

Citizenship and Social Housing: The Moral Geography of the Mixed Community in UK Housing Management

Paper to be presented to:

European Network for Housing Research
Annual Conference

Changing Housing Markets: Integration and Segmentation
Prague, 2009

Tony Manzi

University of Westminster

manzit@wmin.ac.uk

Draft – not for quotation

7754 words

Citizenship and Social Housing: The Moral Geography of the Mixed Community in UK Housing Management

Abstract

This paper considers how discourses of mixed communities have assisted in establishing a new moral geography for social housing in the UK. Echoing distinctions between 'rough' and 'respectable' groups; this new moral geography is based on a thesis of the failure of social housing; as such it has been influential in the construction of new forms of citizenship. Based on a discourse of responsibilities (as opposed to rights), citizenship in social housing entails a range of duties: to participate in decision-making; to behave in 'acceptable' ways and to act as role models for peer groups. These responsibilities are enforced by an intensive housing management style (which is not applied to other tenure groups). The paper challenges the thesis of the failure of social housing. It argues that it is the failure of private housing markets rather than social housing per se, which represents a more accurate representation of the challenges facing the UK housing sector.

Keywords:

Mixed communities, housing management, moral geography

Introduction: The new moral geography of social housing

In 2008 a UK 9-year old child named Shannon Matthews was reported missing from the Dewsbury Moor estate in West Yorkshire. A huge police hunt was mobilised (said to be the largest police search for a missing person for 30 years) which involved large numbers of local residents. Despite generally sympathetic press coverage (including the offer of a reward of £50,000) tabloid newspapers could not resist reverting to stereotype. For example, describing the estate as 'like a nastier Beirut' *The Sun* newspaper (which had offered the reward) commented:

As the Press descended, people were regularly pictured walking to the shops in their pyjamas up to *midday* . . . even in the rain... Bailiffs are as regular as the postmen and some lags openly show off their electronic tags (*The Sun*, 9 April, 2008, emphasis in original).

After 24 days Shannon was safely returned and it transpired that the girl's mother (Karen Matthews) was involved in the disappearance, in league with the stepfather's uncle. Moreover, the stepfather was arrested for child pornography and following the conviction of the mother for child neglect and perverting the course of justice, press coverage turned not simply against the mother and the child's extended family, but against the neighbourhood as a whole. Karen Matthews, who had mothered seven children by five different fathers, was described as 'pure evil' by police and journalists were despatched to the estate find evidence of 'feckless' households, social security benefit 'cheats' and other indicators of an urban underclass. Writing in a national tabloid newspaper (*The Daily Mail*) and referring to the case, the leader of the UK Opposition Conservative party wrote of:

A fragmented family held together by drink, drugs and deception. An estate where decency fights a losing battle against degradation and despair. A community whose pillars are crime, unemployment and addiction (Cameron, 2008).

This depiction of 'broken Britain' provided a convenient juxtaposition of family, estate and community and ignored the way that the neighbourhood had acted together – indeed the trial judge commended the collective response of the community in the search for the girl; instead the Karen Matthews case was used to present all the indicators of moral failure associated with representations of council housing. Subsequently (following a tragic murder) Dewsbury was described as 'the town that dare not speak its name' and the *Times* newspaper commented:

What dismayed and depressed onlookers was not so much a sink estate as the sink lives that were being led there, dominated by a poverty of expectation that is passed like a badge from generation to generation (*The Times*, March 28, 2008)

A range of publications have reinforced such messages about council housing; references to 'neighbours from hell' (Field, 2003) became commonplace in discussions of social housing. Lynsey Hanley's (2007) 'intimate' history, based on her personal experiences of growing up on an estate in Birmingham refers to a 'wall in the mind' on the part of residents subjected to a vicious cycle of low aspirations and low expectations. Using data identifying a strong correlation between social housing and deprivation (for example Hills, 2008) others have argued: 'There was – and there is – an umbilical link between granting social tenancies and reducing a household's prospects' (Dwelly, 2009) Moreover:

Mono tenure housing estates are a flop. They don't help people get work, they don't help people avoid crime, and they don't help children's prospects. They are a very bad use of public money' (Dwelly, 2009, p.20).

Of course, for 'mono tenure' read social rented housing; owner-occupied developments do not exhibit such problems. It is the contention of this paper that such attitudes have become widely accepted, not simply within tabloid demotic representations but as part of a broader policy discourse amongst professionals and some academics. These attitudes representing a new form of 'moral geography', which identifies interrelationships between morality and space (Whitehead, 2004, p.59) involving normative judgments based on assumptions about the relationships between patterns of behaviour and particular environments. On such a reading social rented housing provides a framework for the identification, codification and implementation of urban policies and problems (ibid.). Consequently, attitudes towards social housing are permeated by references to 'the other', to moral failure and social breakdown. This emerging moral geography is premised on the notion of failure, justifying extensive 'modernisation' of policy, and a rejection of previous policies based on 'outdated welfarist foundations' (Stevenson, 2006, p.5). Such modernisation is accomplished through two main processes: managerialism and tenure mix.

This paper begins by outlining the constructionist theoretical framework adopted in understanding the moral geography of social housing; a model shaped entirely by the concept of failure. It looks at how this perception of failure has taken root, how it has

permeated discourses in urban policy and how it has subsequently influenced policy solutions. The paper then considers the major reforms, based on this discourse of failure which it is argued have taken three main forms: *marketisation*, *managerialism* and *tenure mix*. It briefly considers the effectiveness of these approaches with reference to empirical data and concludes that the discourse of failure has mainly acted to stigmatise social rented tenants, to pathologise their behaviour (whilst ignoring the behaviour of those in other tenures) and has ignored the failures associated with the private sector. Significantly given the failure of the latter it may be time for a renewal of social renting, based on a new moral geography. It argues for a more nuanced understanding of both success and failure and a need to understand social problems in UK social housing which acknowledges underlying normative processes and how such a moral geography is constructed.

Theory: The social construction of policy failure

This paper uses social constructionism to develop an understanding of social problems. Formulated as a response to narrow empiricism or positivist approaches that seen problems as clearly defined and generally self evident, social constructionism draws on the work of Berger and Luckman (1966); it considers how definitions of social problems are determined by a range of factors including: the construction of convincing narratives; the mobilisation of bias; and the generation of institutional support (Jacobs et. al, 2004). Constructionism is interested in examining contestation, interpretation and subjective determination and focuses on the application of power relationships and political processes. As such it is concerned with processes of agenda-setting, claims-making and the activities undertaken by policy makers and pressure groups to promote these claims. It examines how policy orthodoxies are constructed and how definitions of social problems operate in order to close debate, to promote specific world-views and to advance particular policy solutions as 'obvious' or inevitable.

As will be shown in this paper, perceptions of council housing have been used to discredit the sector, and indeed to undermine the principle of government intervention in housing. Contemporary representations of council housing have substituted the social problem as being one of housing *provision* rather than housing *shortage*. Council housing has come to be seen as constituting a problem in itself ('problematised') rather than as being seen as a solution to other more intractable problems (such as housing shortage, affordability of quality). Neo-liberal ideologies

have served to represent of the problem of social housing as managerial and largely 'depoliticised' in an attempt to minimise political conflict. The 'systemic devalorisation' of local authority housing (Watt, 2009, p.22) has underpinned discourses of the sector; with council tenants represented as outsiders (Becker, 1997) and subject to moral panics (Cohen, 2002) about the (potential as well as actual) behaviour of tenants. The consequence has been a response based on constructing new moral spaces through a process of 'punitive urbanism' (Cochrane, 2007, p.79), achieved through a discourse of individual behaviour or what Reeves (2008) terms 'character talk'. It is through a study of these moral spaces that we can understand how taken-for-granted assumptions operate regarding competing formulations of appropriate behaviour. These 'geographies of exclusion' help to explain how transgressive groups are both understood and managed (Matless, 2000); a moral geography clearly evident in the practice of contemporary housing management and in particular through the policy of creating and sustaining new mixed income communities. The remainder of the paper will attempt to demonstrate how these issues operate through the example of UK (or more specifically English) housing policies to establish sustainable neighbourhoods.

Methodology

This paper is based on research aimed at examining the wider management implications of the mixed community agenda and considering the costs and benefits of development and management strategies adopted in different geographical, social and economic contexts. The research involved three main case studies in the South East of England: involving two local authority estates and one new housing association development. All three case studies involved significant input from public, private and voluntary sector agencies. Using mainly qualitative data, the research incorporated a fifteen detailed semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders: including representatives from the Housing Corporation, the National Housing Federation, housing association managers, architects, private developers, residents and politicians. Interviews were designed to explore in detail the main principles behind developing mixed income communities and to gain an awareness of the key constraints and specific management issues relating to creating and sustaining new mixed income communities. The research was mainly undertaken between 2005 and 2007.

The failure of social housing: Diagnosing the social problem

In supplying the 'wobbly pillar under the welfare state' (Torgersen, 1994) council housing has become placed 'at the forefront of retrenchment, restructuring and modernisation for more than twenty-five years' (Malpass, 2005, p.2). However, it is important to note that it did not always have such a low status: Whilst post-war council housing had for nearly three decades appeared to be both a 'permanent and substantial social institution' (Malpass, 2005), by the 1970s it had become widely discredited. Writers have described a 'crisis of legitimacy' (Dunleavy, 1981), a 'mass housing disaster' (Holmes, 2006, p.32) and with residents subjected to 'bureaucratic paternalism' or 'public landlordism' (Cole and Furbey, 1994).

However, others have noted that these problems were not in fact new. Writers such as Holmes (2006) acknowledge that 'there was a deep, class-based animosity to council housing which had been displayed from its early years' (2006, p.40). Hence, as Damer (1989) has shown, perceptions of failure can be traced back to: the work of the 1930s (Central Housing Advisory Committee, 1930, para.27) and subsequent emerging distinctions between 'rough' and 'respectable' groups (Central Housing Advisory Committee, 1955) built into eligibility requirements for social housing. Whilst the provision of council housing was limited to a skilled working class, local authorities were able to directly discriminate on the basis of not simply housing need but desert; they were able to reward certain groups with tenancies as a 'badge of citizenship' (Pawson and Kintrea, 2002).

The key stage in the development of a new moral geography was the 'filtering down' process (Damer, 1989) of the 1960s and 1970s, whereby council housing moving from a 'mass' to a 'residual' tenure (Harloe, 1985). As housing became limited to more deprived sections of the community, there was a greater emphasis on both problem places and anti-social tenants. The concept of the 'problem estate' linked poor design, a lack of management with inadequate maintenance alongside allocation policies which concentrated deprived groups in one tenure. The development of mass housing estates in the 1960s was characterized by a 'poverty of administration', which has had far-reaching effects for subsequent development (Power, 1987) and described as typifying the limitations of Utopian modernism (Power, 1999, p.217). Consequently, by the 1970s the Labour Minister Anthony Crosland wrote of the 'second class citizenship' associated with council tenure (*The*

Guardian, 16/6/76, cited in Timmins, 1995, p.366) and in the early 1980s the Audit Commission (1983) was referring to a 'crisis' in council housing.

By the 1980s and 1990s the council estate was seen as comprising an 'increasingly residualised locale of spatialised social problems' (Whitehead, 2004) and the fundamental problem as perceived by the new critics of council housing is the idea that housing policy has been unable to adapt to changing social circumstances:

Society has changed, the fundamental principles of social housing policy have not. The result is a tenure which the vast majority of the population would not choose – a tenure of last resort – stigmatised and reviled (Stevenson, 2006, p.4).

A generalised concept of stigma applied to the social rented sector forms the new moral geography. Whereas stigma has often been applied to specific estates and neighbourhoods (Hastings, 2004), the new moral geography contends that social housing in its entirety is equated with failure. For example, Dwelly (2006) rhetorically asks: 'Very little attention seems to be spent on the big question: no matter how you run it, is "social housing" a good idea at all?' For Dwelly, social housing produces 'a system that entrenches poverty and dependency, often stigmatising people as unlikely to succeed' (p.12). Consequently, 'the penny is dropping. More and more people recognise that social housing isn't working' (p.14).

The stigma attached to social housing draws largely on pathological rather than structural explanations with tenants criticised in behavioural terms and policy focusing on individual and social characteristics. For example Power and Lupton (2002) draw a distinction between 'households with problems' and 'problem households' in their analysis of neighbourhood exclusion. 'Problem households are those whose behaviour creates problems for others, either because of deliberate...or unintentional acts' (p.132). Lupton (2003) has elsewhere written of the small number of 'chaotic households' who cause problems disproportionate to their number (p.116).

According to this analysis neighbourhoods can quickly reach a 'tipping point' (Power and Lupton, 2002, p.128) based on the behaviour of a small number of these 'problem households' at which stage action to reverse exclusion and to regenerate areas becomes increasingly difficult to achieve. This analysis bears an uncomfortable relationship with formerly largely discredited 'underclass' theories associated with Murray (1990). Residents can quickly become stigmatised on the basis of

'neighbourhood effects' which are largely understood as individually contrived behavioural (if not cultural) problems.

In overall terms the combination of poor management, a narrow social composition and perceptions of widespread anti-social behaviour has resulted in a focus on individual responsibility with social housing seen as comprising problem spaces for problem families (Cooper, 2005; Johnston and Mooney, 2007). It was this combination of management failure, design flaws, development and planning inadequacies and wider social problems that enabled such a powerful mass of weight to be mobilised against the idea of social housing per se. The increasing marginalisation of social housing has led some to refer to a process of 'social apartheid' (Gregory, 2009) where a combination of immediate and long term spatial 'separation' and 'labelling' effects operate to disadvantage residents. Labelling effects include a process of 'self-labelling' where households are encouraged to 'present' themselves in priority need through needs-based allocation systems in order to gain access to scarce public housing resources 'and to thereby fulfil some of the stereotypes of a dependent underclass' (Gregory, 2009, p.42). The response has therefore been to instigate a radical modernisation of the sector. The next section therefore considers the key features of the housing reform programme.

Modernising a failed tenure: Marketisation, managerialism and tenure mix

As noted above the modernisation of social housing has taken three main forms: a 'marketisation' of housing provision, a managerialist ethos and a determined policy to develop mixed income communities. A market-driven reform programme of the 1980s was designed with municipal authorities in mind as the chief perpetrators of abuses of bureaucratic administration. In line with other new public management (NPM) reforms, the policy solution was to engender the 'demunicipalisation' (Kemp, 1989) of rented housing provision.

Marketisation reforms (notably the Housing Act 1988) indicated that 'the state's role in the provision and future management of social housing has been radically restructured and altered' (Lambert and Malpass, 1998, p.93). In particular the Conservative government of Margaret Thatcher and John Major were determined to introduce tenure diversification with an enhanced role for housing associations (later termed registered social landlords - RSLs) at the expense of local authority provision. However, the restructuring of social housing had a number of consequences. In

particular, the attempt to 'roll back the frontiers of the state' was flawed; overall subsidies were not reduced, but merely redirected from capital funding to the social security budget (mainly through increases in housing benefit payments). Moreover, it was not only council housing that was vulnerable to the process of residualisation. In the early 1990s concerns were expressed (notably Page, 1993) that the combination of the development process, allocation policies based on need and management failures were resulting in housing associations also assuming the role of a stigmatised, ghettoised sector.

A *managerialist* emphasis was developed initially through 'new public management' models based on principles of competition, 'incentivisation' and 'disaggregation' (Dunleavy and Hood, 1994). This emphasis continued post 1997 with the Labour government introducing: the 'Best Value' initiative (ODPM, 2005), based on principles of competition, comparison, consultation and market testing; 'consumerist' approaches emphasizing choice (for example through allocation systems); 'holistic' models of intervention (such as in the National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal) and tenure diversification (as with the development of arms-length management and stock transfer initiatives) (Walker, 2001).

The establishment of intensive housing management strategies and strategies for the social control of residents (Saugeres, 2000) advanced the new moral geography. In particular the introduction of the 'Respect' agenda (Home Office, 2003) was a policy central to the third Blair administration, whereby social landlords were encouraged to make use of a range of measures to combat anti-social behaviour including tools such as Acceptable Behaviour Contracts, anti-social behaviour orders and crime and disorder reduction partnerships. In addition landlords were encouraged to make use of 'introductory' or 'probationary' tenancies and to introduce incentive schemes for positive behaviour (such as the Irwell Valley Gold Standard scheme) as well as increased sanctions for anti-social behaviour. This agenda was based on communitarian principles of social responsibility; placing less emphasis on individual rights and more on the responsibilities of stakeholders to abide by the terms of their tenancy agreements and to participate in decisions about their communities and neighbourhoods (Halpern and Bates, 2004). 'Active citizenship' was encouraged through increasing levels of consultation and participation in decision-making (Casey and Flint, 2007); strategies aimed at resident empowerment formed an important element of ways to regenerate neighbourhoods and to modernise social housing. Key to these strategies was an emphasis on 'conditionality' in welfare reform

(Deacon, 2004) with regeneration and neighbourhood management strategies contingent on residents adhering to appropriate standards of behaviour. Although such proposals have met with mixed results proposals continue to be propounded to advance this moral agenda is to be extended. For example future proposals for reform within the social rented sector include:

- Cutting housing benefit for perpetrators (Field, 2003) in cases of anti-social behaviour, or other breaches of tenancy conditions;
- 'Commitment contracts' (advocated by Housing Minister Caroline Flint in 2008). Such contracts would make tenancies contingent upon a willingness to take up employment or training opportunities;
- Ending security of tenure (Dwelly and Cowans, 2006) with *permanent* tenancies seen as an inappropriate solution to the *temporary* problem of homelessness or overcrowding. This is a proposal that has found considerable support amongst housing professionals (including the Chartered Institute of Housing).

The third main feature of modernising social housing was linked to marketisation strategies, through the idea of ensuring that new housing supply was delivered through private sector agencies. However, the strategy of *tenure mix* was mainly aimed at a 'deconcentration' of poverty through the development of new mixed income communities. It was a policy primarily driven by private developers, who were compelled to provide affordable housing through the use of 'section 106' agreements. These were part of a bargaining process between local authorities and developers aimed at ensuring minimum proportions of affordable housing. These mixed-tenure approaches marked an attempt to avoid difficulties associated with concentrations of deprivation where large mono-tenure estates had historically developed. It is this latter focus on sustainable mixed tenure communities that has been the strongest emphasis of recent housing strategies within the social rented sector (ODPM, 2003; Hills, 2006; CLG, 2007). Such initiatives raised important management issues (for example in terms of community cohesion, service charges and neighbourhood participation), which became an essential feature of twenty-first century housing policy.

Empirical Data

omes Hom

A continual stress on moral failure has had an important impact on concepts of citizenship applied to social housing tenants. There is a paradox; whereas on the one hand policy has been to empower residents through consultation and participative mechanisms, on the other hand there has been a stress on an ideology of respect, enforced through anti-social behaviour orders and acceptable behaviour contracts. This agenda has been disproportionately applied to social rented sector tenants and is clearly evident in contemporary strategies to improve housing management.

Marketisation

Given the discourse of the failure of social housing mixed income policies have tended to place great emphasis on the importance of owner-occupation, key worker and shared ownership models as well as ideas of 'flexible tenure' neighbourhoods (Dickinson, 2006). These concepts have further distanced affordable housing from traditional ideas about social rented housing. Schemes were dependent on property sales rather than public subsidy in order to be 'sustainable'.

the better the value is, the more cross subsidy; we've got the community as well saying that the prime parts of the estate should go to the re-provision of rented housing. But if you do that, then you've got to sell more units (Interview, RSL manager).

In similar terms a council leader explained that their new schemes were almost totally dependent on private finance: 'We are talking about billions in investment; all but a few pounds coming from the private sector' (Interview, Cllr). Nevertheless, RSL managers warned that social landlords were in danger of becoming losing sight of their original objectives. For example:

you need to get a lot of framework to these developments; things like key workers, some parts of the housing department think that's brilliant, other parts think it's a disaster. You are sort of taking prime sites away from what should be affordable housing (Interview, RSL manager).

The concern here was that housing agencies would lose sight of their public obligations in the rush towards market solutions. The dependence on private finance also brought further problems of management and control. A number of respondents warned of the dangers where properties were originally sold on the open market but

were subsequently used for temporary social housing. As one council member explained:

The Buy-to-let market is clearly visible here; it does create problems. You have people who have got ex-Right-to-Buy property from the council. So you could find somebody in temporary accommodation, on a lease scheme from a housing association paying £200 a week, living cheek by jowl with someone placed by the council in temporary housing, paying the council rent and it's a lottery which one you get (Interview, Cllr).

This concern that the major problems would be apparent in private sector properties was emphasised by respondents who warned of 'absentee landlordism' (interview, RSL manager). Consequently and despite the considerable stigma associated with social housing, the major management problems often emerged in the private rather than public sector; an issue that is largely neglected in debates about housing management. For example:

if houses for sale are lower than rent, the chances that they will end up in the lower end of the private rented market, to people who are quite poor and may well have been nominated as council tenants are very high indeed (Interview, RSL).

It was clear that respondents felt that the market-driven agenda for social housing was leading to considerable difficulties and private sector agencies were unable to step into the gap where the public sector had withdrawn. Such problems were exacerbated apparent in the drive towards the second major housing reform: managerialism.

Managerialism

Managerialist indications of a new moral geography are evidenced in the strong focus on responsibilities of residents, rather than a traditional 'rights' based discourse. Housing management was seen at the heart of the problems. Hence for residents:

They had moved out of multi-occupied Victorian housing and that was seen as a big step-up; a success story. It was the inability to manage it and maintain it over the years which then became the problem (Interview, architect).

However, the social housing managers were seen as particularly culpable in terms of a loss of attention in schemes. One architect described this process as a loss of 'institutional dynamism' where there was considerable motivation at the start of

regeneration work, which quickly faded as works were in progress. For example, a local politician criticised one scheme on the basis that:

the RSLs lost interest...The learning point has been around getting the sustainability of those arrangements in early on and the council cannot walk away; the council has to be at the table.... you've got to get some community anchors. It has to be physical as well as social.... It's about management, governance and community engagement (Interview, Cllr)

What this comment illustrated was the importance of retaining a role for public sector institutions; a criticism often levelled at the consortium schemes that were popular feature in the demunicipalised approaches of the late 1980s (see for example, Manzi and Smith Bowers, 2004). Moreover, managerialist models were most clearly evident in the approach taken to managing anti-social behaviour. Here residents complained about the design, planning and development of properties.

We weren't helped by our RSL... they said look can we put [units] together...because it's easier to manage. Now doing it again I would say no, under no circumstances... [it is] not a smart way for us to have to deal with community spaces and people. We would be better served if we don't get collections of problem families together, even in smallish groups (Interview, resident).

These anti-social behaviour strategies were inevitable targeted at the behaviour of social housing residents and premised on the assumption that any concentrations of socially rented tenants was likely to be problematic. The range of guidance and legislation directed towards changing the behaviour of residents towards a 'responsibilisation' of behaviour and in particular at influencing younger residents to behave more appropriately has had a deep impact on approaches to housing management amongst cotemporary practitioners as noted elsewhere (see for example Flint, 2006). Consequently housing managers have been compelled to take a far more active role in ensuring social control and the policing of their housing estates (Saugeres, 2000); such measures reflect a communitarian emphasis on new forms of conditionality in social policy (Deacon, 2004) and a social contract based upon principles of discipline and duty.

Tenure mix

The main justification for mixed tenure strategies was to ensure a more appropriate 'balance of households and incomes within communities to avoid concentrations of deprivation. Allocation policies have been widely believed to be at the heart of the

problems of deprived neighbourhoods and social landlords have therefore been encouraged to move away from traditional 'needs-based' allocation policies, towards providing eligibility on the basis of more deserving groups. Whilst this concept of desert has always been evident in the allocation of social housing, in recent years there has been a much greater focus on avoiding concentrations of deprivation through introducing choice on the one hand in conjunction with policies that enable a wider range of social groups to be housed. Respondents therefore spoke of renegotiating nomination agreements with local authorities to ensure residents were 'suitable' (interview, RSL); 'exporting people who might be problematic', excluding those with criminal records, a history of anti-social behaviour or rent arrears from 'flagship' schemes (interview, RSL), and imposing incomes policy 'to ensure that 50% of people would be working' (interview, RSL).

A key indicator of effective tenure mix was whether it was able to remove the *stigma* associated with rented properties. In a 'property-owning' democracy (Saunders, 1990), it is therefore difficult to provide a sense of citizenship for groups perceived as a marginalised underclass, liable to anti-social behaviour (Haworth and Manzi, 1999). As one RSL manager commented: 'I think home owners in houses look down on us thinking we are really rough' (Interview, RSL manager). This stigma also deeply affected the way that council tenants in particular viewed themselves: 'you can have 15 kids out on the street all of them come out of the small set of houses, well their reputation stinks even if the kids aren't bad' (Interview, resident). For example in one notorious development, prior to the regeneration process the residents saw themselves in the following terms:

they lived in an estate with glass walls around it... they felt socially and physically isolated... they wanted something which wasn't adventurous but felt psychologically safe and brought them this anonymity. They wanted ordinary streets with ordinary houses (Interview, architect).

The stigma associated with social housing therefore served to prevent innovative policy solutions. Residents took the view that 'they wanted to stop being experimented on' (Interview, architect), meaning that they did not want to be subject to grandiose visions. Designs tended to be conservative, implying a return to vernacular styles and typified by unimaginative architectural approaches. Residents were keen to avoid at all costs any identification with social housing. In such schemes, residents often resorted to a form of 'gallows humour'; infestation was seen as so bad that 'we used to put coasters on top of mugs rather than underneath'

(Interview, resident) and 'once you got inside your door, what ever you heard you kept the door locked' (Interview, resident). Social (or affordable) housing therefore came to be associated with an intractable set of problems, regardless of actual social composition, design or management. These stereotypical views became all-pervasive. Hence:

where they put in affordable housing it was in great groups of housing all together, so you just multiplied your problems. You just effectively relocated problems from one place to another (Interview, resident).

These stereotypical views therefore were widely shared by housing managers and residents of adjoining areas, increasing hostility and resistance to new developments which would comprise large proportions of social housing: 'People on one side are worried...and I think part of their worry is that people from [the estate] might be coming nearer' (Interview, Cllr). Estates were seen as 'potentially a dumping ground for local authority families that haven't got choice' (Interview, RSL manager). RSL managers tended to be more realistic but nevertheless talked in highly pejorative terms about their new residents:

I am sure we are going to have situations with a couple of families from hell...but from experience of previous schemes it could be those sort of households that bought in to our sale scheme as well (Interview, RSL manager)

These responses illustrated a deep sense of cultural conservatism (Jacobs and Manzi, 1998) in spite of the fact that many of the worst problems emanated from privately owned property. The systematic assault on the legitimacy of council housing and by implication the principle of social rented housing had the effect of promoting further stigma, shared by residents, private landlords, development and management staff. Adjacent residents were therefore inevitably opposed to any introduction of social housing – 'they want to know straight away where the social housing is' and it would inevitably 'have an impact on my sales values' (Interview, private developer).

Discussion

Given the wealth of commentary about the failure of council housing and the construction of social housing estates as uniquely problematic it is easy to lose sight of the importance of council housing. As Ravetz (2001) notes:

Council housing was a significant part of twentieth-century working-class history that was arguably more significant for many lives than employment and trade

unionism...It was particularly crucial for the history of working-class women, in their domestic role, and so by extension to children...(p.6).

The successes of municipal provision have become largely ignored in the face of the sustained assault on the sector as uniquely problematic. However, it was the failure to meet the needs of poorest that largely ensured the attraction (and success) of council housing in wider public discourse. Once it changed to a residual form of welfare, the thesis of failure was able to take much stronger hold. As Henderson and Karn (1983) presciently argued in the early 1980s:

In egalitarian terms we need to run public housing in the interests of those for whom the private sector provides least well. Yet moves in this direction would make public housing less attractive to the better off white working class, would lead to their leaving and would make public housing even more a 'welfare' tenure, with all the problems of a stigmatised service with intensified segregation of the poorest (1983, p.127).

There is therefore a clear dilemma between meeting egalitarian goals (incorporating wider citizenship rights) and the need to provide a popular and high quality service. As a mass tenure concerns were expressed in the 1960s about the affluence (rather than poverty) of residents (see for example Kemeny et. al. 2003). It was only once council housing became seen as a marginal, residual tenure that public perceptions were articulated in overwhelmingly negative terms. This represents the paradox of UK housing provision. It is successful only when it fails to meet need. Once these needs have been met it becomes much easier to stigmatise, particularly in an ideology where home ownership is seen as the only viable solution. Moreover, as writers such as King (2006), Casey and Flint (2007) have commented, policies targeted at the most disadvantaged and vulnerable deflect the focus on the causal responsibility for the concentration of anti-social behaviour in deprived communities.

It is the effective construction of owner-occupation as the aspirational tenure that has assisted in the rejection of council housing as a policy solution. This ideology was always evident in government rhetoric but became most clearly expressed in the Thatcher years. However, these assumptions are largely unquestioned. What is significant is in the light of wider economic developments, in the problems now associated with owner-occupation, that there exists an opportunity to revisit the successes of the municipal sector.

A significant development since 2008, in the light of the economic downturn and the collapse in owner-occupied markets, has been the acknowledged failure of private sector models of development, particularly the use of section 106 agreements which rely on private sector agencies to provide specified levels of social (or affordable housing) on new developments. The mixed community initiative has had limited successes and is based on limited evidence about the ability to overcome negative neighbourhood effects associated with place-based interventions.

The metaphor of the wobbly pillar is in danger of being replaced by the metaphor of 'social apartheid'; however such descriptions only serve to increase public mistrust and unwillingness to fund investment in social housing. The more that council tenants are seen as a residualised underclass the greater pressure there is for them to behave in 'responsible' ways. In contrast the catastrophic failures of private markets evident since 2008 provide a new impetus for good quality, well-designed affordable accommodation. It is clear that whilst there have been serious flaws in the provision of social housing, the idea that it is a flawed concept per se has not yet been established.

The new moral geography of mixed communities represents a qualitative difference in approach, in that it is based on a wholesale failure of social renting, rather than an attribute previously applied to specific council estates. This moral geography has permeated policies to establish mixed communities to the extent that it has become increasingly difficult to provide justifications for social rented accommodation.

The cumulative impact of contemporary initiatives has been to deny citizenship rights to residents as they simultaneously stress market mechanisms and particularly choice as the prime motivating factor in urban renewal. In particular modernisation of social housing has detached the sector from mainstream housing policy and helped to deny the legitimacy of state involvement in housing. In relation to the empirical material; these conceptions of citizenship are most clearly apparent in contemporary housing management initiatives. However, these normative attitudes should be re-examined and reappraised to recognise both successes as well as failures of council housing, within a wider agenda of creating and sustaining mixed income communities. As Fitzpatrick and Pawson (2007) argue policy would be more effectively focussed primarily on 'addressing spatial rather than tenure polarisation, as this is what most affects poorer people's well-being and longer-term life chances' (p.179).

As noted in this paper, the discourse of failure has mainly acted to stigmatise social rented tenants and to pathologise their behaviour (whilst ignoring the behaviour of those in other tenures); 'problem' families exist in the private sector as much as in social housing, but there has been little focus on managing these groups. Moreover, the discourse largely ignores failures associated with the private sector; failures that local authority landlords were originally designed to address. Significantly given the failure of private sector institutions it may be time for a renewal of social renting, based on a moral geography that acknowledges the limitations of previous social rented provision, without dismissing the tenure in its entirety. Local authorities have undoubtedly made mistakes in provision, but this does not mean that they are uniquely unsuited to either providing or managing social housing. The discussion illustrates the need for a nuanced understanding of both success and failure and a need to understanding social problems in UK social housing which acknowledges underlying normative processes and how such a moral geography is constructed.

References

- Audit Commission (1986) *Managing the Crisis in Council Housing* London: HMSO
- Becker, H. (1997) *Outsiders: Studies in the Sociology of Deviance* New York: The Free Press
- Berger, P. and Luckman, T. (1966) *The Social Construction of Reality* London: Penguin
- Cameron, D. (2008) 'There are five million people on benefits in Britain. How do we stop them from turning into Karen Matthews?' *The Daily Mail*, 8 December, available at: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1092588/DAVID-CAMERON-There-5-million-people-benefits-Britain-How-stop-turning-this.html>, accessed 9/6/09
- Casey, R. and Flint, J. (2007) 'Active citizenship in the governance of anti-social behaviour in the UK: Exploring the non-reporting of incidents', *People, Place and Policy Online*, 1/2, pp.69-79
- Central Housing Advisory Committee (1930) *The Management of Municipal Housing Estates* London: HMSO
- Central Housing Advisory Committee (1930) *Unsatisfactory Tenants, 6th Report of the Housing Management Sub-Committee of the Central Housing Advisory Committee* London: HMSO

- Cochrane, A. (2007) *Understanding Urban Policy: A Critical Approach* Oxford: Blackwell
- Cohen, S. (2002) *Folk Devils and Moral Panics* London: Routledge
- Cole, I. and Furbey, R. (1994) *The Eclipse of Council Housing* London: Routledge
- Communities and Local Government (CLG) (2007) *Homes for the Future: More Affordable, More Sustainable*, Cm7191 (London: the Stationery Office).
- Commission for Racial Equality (CRE) (1984) *Race and Council Housing in Hackney* London: CRE
- Cooper, C. (2005) 'Places, "folk devils" and social policy', in P. Somerville and N. Springings (eds.) *Housing and Social Policy: Contemporary Themes and Critical Perspectives* London: Routledge
- Cullingworth, B. (1969) *Council Housing: Purposes, Procedures and Priorities* London: Department of the Environment
- Damer, S. (1989) *From Moorepark to "Wine Alley": The Rise and Fall of a Glasgow Housing Scheme* Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press
- Deacon, A. (2004) 'Justifying conditionality: the case of anti-social tenants', *Housing Studies*, vol.19, no.6, pp.911-926
- Dickinson, R. (2006) 'Flexible tenure neighbourhoods – a new approach to creating sustainable communities', in T. Dwelly, T. and J. Cowans (eds.) *Rethinking Social Housing* London: The Smith Institute, pp. 58-65
- Dunleavy, P. (1981) *The Politics of Mass Housing in Britain 1945-1975: a Study of Corporate Power and Professional Influence in the Welfare State* Oxford: Clarendon Press
- Dunleavy, P. and Hood, C. (1994) 'From old public administration to new public management', *Public Money and Management* (July/Sept.), pp.9-16
- Dwelly, T. (2009) 'We have been here before', *Inside Housing*, 19 May.
- Dwelly, T. and Cowans, J. (eds.) (2006) *Rethinking Social Housing* London: The Smith Institute
- Etzioni, A. (1993) *The Spirit of Community: Rights, Responsibilities and the Communitarian Agenda* London: Fontana
- Fitzpatrick, S. and Pawson, H. (2007) 'Welfare safety net or tenure of choice? The dilemma facing social housing policy in England', *Housing Studies*, vol. 22, issue 2, pp163-182.
- Field, F. (2003) *Neighbours from Hell? The Politics of Behaviour* London: Politicos
- Flint, C. (2008) 'We must break link between housing and worklessness', Speech to the *Fabian Society*, 5th February.

- Flint, J. (2004) 'The responsible tenant: Housing governance and the politics of behaviour', *Housing Studies*, 19 (6), pp.893-909
- Flint, J. (ed.) (2006) *Housing, Urban Governance and Anti-Social Behaviour* Bristol: the Policy Press
- Gregory, J. (2009) *In the Mix: Narrowing the Gap Between Public and Private Housing* London: The Fabian Society
- Halpern, D. and Bates, C. (2004) *Personal Responsibility and Changing Behaviour: the State of Knowledge and its Implications for Public Policy* London Cabinet Office/Prime Minister's Strategy Unit
- Hanley, L. (2007) *Estates: an Intimate History* London: Granta
- Harloe, M. (1995) *The People's Home? Social Rented Housing In Europe and America* Oxford: Blackwell
- Hastings, A. (2004) 'Stigma and social housing estates: Beyond pathological explanations', *Journal of Housing and the Built Environment*, vol.19, no.3, pp.233-254.
- Haworth, A. and Manzi, T. (1999) 'Managing the underclass: interpreting the moral discourse of housing management', *Urban Studies*, vol.36, no.1: 153-165
- Henderson, J. and Karn, V. (1983) *Race, Class and State Housing: Inequality and the Allocation of Public Housing* Aldershot: Ashgate Press
- Hills, J. (2006) *Ends and Means: the Future Roles of Social Housing in England*, CASE Report 34, London: London School of Economics, ESRC Research Centre for the Analysis of Social Exclusion
- Holmes, C. (2006) *A New Vision for Housing* London: Routledge
- Jacobs, K. and Manzi, T. (1998) 'Urban renewal and the culture of conservatism', *Critical Social Policy*, vol.18, no.2, pp.157-174
- Jacobs, K., Kemeny, J. and Manzi, T. (2004) 'Power, discursive space and institutional practices in the construction of housing problems', *Housing Studies*, vol.18, no.14, pp.429-446
- Johnston, C. and Mooney, G. (2007) "'Problem people", "problem" places: New Labour and council estates' in R. Atkinson and G. Helms, (eds.) *Securing an Urban Renaissance: Crime, Community and British Urban Policy* Bristol: Policy Press, pp.125-140.
- Kemeny, J., Jacobs, K. and Manzi, T. (2004) 'Privileged or exploited council tenants? The discursive change in Conservative housing policy from 1972-1980', *Policy and Politics*, vol.31, no.3, pp.307-320
- Kemp, P. (1989) 'The demunicipalisation of rented housing' in M. Brenton and C. Ungerson (eds.) *Social Policy Review 1988-89* London: Longman

pp.46-66.

- King, P. (2006) 'What do we mean by responsibility? The case for UK housing benefit reform' *Journal of Housing and the Built Environment*, 21, pp.111-125
- Lambert, C. and Malpass, P. (1998) 'The rules of the game: competition for housing investment' in N. Oatley (ed.) *Cities, Economic Competition and Urban Policy* London: Paul Chapman Publishing, pp. 93-108
- Lupton, R. (2003) *Poverty Street: The Dynamics of Neighbourhood Decline and Renewal* Bristol: Policy Press
- Malpass, P. (2003) 'The wobbly pillar? Housing and the British postwar welfare state', *Journal of Social Policy*, 32, pp.589-606
- Malpass, P. (2005) *Housing and the Welfare State: The Development of Housing Policy in Britain* London: Routledge
- Manzi, T. and Smith-Bowers, W. (2004) 'So many managers, so little vision: Registered social landlords and consortium schemes in the UK', *European Journal of Housing Policy*, vol.4, no.1, pp.57-75.
- Matless, D. (2000) 'Moral geographies' in R. Johnston, D. Gregory, G. Pratt and M. Watts (eds.) *The Dictionary of Human Geography* Oxford: Blackwell
- Murray, C. (1990) *The Emerging British Underclass* London: Institute for Economic Affairs
- Nuttgens, P. (1989) *The Home Front* London: BBC Books
- Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) (2003) *Sustainable Communities: Building for the Future* London: ODPM
- Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) (2005) *Best Value in Housing: What Makes Local Authorities Improve and Sustain Their Performance?* London: ODPM
- Pawson, H. and Kintrea, K. (2002) 'Part of the problem or part of the solution? Social housing allocation policies and social exclusion in Britain', *Journal of Social Policy*, vol. 31, no.4, pp. 643-667
- Power, A. (1987) *Property Before People: the Management of Twentieth-Century Council Housing* London: Allen and Unwin
- Power, A. (1999) 'Marginal housing estates in Europe' in M. Kleinman, W. Matzenetter and M. Stephens (eds.) *European Integration and Housing Policy* London: Routledge/RICS, pp. 215-241
- Power, A. and Lupton, R. (2002) 'Social exclusion and neighbourhoods' in J. Hills, D. Piachaud and J. Le Grand (eds.) *Understanding Social Exclusion* Oxford: Oxford University Press

- Ravetz, A. (2001) *Council Housing and Culture* London: Routledge
- Reeves, R. (2008) 'A question of character', *Prospect*, 149, August
- Saugeres, L. (2000) 'Of tidy gardens and clean houses: Housing officers as agents of social control', *Geoforum*, 31, pp. 587-599.
- Saunders, P. (1990) *A Nation of Home Owners* London: Routledge
- Stevenson, W. (2006) 'Preface' in T. Dwelly and J. Cowans (eds.) *Rethinking Social Housing* London: The Smith Institute, pp.4-7
- Timmins, N. (1996) *The Five Giants: a Biography of the Welfare State* London: Fontana
- Torgersen, U. (1987) 'Housing: The wobbly pillar under the welfare state' in B. Turner J. Kemeny and L. Lundqvust (eds.) *Between State and Market: Housing in the Post-Industrial Era* Stockholm: Almqvist and Wiksell
- Walker, R. (2001) 'How to abolish public housing: implications and lessons from public management reform', *Housing Studies*, vol. 16, no. 5, pp.674-96.
- Watt, P. (2009) "'It's social cleansing": Housing stock transfers and state-led gentrification in London', unpublished paper, London: Birkbeck, University of London
- Whitehead, M. (2004) 'The urban neighbourhood and the moral geographies of British urban policy', in C. Johnstone and M. Whitehead (eds.) *New Horizons in British Urban Policy: Perspectives on New Labour's Urban Renaissance* Aldershot: Ashgate