

INCLUSIVE CITY BUILDING: RESISTANCE, RESPONSE AND REIMAGINATION

Seana Irvine
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Resistance, Response and Reimagination

If cities are “places constantly in the remaking”, (Mckenzie & Hutton, 2015) then who they are being remade for must be actively called into question. Urban theorist Jane Jacobs (1961) wrote in *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, her seminal publication that critiqued the large-scale urban redevelopment projects of that time, “cities have the capability of providing something for everybody, only because, and only when, they are created by everybody” (Jacobs, 1961, p. 312). If we seek to move “beyond the body count” as Cowie and Heathcott (2003) encourage deindustrialization scholars, then we must also be compelled to identify ways to make working-class lives count not only in the present, but also as active contributors shaping the future.

With its emphasis on the paramountcy of use value of urban space over exchange value, and in its advocacy that all inhabitants of a city must have the power to shape it, Henri Lefebvre’s (1968) concept of right to the city provides a useful starting point for guiding this inquiry. If

“all inhabitants” have a right to the city, then that also implies the inclusion of those who are the least well off and the most adversely affected by those redevelopment decisions. At a minimum, public policy should strive to minimize displacement (Marcuse, 1985; Slater, 2009) yet academic and policy literature has generally failed to include accounts of working-class experiences of, and participation in gentrification, working with the assumption that working-class residents are victims of gentrification, and are therefore unable to negotiate processes positively and on their own terms, ultimately resulting in their displacement (Paton, 2014).

Alternatives to gentrification are needed that are capable of addressing the class divisions, power discrepancies and structural inequalities that lie at the heart of neoliberal urban policy making and that have made cities increasingly exclusive. Devising strategies to address inequalities requires “toggling between different levels of analysis... as too much focus on global trends can make

the matter abstract and overwhelming and more specific accounts can lose the bigger picture in favour of technicalities” (Perry, 2023, p. 17). Harvey identifies the tension between local coalition movements serving class interests and global conditions “[by showing] why each must fail, for all share a common flaw: they seek local solutions to problems that are increasingly global in nature” (Harvey, 1996, p.182).

That said, the magnitude and intangibility of the larger forces of globalization and capital disinvestment involved remain abstract and distant which no doubt makes mobilization and the agency that goes with that more complex (Linkon, 2018). Adding further complication, given that gentrification results from a confluence of different measures of race, sexuality, gender, colonialism, and/or ability, solutions capable of protecting those vulnerable to displacement need to consider an intersectional approach that can build the knowledge and connections that challenge the politics of empowerment (Kern, 2022).

Examining the relationship between deindustrialization, gentrification and displacement requires embedding analysis of social justice issues within gentrification research and urban policy making in order to reframe traditional understandings of property, its commodification, ownership and exchange value (Bunce, 2018; Slater, 2009). This research ultimately asks: how should we redevelop former industrial sites to benefit those made worse off from the process of redevelopment?

The impacts of gentrification and deindustrialization are multi-scalar, spanning from the transnational to the hyperlocal. Post-industrial landscapes are contested political and economic terrain, their presence serving as a contemporary reminder of the seismic neoliberal transformation and who was, and was not, included in that transformation. How can the public good be addressed in the contemporary redevelopment of post-industrial landscapes through inclusive urban justice theory and community-based policies and practices that benefit those disproportionately negatively affected? Given the contributions that workers have made to political, economic and cultural life, and by extension the values

ascribed to former industrial sites, it is imperative to engage worker perspectives and experiences in how post-industrial landscapes are reimagined and redeveloped. More critically, it is argued that we have a moral obligation to engage working-class communities in ways that mitigate their displacement and create new opportunities for their continued involvement in and benefit of these places.

Over the past 50 years, the field of deindustrialization studies has developed and expanded to become interdisciplinary in nature. Economists, sociologists, historians and geographers have explored the economic, social and cultural impacts of deindustrialization and its relationship to gentrification, often through the voices of those most affected. Others have examined planning theories and economic development approaches, including urban social justice theory and community wealth building, that can present new possibilities that counter top down urban land use and economic policies. What is often missing from the discourse, is the growing relationship between the redevelopment of industrial heritage properties and

gentrification. Further there is a gap in research exploring alternatives to gentrification in deindustrializing neighbourhoods and how these alternatives can be advanced both within local communities but also linked to broader social movements working to get at underlying structural issues that lie at the heart of systemic inequality.

What is needed is radical, optimistic thinking that offers a counter narrative to Schumpeter's theory of creative destruction, replacing it instead with a new and potentially more profound narrative built on what sociologist Ulrich Beck calls creative construction. [Creative construction] is the besieging of what exists with provocative alternatives in which the amazing new alternative brings pressure to bear on the existing system of beliefs, putting it to the test both intellectually and politically" (Meehan, 2014, p. 131). Such thinking must be applied to address the impacts of urban displacement in the context of deindustrialization and gentrification, to create more inclusive cities capable of addressing growing inequalities and to ensure that the voices of those most affected by these processes remain active, not only in constructing the present, but in shaping a better, albeit uncertain, future.

References

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- Slater, T. (2009). Missing Marcuse: On gentrification and displacement. *City*, 13(2–3), 292–311. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13604810902982250>the complex nuances that bind the workers identity with their job, work with family, the public and private, and labour and leisure. As personal stories, they are subjective. It is this messiness, or the “contradict-ladenness of personal memory”, that best evokes the complexity and paradoxes of working-class lives (High, 2022, p. 20).