

Cities in the 1990s

Gerry Stoker
and Stephen Young

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Cities in the 1990s

local choice for a balanced strategy

By

Gerry Stoker
and
Stephen Young

Series editors: John Benington and Mike Geddes

LONGMAN



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in making planning work*

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We hope this series will stimulate a lively and critical exchange of ideas and experience about policy making in the public sector. The editors welcome contributions to the debate from local policy makers, managers and academics.

John Benington and Mike Geddes

Preface

The case for this book rests on our feeling that there is a gap in the literature on cities. To be sure, publications of all kinds continue to proliferate, especially on inner city issues. Some of it is descriptive. Some of it is generalised. Some of it is polemical. Some of it is negative. Much of it analyses the impacts on cities and people of policies and wider pressures for change. But too little is focussed on the perspectives of policy-makers. When asked whether they have read a particular article, pamphlet or book their responses usually go something like 'Yes, it was very interesting, but what can I do with it?' or 'Quite fascinating, but it is too generalised'; or 'the trouble is that the writer wanted to change the political system. I'm working to this month's committee cycle; and trying to find time to think about next year's budget.' So we have tried to relate to the needs of senior policy-makers in cities. It is not a 'how to do it' book. It is one that seeks to conceptualise and contextualise the issues confronting policy-makers. It aims to be an analysis of the key issues and problems that need addressing.

Over the last 20 years many have tried to help us understand the complexities of cities, the nature of decision-making processes at all levels of government, and the range of implementation problems that arise. We have also learnt from academic colleagues and students; from interviews all over the country, from the front rooms of those running neighbourhood-based not-for-profit projects, to Marsham Street offices; from the informal chats that are so fascinating at conferences; and from the meetings of a range of academic and professional associations. Stephen would

particularly like to mention the study tours organized by the Town and Country Planning Association; and Gerry his years at INLOGOV. We are especially grateful to John Hudson, Chris Wood, Chris Bannister, Paul Wilding, Riki Therivel, John Stewart and Vivien Lowndes who have commented on draft chapters. But these are our views and not those of any of the organisations or people with which we are associated. Whatever the faults we are responsible for them.

Apart from our intellectual debts, we are also indebted to those who have converted our writing into this book. Catherine Smith, Joanne Crolla-Parkhouse and Shahnaz Holder have cheerfully coped with Stephen's illegible scribbling; and Grace Hunter, Margaret Leckie and Alison Bennett with Gerry's more readable scrawl. We are also grateful to our editors Mike Geddes and John Benington; and to James Banfield at Longmans for their patient help and encouragement.

But it is the nearest and dearest who always bear the real costs of living with writers especially when they have too many other things to do anyway. Stephen's debts are to Anne for her love and support, and her distractions. She has also womanfully accompanied him on all sorts of strange expeditions exploring inner city sites, and lost green corridors. In such places he was especially grateful for the realism behind the questions that started 'But...?' Gerry gives his thanks and love to Deborah, Bethany, Robert and Benjamin.

Stephen Young, *Manchester*
Gerry Stoker, *Glasgow*
March 1993

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Introduction

This book is about the positive role for local authorities in regenerating urban areas. The argument is made by way of an extensive review of the experience of local government and local communities in tackling the problems they face. Concrete policy options are considered at various stages but this book is not aimed at providing a comprehensive review of substantive, urban policies. Indeed part of the argument of the book is that to think in terms of policies being applied on a uniform basis, to tackle the problems of cities, is mistaken. It belies the variety and complexity of the challenges facing our towns and cities. This book, then, makes the case for an approach to solving urban problems that relies on local leadership to make strategic choices and balance the diverse interests of the communities that live in urban areas. Local authorities, working through and alongside other interests, can, by developing a new style of government, provide that leadership. This book seeks to explore the core characteristics of this new system of urban governance and how its empowering style and approach to city government can be fostered.

Chapter 1 outlines the general case for bringing local government back in. Such a case needs to be made because of the extent to which the role of local authorities has been side-lined by successive central government interventions. Articles in the national press about how to tackle inner city problems often give little credence to the role of local authorities. Those in local government may in some instances have lost heart or lack a clear view of what is the appropriate role for local authorities. In short to

develop the argument of our book we need to overcome the doubts and uncertainties surrounding the value and role of local authority intervention in meeting the challenge of urban problems.

We build our case for giving elected local government a key role in urban regeneration around four arguments. First urban problems require local solutions and the local knowledge embedded within local authorities means they can tailor policies to meet the particular conditions of their locality. Second the challenges facing cities demand a response from a range of agencies, and local authorities are in a position to ensure that effective networks between different agencies and interests are developed. Third tackling problems requires leadership. Local authorities can offer that leadership in a way that balances the concerns of different interests. Finally, it is argued that local authorities have a special role in ensuring the legitimacy of urban decision-making.

Chapter 2 is divided into two parts. The first half of the chapter establishes that, despite the efforts of many, substantial problems remain in cities. A range of statistical and other information is reviewed to show how many residents of cities suffer substantial economic and social disadvantages. The deteriorating infrastructure of cities and environmental concerns are also identified as key challenges facing policy-makers. The second half of the chapter argues that, in light of the substantial evidence of continuing disadvantage suffered by many city residents and the other problems of cities, a balanced regeneration strategy is required for the new governance of cities. The physical, growth orientated renewal strategies of the 1980s need to be extended to provide a wider vision. To meet the challenge facing cities we need strategies that give opportunities to 'have-nots' as well as 'haves' and in which the commitment to growth is complimented by a concern with sustainable development.

Chapter 3 begins the process of exploring the different elements of the new style of governance required in cities. The underlying theme of the chapter is the emergence of a new type of entrepreneurial planning to encourage private investment and economic development in cities. This type of planning is market orientated in the sense that it seeks to establish the conditions for private sector economic activity yet it involves a complex range of activities for the public sector. This chapter outlines a step-by-step guide to these activities and the implementation problems that need to be tackled. Entrepreneurial planning is not just about recreating the market, it is also about getting people, vitality and even a sense of festival back into neglected areas. The chapter concludes with some thoughts about how the people dimension to

entrepreneurial planning can be developed. The challenge for the 1990s is to apply the techniques of entrepreneurial planning to tackle social as well as economic or physical regeneration.

Chapter 4 introduces the need for sustainable planning. It is argued that sensitivity to the environment is not a bolt-on extra that local authorities can simply adopt, rather it requires a whole new way of thinking. The chapter aims to provide a guide to how a commitment to greening the city can be realised in practice. The aim is to try to work out what sustainable planning means at the level of the city, especially given the conclusion of the 1992 UN Earth Summit that if the environment challenge was to be met action at the local level was the key. This chapter outlines criteria by which new proposals and established conditions can be judged in environmental terms. It considers the resources that need to be mobilised to meet environmental challenges and emphasises how local authorities need to work through and alongside other organisations. The chapter makes it clear that environmental issues cannot be ignored and urges local authorities to lead a concerted effort to move from tokenistic responses to positive, long-term programmes for greening the city.

Chapter 5 restates the case for what has for long been a plan of urban policy: the need for initiatives aimed at particular geographical pockets within the broader boundaries of cities. The experience of area approaches in the 1970s and decentralisation in the 1980s is reviewed. It is concluded that such approaches tend to attract unreasonably high expectations but if they are seen as one part of a wider strategy they can make a valuable contribution. The bulk of the chapter is then devoted to an examination of the potential and pitfalls of area approaches and decentralisation. A concluding section reviews the main lessons from past experience and indicates the way forward for decentralisation in the 1990s.

Chapter 6 is concerned with the growing band of 'third force organisations' and the contribution they can make to a balanced strategy of regeneration. Third force organisations operate on a not-for-profit basis and include various charities, community groups, voluntary sector bodies and other agencies. This new breed of organisation is independent and outside government like a pressure group, but instead of trying to simply persuade government into action they get involved in implementation and in carrying out projects. The chapter reviews the advantages and disadvantages of third force organisations. It outlines what policy-makers need to understand about these organisations in order to enable them to offer appropriate support. It considers various stages in the development of third force organisations. Various

strategies for local authorities seeking to encourage third force organisations are explored. It is concluded that such organisations should have a vital part to play in encouraging a politics of empowerment in the 1990s.

Chapter 7 explores the process of lobbying Whitehall and Brussels for funding and other support to underwrite the kind of local initiatives we have been discussing. Behind the more politicised relations of conflict that exist between central and local government there are many opportunities to develop a more positive dialogue. The enhanced role for the European Community means that a capacity to lobby in Brussels is also an essential part of the toolkit of urban governance. This chapter explains the strategies and tactics of lobbying.

Chapter 8 examines the new style of working that has been at the heart of the more substantive chapters. Networking — the pooling of resources in a co-operative manner to achieve shared purposes — underlies much of the new style of governance that we argue for in this book. The chapter identifies the distinctive features of the networking style and explores what makes networks 'tick'. The key dilemmas associated with networking are briefly reviewed. It is concluded that at its best networking can provide a flexible and responsive approach to the challenge of governing our cities. However it is noted that networks are not immune from the strains of operating in the context of a political system that distributes scarce resources and driven by competing ideologies and interests.

The concluding chapter is divided into three parts. First a call is made for local authorities to develop an overall sense of how different regeneration strategies might be applied to different parts of their areas. Second, in order to bolster its claims for civic leadership, we argue that the local government community should give serious attention to reforming its structure of internal decision-making. In particular we argue the case for experimenting with an elected mayor or political executive. Although we note that, if such a measure was adopted, a strengthening of the systems of accountability would also be required. Much of this book has argued the need for local intervention and action. We conclude by examining the sort of national urban policy that is implied by our commitment to local choice.

1 Bringing local government back in: The importance of local choice

Local government has to be seen not as an inhibition to the exercise of choice but as a prime means of providing choice for both individuals and communities. Its legitimacy lies not only in the ballot box but in daily contact of members and officers with the communities we serve, *communities in which collective needs and aspirations have to be balanced with each other and with the needs and aspirations of individuals.* The atomisation of local government through the hiving off of responsibilities to appointed agencies negates the strategic role which is at the core of local government's rationale, whether in the form of planning or providing services, or acting as spokesmen for an individual area.

(Jeremy Beecham, Chairman of the Association of Metropolitan Authority 1992).

The task of this introductory chapter is to make the general case for 'bringing local government back in'. That such a case needs to be made cannot be doubted. The policies of central government since 1979 have marginalised the role of local authorities. Urban Development Corporations, Training and Enterprise Councils, Local Enterprise Companies in Scotland, City Technology Colleges, Task Forces are among the agencies set up by central government to by-pass elected local authorities. City Challenge launched in 1991 in some respects revised the trend and appeared to give local authorities a clear leadership role. But the proposed

Urban Regeneration Agency launched in July 1992 appears to revert to the formula in which central government vests power in a special purpose agency. The conflict-laden days of the 1980s appear to have passed but at best central government ministers appear to see local authorities as one interest group among many. Local authorities are viewed not as partners in government but as pressure groups to be appeased.

In making our case for local government we are not only challenging the central thrust of the Conservatives' urban policy since 1979 but we also seek to attack two substantial 'schools of thought' within local authorities. One group — the pessimists — argue that the role and financial position of elected local government has been so undermined that no positive ways forward remain. We would not dispute that the constraints can be considerable — the financial thought-jacket which was tight in 1980s appears likely to be even tighter in the 1990s. Yet opportunities remain and building on the experience of local authorities we will show how these may be exploited. This is not to deny, of course, that the availability of more resources would make the solution of urban problems easier.

A second group within local government — the complacent — argue that if resources were available local authorities as they proved in the 1950s, '60s and '70s could do the job of urban regeneration. While many good developments did take place in those years we must also recognise that there were many failures. Moreover the challenges of the 1990s are different in form and scope. They demand a new way of working from local authorities.

We build our case for 'bringing local government back in' around four roles.

1. Urban problems require local solutions and local authorities can provide the local knowledge necessary to tailor policies to meet the particular conditions of their localities.
2. Tackling urban problems often requires an integrated response from a range of agencies and interests. Local authorities can act as a catalyst to ensure effective networking among agencies.
3. Developing appropriate policies requires strategic leadership and vision. Local authorities can provide that leadership in a way that balances the concerns of different interests.
4. Decisions about how to tackle urban problems should be seen as accountable and legitimate. Local authorities can provide a forum for ensuring the legitimacy of urban decision-making.

None of these roles can be uniquely reserved for local authorities. Yet no other organisation is as well-equipped to undertake all four roles. The capacity within local authorities to bring together these four roles in tackling urban problems makes an overwhelming argument for bringing local authorities back in. Local authorities have a role in urban regeneration by virtue of their position within localities as major service providers, employers, purchasers and landowners. Yet our argument for local authorities to take a lead role goes beyond their particular powers and responsibilities. It rests on their potential to offer community government.

The need for local solutions and knowledge

As Chapter 2 makes clear, the scale and range of urban problems is such that national or even European-wide intervention is necessary to tackle the issues of de-industrialisation, social deprivation, physical decay and failing infrastructure. In short many urban issues may be problems in cities but not necessarily problems of cities. The underlying cause of urban problems may lie in broad processes of social and economic restructuring which have national or global dimensions. Tackling urban problems can never, in the light of such factors, simply be left to cities. Yet equally it is a mistake to believe that national or supra-national intervention is the key. What is required is a framework for action in which supra-national, national and local intervention all have a part to play.

Given the focus of this book our prime concern is with the scope for local intervention. The scope is considerable because of the localised character of urban problems. As Solesbury (1990, p.26) comments:

Urban policy in the 1990s must address directly a much more varied agenda. That variety has two dimensions: variety in issues, and with the mix of issues varying between places as they respond individually to the wider processes of economic, social and environmental change. In consequence, individual towns and cities will tend to have their own unique agenda — rather than a common agenda — of issues to address.

Places have a unique mixture of potential and problems.

Diversity is much greater than the dominant image of the North/South divide allows. Robson (1988) reviewing the plight of those inner cities, rightly notes the particular problems of big cities and

the sustained influence of a North/South divide. The British image of the urban is conditioned by a perspective which contrasts the declining, large industrial cities in the North with the booming, newer, smaller cities and towns in the South East and East Anglia. The recession of the early 1990s, which has been more severe in the South East and East Anglia, has only slightly dented this image. Yet behind the broad pattern of uneven development lies a more complex reality. Growth areas and prosperous enclaves are to be found in the North and deprivation and disadvantage exists in parts of the South. Smaller towns and cities have their own problems and difficulties. Moreover within any particular urban area the pattern of decline and growth is more complex than any simple generalisation about boom or bust areas might suggest. As Solesbury (1990, p.26) argues 'on closer examination, and increasingly, the policy issues in Manchester differ from those in Liverpool, Sevenoaks from Maidenhead, Bath from Oxford, Morecombe from Eastbourne and so on. Places are individual and diverse'.

If these arguments are accepted then the case for detailed local knowledge and involvement in the design of urban policies is clear. Local authorities are in a position to provide that local knowledge. Yet we would not claim that they are uniquely able to provide such knowledge.

In theory at least it would be possible for locally-based agents of central government to gain a significant level of local knowledge. Indeed few could dispute that certain regional officials from, for example, the Departments of Environment or Trade and Industry have a detailed local grasp. Of course problems caused by the rapid turnover of officials and the detached way in which many operate limit the development of local understanding. Local business people may also have a certain type of local knowledge. Indeed some business interests in property and building may rely on that local knowledge to provide economic opportunities. Voluntary agencies and community groups — the range of 'third force organisations' we consider in Chapter 6 — have a particular contribution to make in local knowledge and understanding. Their local knowledge may enable them to see opportunities where others see only problems.

Local authorities cannot claim to be the sole source of local knowledge but they can claim to be a key source through the detailed and technical work of their professional officers and the daily presence in their local communities of councillors. At times a local authority may fail to harness or bring together in a manageable form its range of local knowledge. Yet there can be

little doubt of the strong potential for providing such knowledge by local authorities and that in many instances successful urban policy interventions have drawn on the deep well of local knowledge contained within local authorities.

Co-ordination through networking

If the problems of our towns and cities are to be tackled, then what is required is a sustained effort from a variety of sources. Such effort has indeed been forthcoming. Many living in urban communities, despite in some cases a daily struggle to survive, have banded together in groups and organisations to tackle the problems of their area. Local politicians and officials have also played a key part. Private and corporate interests have launched initiatives. The churches and the voluntary sector have developed programmes. Finally national-level government has engaged in a diverse range of policy initiatives. So much so that the Audit Commission in 1989 accused central government programmes of creating 'a patchwork quilt of complexity and idiosyncrasy' (Audit Commission 1989). The very proliferation of interests involved in tackling urban issues raises the issues of co-ordination. Multi-agency involvement in urban problem-solving is a phenomenon that is not going to disappear. Further no urban gathering or conference would be complete without the ritual call for and endorsement of the need for more co-ordination.

But what do people mean by co-ordination? In a famous study of the problems of implementation associated with an urban renewal programme in the United States, Pressman and Wildavsky (1974, pp. 135-5) pour scorn on those that argue that the solution to urban problems is more co-ordination. They argue that co-ordination lacks a clear meaning and focus in circumstances where participants in a common project disagree over goals and means. It would be nice to assume that people do not work at cross-purposes but given the different backgrounds and starting-points of those involved in multi-agency working such conflict is best taken as a given.

One response to the problem of co-ordination would then be to set up an agency to impose order and coerce others to go along with its policy goals. Co-ordination in this sense becomes a form of power. People are co-ordinated by being told what to do within a hierarchical frame of reference or to use the jargon of organisational analysis the solution is vertical integration. A central government agent such as a local prefect in the French system of