

ESRC Public Policy Seminar

What role for policing in securing economic and social well-being?

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The topic of this ESRC Public Policy seminar reflects a series of changes that have taken place with British criminal justice policy, policing and community safety over the past 15 years. These changes have been discussed as an increasing intermeshing of criminal justice and social policy – a criminalisation of social policy and the socialisation of crime. In fact, I want to expand on this argument to enquire over the extent to which the extensive field of urban policy and most notably urban regeneration has been subjected to such process of criminalisation. Doing so, this presentation takes as a starting point Allan Cochrane's (2007) observation that we need to understand urban policy as an active social policy, one that actively concerns itself not only with the renewal of physical infrastructure but its citizens in similar ways. Evidence of these developments is ample, ranging from Secure by Design standards to the extensive range of orders available to public sector organisations, and their supporting agencies that form part of the extended police family.

Urban regeneration, notably with large-scale programmes such as the Single Regeneration Budget and New Deal for Communities, has focussed strongly on residential areas with the majority of these foregrounding regeneration by property-led investment –in places merely a different name for gentrification. These have raised a whole set of issues about the impact of policing and regulatory measures. The development of antisocial behaviour strategies, reassurance policing and integrated neighbourhood management gives evidence to the ways in which policing underscores such regeneration initiatives. Yet, if we want to explore the role of policing agencies for securing economic and social well-being, we need to consider the spaces of commercial, retailing, entertainment and service sector activity as these have been at the centre of economic growth strategies for city regions. And with this, the city's central public spaces and their management move into view.

A reasonably straightforward assumption seems to be at play in public debates and policy programmes: the one whereby more policing provides more security and thus translates into economic growth. In practice, this seems to translate easily into headlines like 'city centre beggars are driving shoppers away' (Nicoll 2001). Enframed by models of urban competitiveness, place-marketing and an overall entrepreneurial city, safety and security have become prime place-attributes to outperform fellow competitors over retail, tourism, leisure and other growing service sectors. In this argument, economic

well-being has become reducible to the competitiveness of urban economies, more specifically: the vitality of city centre and other commercial spaces.

With this presentation, I would like to place these demands on policing into a number of tensions. Some of these tensions are rather old questions in need of being asked again:

- Does economic growth equal economic well-being?
- Whose economic well-being are we talking about?
- Can there be economic well-being without social well-being?

These questions are all concerned with the role of primary definers, those agencies and key individuals who are able to define which questions are being posed in public debates and, crucially, able to provide a strong steer towards how they are answered. These questions thus enquire into the role of the public, of public spaces and of the public realm. They also enquire into the policing, regulating, managing, governing – in all: the politics – of these various public entities.

The role of policing in deprived neighbourhoods and the importance of improving well-being necessarily centrally concerns 'community'. The complexity and ambiguity of such community and the inherent ambiguity for its roles as victims, agents, perpetrators or beneficiaries has been subject to earlier presentations. However, there remains a dangerous inability to address these complexities over what kinds of communities are present and have stake in central public spaces. Instead, there exists a tendency to conceive of the city centre community as one of businesses only, adequately represented by local retailers' associations. These struggles of power, influence and primary definitions lie at the heart of many public-private bodies. Thus, while participation of varied communities have been problematised substantially in residential settings, such debates remain in the large absent for city centre publics.

Across North America and Europe we have witnessed the formation of umbrella organisations to manage Central Business Districts and town centres. Most notably this has been achieved through the establishment of Business Improvement Districts (BIDs). Originating from Canada, BIDs are a common vehicle for delivering the regeneration and management of commercially valuable downtown locations. With a vote among rateable businesses in the proposed area, BIDs present one of the most advanced examples of privatised governance of urban spaces due to the fact that once approved, participation becomes compulsory and funding for services is achieved by mandatory fees payable by all businesses within the district. The introduction of BIDs in the UK builds on an extensive network of town centre management (TCM) schemes across the country since the early 1990s, with

the first BID established in 2001. Since then, we have witnessed a steady expansion with votes taken currently almost weekly and with currently over 70 schemes established.

Observers of international developments recognise the lively transfer of policy and practice around BIDs as their rise to best practice is closely aligned to the export of Zero Tolerance Policing from New York across the world. They will also note the role of national umbrella organisations such as the US International Downtown Association and the British Association of Town Centre Management in providing a national platform for lobbying, providing policy advice and other membership services to TCM and BID schemes. The key tasks for BIDs vary but on the main they are organised around marketing and promotional activity; management and regulatory functions as well as other services for their members. Management and regulatory tasks for BID areas consist of the maintenance and improvement of street furniture, cleansing, the monitoring of litter, graffiti, parking and rubbish disposal as well as the provision of uniformed policing presences. The latter are often organised through wardens or other uniformed agencies employed by the BID. The BID thus effectively takes on, through contractual arrangements with the local authority, the delivery of previously statutory tasks.

Various forms of public-private partnerships have been used to establish original TCM bodies, with the impetus stemming in the main from local economic development companies (LEDC) and local authorities. Here, LEDCs pursue the role they are tasked to: to attract and promote inward investment and to provide vehicles to manage these. The key sectors for this are arguably those most present in city centre space: retail and leisure businesses. Thus, Reeve's (2004) observation that retail interest – and notably that of leading multiple retailers – is dominating many UK schemes should not be surprising. However, driven by commercial values TCMs acquire powers that are not democratically accountable and pursue a particular approach to the management of urban spaces responsive to their interests.

This leads us to examine the impact and outcomes of these initiatives along three lines: with regard to claims over cleaning up and excluding segments of the urban population from public spaces; the anticipated impacts on increased economic growth; and lastly implications for urban governance.

Evidence of exclusion of vulnerable populations from public urban spaces is one of the most-researched fields of urban studies and related disciplines in the UK and abroad. Evidence is ample and widespread that homeless people, young people, and others who use public spaces in regenerated city centres have become subjected to intensified policing and management activities. Studies by Lees (2003) on Portland, US, and Peyroux (2006) on Johannesburg, SA, serve as an exemplar for the many. With a wealth of studies, we find evidence of the specificities with which local partnerships

operate along a continuum of enforcement and support and within a variety of newly emerging institutional and *ad hoc* cooperations and alliances to manage these spaces and populations amidst demands from TCM, LEDC and local businesses. New and emerging within these working arrangements are divisions of labour between various regulatory bodies and the increasing extent to which new organisations are set up to focus in on supervised and policed social policy interventions. In the UK, this is exemplified by the stronger emphasis on social support played by Neighbourhood Wardens (as result of division of labour with Police Community Support Officers). Research on the policing of downtown Los Angeles (Eick *et al.* 2004; Fuller and Marquardt 2008) in turn shows the often repressive role taken by non-profit organisations in cleaning up and – at request – moving on homeless populations.

Evidence of promoting economic vitality by more security is a lot more difficult to present. The long ongoing debate about the effectiveness of CCTV and the numerous evaluations of schemes and their impact before and after introduction not only on crime prevention and detection, but more crucially on stimulating economic growth have borne witness to this (Tilley 1998; Welsh and Farrington 2002).

For urban politics, the implications are significant in terms of newly established modes of governance. Increasingly complicated setups of partnerships across public, private and third sector organisations have altered urban politics in form and content as much as they have posited new demands on policing agents, be they public or private. The establishment of BIDs presents the most advanced case of private urban governance by creating spaces to which the adjacent businesses, by way of paying fees, can stake claims more powerful than before. The implications of these changed ownership rights over central spaces are beginning to emerge in places such as Los Angeles, Johannesburg and Portland. They point to the attempts to define legitimately a city centre community as one of businesses only. They also contribute further to what Ward (2007, 667) identifies as a fragmentation of the city:

“into discrete, governable spaces. These ‘micro-spaces’... encourage inter-urban competition... and a share in the spatial division of consumption. In contrast to the recent traditions of resource redistribution between places within cities, and between cities within regions the BIDs model builds on existing inequalities, effectively breaking up the urban sphere into competing units.”

This in turn has significant consequences for (a) any kind of urban politics; and (b) the means, demands, and outcomes of the policing of these spaces. The tensions created by this new governance for policing are visible in the demands placed on policing with regards to the night-time economy. Here, pursued urban investment strategies have create a level of public disorder in

city centres that places large demands on the policing and regulation of these for numerous agencies from licensing officers, taxi stewards to public police.

These findings highlight the necessity to question the logic as promoted by local economic development, TCM and other place-managers and image campaigners that more policing and the exclusion of those who do not fit with commercial uses of urban public space easily maps onto an increase in economic well-being. They also demonstrate the extent to which urban regeneration policies operate as active social policies into which policing and regulation are increasingly tightly interwoven. As such, economic well-being does not equal economic competitiveness; neither is it clear that economic competitiveness results *per se* in the economic well-being of a city's population. These are subject to political choice and decisions as well as the struggles to achieve these. As a social policy, economic well-being cannot sensibly be conceived of separate from social well-being.

However, given the complexity of public-private urban governance under conditions of an entrepreneurial urbanism in arrangements such as TCM or BIDs means that primary definers from retailers' associations to local economic development agents are equipped with the ability to normalise – to present as commonsensical – their particular claims and definition as to the purpose of a city's public spaces. A privatised urban governance model such as BIDs has resulted in making resistance to particular pressures and demands, e.g., for extra police time or the prioritising of some demands over others, a lot harder than in governance arrangements that are more transparent and democratically accountably.

This happens at a time when urban policy as active social policy leaves public space to fulfil a whole set of roles and functions for people who do not have safe private spaces for sleeping, socialising or living available to them – such as the homeless, young people and other vulnerable groups. It is for reasons like these that the politics of public space must not be left out and that questions like those over definitions of economic and social well-being and who is to benefit from these require our attention.

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