sought in different ways to mimic.⁴⁸ What is perhaps

significant about the culture of community self-organisation in impoverished neighbourhoods in some US cities is that its roots stem in part from a history of spasmodic and inconsistent federal government involvement in local regeneration (some notable exceptions such as Empowerment Zones and Hope VI notwithstanding⁴⁷), and the resultant pressure for community actors to mobilise to fill the gap left on occasion by the national state. But there is also a contrast, on the other hand, with the less centralised government structures evident in other European countries, where sub-national institutions that are relatively stronger and more firmly established than in England may prove better equipped to resist or offset austerity-driven attempts by national states to reduce their involvement in neighbourhood regeneration. As one recent review of European cities put it, 'austerity programs ... are decimating the traditional fiscal transfers from superior levels of government to cities and regions, leaving them to their own resources more than ever before'.⁵⁰ The problem is, however, that in spite of recent experimental efforts to enhance the fiscal autonomy and governance capacity of some English city-regions, swingeing reductions in central government funding of local authorities have further eroded the already limited ability of urban areas to compensate for the loss of a national programme of targeted regeneration.

A fourth concluding point, in light of central government's retreat from neighbourhood regeneration, is that failure to ensure that the state continues to play an active role in nurturing community capacity risks exacerbating wider socio-spatial polarisation. Devolution of responsibility for developing and implementing regeneration from the national state to local actors is one example of what Peck calls 'devolved risk' (Ref. 47, p. 631). A strong state is

important in promoting national policy for inclusion and equality, which can underpin citizen activism in local communities.⁹ In the absence of a more interventionist state, the significance of uneven community capacity and variable market circumstances is reinforced, with the result that broader disparities in social and economic well-being are more likely to ensue. As Featherstone *et al.*⁵¹ note, in a discussion of ‘austerity localism’, ‘the default actors who are empowered by emerging forms of localism are likely to be those with the resources, expertise and social capital to become involved in the provision of services and facilities’. Neighbourhoods that lack these types of resource are especially vulnerable because — in light of what may subsequently come to be viewed as something akin to a long decade of low or no growth — insipid local economic conditions limit the scope for an expanded private-sector role to compensate for the curtailment of publically funded regeneration. And the need for an active state is even more acute in local areas in which the limited potential for meaningful private-sector involvement is compounded by underdeveloped or poorly harnessed forms of social capital and a resultant inability to develop locally led regeneration.

Notes and References

1. Lawless, P. (1986), ‘The evolution of spatial policy: A case study of inner-urban policy in the United Kingdom 1968–1981’, Pion, London.
2. Robson, B. (1988), ‘Those inner cities: reconciling the economic and social aims of urban policy’, Clarendon Press, Oxford.
3. Kearns, A. (1995), ‘Active citizenship and local governance: Political and geographical dimensions’, *Political Geography*, Vol. 14, No. 2, pp. 155–175.
4. Raco, M. and Imrie, R. (2000), ‘Governmentality and rights and responsibilities in urban policy’, *Environment and Planning A*, Vol. 32, No. 12, pp. 2187–2204.
5. Hall, S. (2003), ‘The “Third Way” revisited: “New” Labour, spatial policy and the national strategy for neighbourhood renewal’, *Planning Practice and Research*, Vol. 18, No. 4, pp. 265–277.
6. Davies, J. and Pill, M. (2012), ‘Empowerment or abandonment? Prospects for neighbourhood revitalization under the big society’, *Public Money and Management*, Vol. 32, No. 3, pp. 193–200.
7. Lowndes, V. and Pratchett, L. (2012), ‘Local governance under the coalition government: austerity, localism and the “Big Society”’, *Local Government Studies*, Vol. 38, No. 1, pp. 21–40.
8. HM Government (2010), ‘Building a stronger civil society: A strategy for voluntary and community groups, charities and social enterprises’, HM Government, London. Available at https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/78927/building-stronger-civil-society.pdf, last accessed on 25th February 2013.
9. See, for example, Kisby, B. (2010), ‘The Big Society: Power to the people?’, *The Political Quarterly*, Vol. 81, No. 4, pp. 484–491.
10. See, for example, Durose, C., France, J., Lupton, R. and Richardson, L. (2011), ‘Towards the “Big Society”: What role for neighbourhood working? Evidence from a comparative European study’, CASEpapers, CASE/154, Centre for Analysis of Social Exclusion, London School of Economics and Political Science, London.
11. Putnam, R. (1993), ‘Making democracy work: Civic traditions in modern Italy’, Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ.
12. Putnam, R. (2000), ‘Bowling alone: The collapse and revival of American community’, Simon & Schuster, New York, NY.
13. Bourdieu, P. and Wacquant, L. (1992), ‘An invitation to reflexive sociology’, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, p. 199.
14. Coleman, J. (1990), ‘Foundations of social theory’, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, p. 302.
15. Loury, G. (1992), ‘The economics of discrimination: Getting to the core of the problem’, *Harvard Journal of African American Public Policy*, Vol. 1, No. 1, pp. 91–110.
16. Coté, S., Healy, T., Helliwell, J. and Field, S. (2001), ‘The well-being of nations: The role of human and social capital’, *Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development*, Paris, p. 41.
17. Lin, N. (2002), ‘Social capital: A theory of structure and action’, Cambridge University Press, New York, NY, p. 25.
18. Field, J. (2008), ‘Social capital’, Routledge, London, p. 1.
19. Robson, B., Lymperopoulou, K. and Rae, A. (2008), ‘People on the move: Exploring the functional roles of deprived neighbourhoods’, *Environment and Planning A*, Vol. 40, No. 11, pp. 2693–2714.
20. The Chartered Institution of Highways and Transportation (2000), ‘Providing for journeys on foot’, The Chartered Institution of Highways and Transportation, London.
21. Russell, G., Stowe, P., Twomey, J. and Robson, B.

- (2009), 'Sustainable communities', report for the Manchester Independent Economic Review, New Economy Manchester, Manchester, Appendix 8, available at <http://www.manchester-review.org.uk/download/?id=610>, last accessed on 27th March, 2013.
22. See, for example, Rae, A. (2012), 'Spatially concentrated deprivation in England: An empirical assessment', *Regional Studies*, Vol. 46, No. 9, pp. 1183–1199.
 23. Harding, A., Harloe, M. and Rees, J. (2010), 'Manchester's Bust Regime?', *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, Vol. 34, No. 4, pp. 981–991.
 24. Jones, M. and Ward, K. (1998), 'Grabbing grants? The role of coalitions in urban economic development', *Local Economy*, Vol. 13, No. 1, pp. 28–38.
 25. As illustrated, for instance, by the evidence-gathering visit to Manchester of members of the parliamentary select committee examining regeneration issues: House of Commons Communities and Local Government Committee (2011), 'Regeneration', sixth report of session 2010–12, Volume I, HC 1014, The Stationery Office, London.
 26. See, for example, Blakeley, G. and Evans, B. (2009), 'Who participates, how and why in urban regeneration projects? The case of the new "city" of East Manchester', *Social Policy and Administration*, Vol. 43, No. 1, pp. 15–32.
 27. See, for example, Durose, C. and Lowndes, V. (2010), 'Neighbourhood governance: Contested rationales within a multi-level setting — a study of Manchester', *Local Government Studies*, Vol. 36, No. 3, pp. 341–359.
 28. Harding, A., Kyng, E., Perry, B. and Puglisi, M. (2002), 'Hulme: Ten years on', Manchester City Council, Manchester, available at http://www.manchester.gov.uk/download/2750/hulme_10_years_on, last accessed on 25th February, 2013.
 29. Curley, A. (2010), 'Relocating the poor: Social capital and neighbourhood resources', *Journal of Urban Affairs*, Vol. 32, No. 1, pp. 79–103.
 30. For a summary of theoretical and empirical issues connected to these and other mechanisms for securing planning gain in respect of housing development in England, see Crook, T. and Monk, S. (2011), 'Planning gains, providing homes', *Housing Studies*, Vol. 26, Nos. 7–8, pp. 997–1018.
 31. Holman, N. and Rydin, Y. (2013), 'What can social capital tell us about planning under localism?', *Local Government Studies*, Vol. 39, No. 1, pp. 71–88.
 32. Lawson, N. (2007), 'New Labour has presided over a social recession', *The Guardian*, 22nd February, available at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2007/feb/22/comment.politics>, last accessed on 25th February, 2013.
 33. Scott, M. (2011), 'Reflections on "The Big Society"', *Community Development Journal*, Vol. 46, No. 1, pp. 132–137.
 34. Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (2013), "'Can do" guidance will make organising volunteer events simpler', press release, 25th March, Department for Business Innovation and Skills, London, available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/can-do-guidance-will-make-organising-volunteer-events-simpler>, last accessed on 26th March, 2013.
 35. Cabinet Office (2013), 'Minister hails new tax incentives as "major step" for social investment market', press release, 21st March, Cabinet Office, London, available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/minister-hails-new-tax-incentives-as-major-step-for-social-investment-market>, last accessed on 26th March, 2013.
 36. See, for example, Hambleton, R. and Taylor, M. (1993), 'Reflections on transatlantic policy transfer', in Hambleton, R. and Taylor, M. (eds) 'People in cities: A transatlantic policy exchange', *School for Advanced Urban Studies, Bristol*, pp. 235–248.
 37. See also, for instance, Squires, G. and Hall, S. (2013), 'Lesson (un)learning in spatially targeted fiscal incentive policy: Enterprise Zones (England) and Empowerment Zones (United States)', *Land Use Policy*, Vol. 33, pp. 81–89.
 38. Department for Communities and Local Government (2013), '£9.5m to support hundreds of communities to create neighbourhood plans', press release, 14th March, Department for Communities and Local Government, London, available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/9-5-million-to-support-hundreds-of-communities-to-create-neighbourhood-plans>, last accessed on 26th March, 2013.
 39. See, for example, Lawless, P. and Pearson, S. (2012), 'Outcomes from community engagement in urban regeneration: Evidence from England's New Deal for Communities programme', *Planning Theory and Practice*, Vol. 13, No. 4, pp. 509–527.
 40. Martin, R. (1989), 'The new regional economics and the politics of regional restructuring', in Albrechts, L., Moulaert, F., Roberts, P. and Swyngedouw, E. (eds) 'Regional policy at the crossroads: European perspectives', Jessica Kingsley, London, pp. 27–51.
 41. Turley, A. (2010), 'What's left of localism?', New Local Government Network, London, available at <http://www.nlgn.org.uk/public/2010/whats-left-of-localism/>, last accessed on 24th March, 2013.
 42. Lowndes, V. and Sullivan, H. (2008), 'How low-can you go? Rationales and challenges for neighbourhood governance', *Public Administration*, Vol. 86, No. 1, pp. 53–74.
 43. For a critique, see for example Kisby, Ref. 9 above.
 44. For a comprehensive review of shifts in policy over time, see Taylor, M. (2012), 'The changing fortunes of community', *Voluntary Sector Review*, Vol. 3, No. 1, pp. 15–34.
 45. DCLG (2012), 'Neighbourhood community

- budgets: Introducing the pilot areas', Department for Communities and Local Government, London.
46. HM Government (2011), 'Community Budgets prospectus', HM Government, London, available at https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/6272/2009783.pdf, last accessed on 25th February, 2013.
 47. Peck, J. (2012), 'Austerity urbanism', *City*, Vol. 16, No. 6, pp. 626–655.
 48. Raco, M. (2003), 'New Labour, community and the future of Britain's urban renaissance', in Imrie, R. and Raco, M. (eds) 'Urban renaissance: New Labour, community and urban policy', The Policy Press, Bristol, pp. 235–249.
 49. For a review of federal urban policy, see Katz, M. (2010), 'Narratives of failure? Historical interpretations of federal urban policy', *City and Community*, Vol. 9, No. 1, pp. 13–22.
 50. Ietri, D. and Kresl, P. (2012), 'Introduction', in Kresl, P. and Ietri, D. (eds), 'European cities and global competitiveness: Strategies for improving performance', Cheltenham, Edward Elgar, pp. 3–14.
 51. Featherstone, D., Ince, A., Mackinnon, D., Strauss, K. and Cumbers, A. (2012), 'Progressive localism and the construction of political alternatives', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, Vol. 37, No. 2, pp. 177–182.