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## Demolition for development: a critical analysis of official urban imaginaries in past and present UK cities

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**Abstract:** This article analyses official urban imaginaries of 'demolition for development' in two different UK cities and time periods: 1) the City Improvement Scheme in Birmingham (1875-1914) during a time of rapid industrial growth, and 2) a housing-led neighbourhood regeneration scheme in Walker, Newcastle upon Tyne (2000-2011) during a time of post-industrial uncertainty. The concept of the 'official urban imaginary' is employed to critically examine assumptions of growth, progress and success within 'demolition for development' policies across different times and places. Drawing on both historical and sociological qualitative case study methods, this research contributes to a range of debates on urban regeneration, gentrification, creative destruction, comparative methodology, and imagining the city. The article argues that there is a serious need to rethink urban policy trajectories of property-led regeneration and 'planned gentrification', particularly in the post-2008 context of recession.

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### Introduction

Urban planners, government officials, and business developers' visions of the future city have played a key role in shaping urban development trajectories in industrialised cities throughout modern history. Several themes in urban development visions, policies and practices have recurred in different past and present cities, including the growth of public transport and communications networks, developments in sanitation and public health, and processes of suburbanisation and city expansion. This article focuses on a particular recurring theme in urban development: the large-scale demolition of 'slum' or 'working-class' housing as a means of urban development or regeneration. Demolitions to make way for development have occurred in industrialised western countries in Europe and North America. Urban imaginaries of 'global city' status (Sassen 1991) have recently figured in massive slum demolitions and redevelopments in India, Latin America, China and Africa, and in cities around the world attempting to redevelop areas of dereliction

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and poverty, including, for example, cities selected for the Olympics, the World Expo and the World Cup. These clearances are often associated with gentrification, whereby poor or working-class areas in the inner city are refurbished and converted into middle-class areas, and the original inhabitants are displaced. However, while the economic growth associated with gentrification may ultimately be a desired outcome of these policies on the part of developers and planners, it is by no means inevitable that either gentrification or economic growth will occur.

This article critically examines official urban imaginaries of ‘demolition for development’ in two different UK cities and time periods: the City Improvement Scheme in Birmingham (1875-1914) and a housing-led regeneration scheme in Walker, Newcastle upon Tyne (2000-2009). By examining official urban imaginaries in early twentieth-century Birmingham and early twenty-first-century Newcastle, one can identify striking similarities between the problems, challenges and potential solutions associated with particular logics and policies of urban development. Furthermore, comparison between the two case studies highlights the problem of applying similar visions and policies within two different periods of modern capitalism: 1) the height of Empire and industrial growth and 2) the post-colonial and post-industrial period. Both Birmingham and Newcastle were key cities in the Industrial Revolution in Britain, and both have experienced deindustrialisation over the past forty years. Both periods under study represent times of social and economic change, one during a time of rapid industrial growth and the other during a time of protracted industrial decline. The value in comparing two different cities in two different times is in critically examining a core, recurring theme in modern capitalism, of ‘demolition for development’ urban policies linked at to urban renewal and ‘improvement’, ‘slum’ and working class housing clearances, and gentrification.

This article will first introduce the concepts of ‘official urban imaginaries’ and ‘demolition for development’, linking these to debates on imagining the city, creative destruction, regeneration and gentrification. Second, the methodological challenge of making comparisons across time and space will be addressed. Third, the article will explore official urban imaginaries of housing-led ‘demolition for development’ and their implications in practice in both case studies. Finally, the article will draw some conclusions about official urban imaginaries of ‘demolition for development’ and their broader implications for imagining cities.

## **Official urban imaginaries of ‘demolition for development’: theorisations**

Imagination, imagining, the imaginary, and a variety of other terms related to ‘imagine’ have emerged as key ways of understanding, analysing and shaping the ever-changing city (Amin and Thrift 2002; Cinar and Bender 2007; Donald 1999; LiPuma and Koelble 2005; Westwood and Williams 1997; Zukin, et al. 1998). The act of imagining the city encompasses questions of identity, belonging, aspiration, memory, equality and justice. Different urban imaginaries come from a range of social actors, including writers, artists, activists, developers, urban planners, and city council officials, amongst many others. These imaginaries are found in collective memories, city plans, and public debates but also in literature and film, for example in Dickens’ grim portrayal of nineteenth-century working-class London and in the film *Bladerunner’s* dystopian vision of Los Angeles (Davis 1990). While imagining the city may create exaggerated utopian or dystopian visions of the city, imagining the city is also a way of facilitating social change, ‘an attempt to imagine not only the way we live, but above all the way we live together’ (Donald 1999, p. xi).

The ‘urban imaginary’ is a useful concept for analysing how people relate to processes of social and economic change in past and present cities. There is no fixed, agreed-upon definition of the urban imaginary. For Westwood and Williams (1997, p. 1), urban imaginaries include: ‘literary productions, notions of urban myth, memory and nostalgia in the city and its environment, [and] the sociological imagination re-cast within the changing realm of new technologies and new forms of communications.’ Other authors have developed the concept of the urban imaginary to analyse interrelated social, cultural and economic dynamics within particular cities. For example, Cinar and Bender (2007) define the ‘urban imaginary’ as the collective imagination of the city, with multiple, contested urban imaginaries acting as sites of negotiation within the city. The book includes wide-ranging empirical examples of urban imaginaries from Istanbul, Los Angeles, Paris, Brazil, Douala, Ankara, Amman, Lebanon and India, exploring processes of boundary marking, narratives of social inclusion and exclusion, and the relationship between city and nation. In a comparative study of the decline of Coney Island and the growth of Las Vegas as public spaces of amusement, Zukin et al. (1998) employ the urban imaginary to discursively analyse how the two sites represent low-class and high-class spaces, racialized spaces, and different eras of capitalism, connecting the social and cultural ‘imaginary’ with ‘real’ material impacts on growth and decline. The authors

define the urban imaginary as ‘a set of meanings about cities that arises in a specific time and cultural space: first, the relational—and often hierarchical—meanings places hold in the popular imagination, and second, the connections between hierarchies of place meanings and hierarchies of social class and race’ (Zukin, et al. 1998, p. 629-30). In another study, LiPuma and Koelble (2005) use the concept of the urban imaginary to show how the identity of Miami has been defined through circulations and flows of people, ideas and goods between North America, Latin America and the Caribbean. The urban imaginary helps to explain why Miami does not fit into the typology of industrialized or production-based cities which tend to have strong place-based identities.

Following LiPuma and Koelble (2005), I use the concept of the urban imaginary to explore cities that are defined by change, and following Zukin et al. (1998), I explore connections between urban imaginaries and processes of growth and decline. In contrast with both approaches, my definition of the urban imaginary focuses more explicitly on social change and the concept of time, and more on socioeconomic and political rather than cultural urban imaginaries. Furthermore, like Cinar and Bender (2007) I make a distinction between multiple, contested urban imaginaries found within the same cities, which I divide broadly into two types: 1) official, including city planners, government officials, and developers, and 2) community-based, including local residents and workers (and who, in the context of property-led regeneration and gentrification, come mainly from poorer, working class or socially disadvantaged backgrounds). This distinction highlights important contrasts between the elite and the everyday and between the dominant and the marginal, allowing scope for exploring further contestations and divisions within these two broad types. In this article, I critically analyse the role of the official urban imaginary of ‘demolition for development’, closely related to housing or property-led development, in shaping urban policy. I have explored everyday or community-based urban imaginaries elsewhere (Mah 2009; Mah 2010), arguing that alternative and diverse perspectives on the city are crucial for challenging dominant policy logics and agendas.

In this article, I focus on the logics underpinning urban policy visions-- how government and municipal officials ‘imagined’ and ‘imagine’ the city-- and how ‘official urban imaginaries’ are important in shaping urban futures. During the 1990s, many cities in North America and Europe adopted ‘entrepreneurial city’ strategies, motivated by global competition with other cities to attract investment (Hall and Hubbard 1998; Hubbard 1996; Quilley 1999; Ward 2003). Entrepreneurial cities explicitly focused on

improving the image of their cities through place-marketing, city-branding, boosterism, and fostering public-private partnerships. However, the concern in this article is less with the surface ‘image’ of the city and more with the ways in which policy-makers ‘imagine’ the city, beneath the rhetoric. This article critically analyses the underlying assumptions of policy ‘visions’ for future cities, including the assumption of economic growth rather than decline (particularly before the 2008 economic recession), and the one-size-fits-all application of property-led regeneration and of arts-and-culture-led regeneration to a diverse range of regeneration cities and context. I argue that these assumptions are not only a product of post-industrial urban imaginaries but that they have deep historical and ideological roots, linked to ideas of progress and *Homo Faber* embedded in modern capitalism (Berman 1983; Harvey 2006; Sennett 2008), and to Schumpeter’s notion of ‘creative destruction’. Schumpeter argued that in order for capitalism to remain dynamic and innovative, it had to undergo a process of both creation and destruction:

The opening up of new markets, foreign or domestic, and the organizational development from the craft shop and factory to such concerns as U.S. Steel illustrate the same process of industrial mutation— if I may use that biological term—that incessantly revolutionizes the economic structure from within, incessantly destroying the old one, incessantly creating a new one. This process of Creative Destruction is the essential fact about capitalism. It is what capitalism consists in and what every capitalist concern has got to live in. (Schumpeter 1965: 83)

The concept of creative destruction helps to explain economic processes of deindustrialisation and recession within capitalism, but it also informs the market-based rationale of urban development and regeneration policies.

Since the 1970s and 80s, there have been two dominant models of urban regeneration policies in the UK, Western Europe, North America and other parts of the ‘post-industrial’ world: arts-and-culture-led regeneration, and property-led regeneration. Arts-and-culture-led regeneration has its roots the 1960s, as young artists and musicians moved to derelict rat-infested warehouses in SoHo in Manhattan, gradually adding caché to the area and attracting property developers and middle-class residents, driving up prices and pushing out existing populations, a phenomenon famously described in Zukin’s (1982) *Loft Living* and linked to processes of gentrification. Arts-and-culture-led regeneration is founded on a concept of the post-industrial knowledge and service economy, and it focuses on converting derelict warehouses, factories and old industrial

quarters into artists' lofts, museums, galleries, and trendy clubs and restaurants. This regeneration strategy embraces the argument in favour of the 'creative city' and the 'creative class' (Florida 2005; Landry 2000) as engines of 'growth' in the new economy. Property-led regeneration is linked to many arts-and-culture regeneration projects, with fancy new apartments and restaurants built alongside revitalised urban areas. However, property-led regeneration is also a strategy that has been pursued independently of arts-and-culture-led regeneration, with new and attractive housing meant to be a driver of economic growth particularly within neighbourhood or area-based initiatives. Both models are premised on economic growth rather than decline, and offer one-size-fits-all models for regeneration.<sup>1</sup> This article focuses on the latter model of property-led regeneration, making connections between recent property-led regeneration policies and historical property-led slum clearance and city improvement policies.

'Demolition for development' policies clear away 'slums' and working class housing to make way for urban development, displacing people in this process. These policies have obvious connections with gentrification, a concept which has been the subject of much academic and policy debate as to its causes, types, and socioeconomic implications (cf. Butler 2007; Hamnett 1984; Smith 2002). Hamnett (1984: 284) provides a useful general definition of gentrification as: 'Simultaneously a physical, economic, social and cultural phenomenon. Gentrification commonly involves the invasion by middle-class or higher-income groups of previously working-class neighbourhoods or multi-occupied "twilight areas" and the replacement or displacement of many of the original occupants.' In the section on Newcastle upon Tyne, this article explores what I term 'planned gentrification', associated with the official urban imaginary of 'demolition for development. The idea of planned gentrification draws on Smith's (2002, p. 427) argument that 'the process of gentrification, which initially emerged as a sporadic, quaint, and local anomaly in the housing markets of some *command-center* cities, is now thoroughly generalized as an urban strategy that takes over from liberal urban policy.' According to Smith, while early forms of gentrification were relatively sporadic and organic, emerging out of various urban forces such as inner city decline and artists' loft-living, by the 1990s gentrification had become entrenched and generalized as a 'crucial urban strategy for city governments in consort with private capital in cities around the world' (Smith 2002, p. 441). I argue that planned gentrification is the key underlying strategy of recent UK housing-led regeneration strategies targeted at areas of deprivation, and that this strategy

has commonalities—in terms of human costs in the face of capitalist ‘progress’-- with late nineteenth-century slum clearance and city improvement schemes.

### **Making comparisons across time and place: methodological challenges**

Urban imaginaries encompass past, present and future visions of cities, as places to live, work and play, as places to leave, visit and return to, and as places that have changed, are changing and will change. Although situated within ‘present’ contexts, urban imaginaries tend to focus on ideas about the past or the future, of how things will be or ought to be, or how things used to be or could have been. As such, urban imaginaries encompass both historical and sociological imaginations of continuities, disruptions and social change. Indeed, both history and sociology are required to understand patterns, processes and trajectories of continuity and social change over time. Calhoun (2003, p. 383) argues that the ‘most compelling reason for the existence of historical sociology... is the importance of studying social change.’

In the era of modernity and late capitalism, greater value tends to be placed on the future, on ‘progress’, and on the ‘new’. As Fabian (2002 [1983]) argues, hierarchical notions of time are used in conceptualising the ‘Other’, where communities that do not conform to western capitalist development trajectories are seen as background or living in the past, rather than present or future-oriented. Similarly, Vásquez (2009) argues that there is a hierarchical ‘politics of time’, and he places value in an orientation towards the past *in itself*, particularly in relation to marginal voices, arguing that no one time period should have greater importance than another. The notion of a politics of time is particularly relevant for analysing property-led regeneration schemes, which generally have short time frames based on the needs of developers rather than ‘community time frames’ based on the long term needs of existing communities (Raco, et al. 2008).

By comparing two British industrial cities in different time periods characterised by growth and decline, this article aims to create a dialogue between urban imaginaries across time and space. This analysis draws on the methodological idea within much of historical sociology that comparative analysis is one of the most revealing and rigorous methods of research. For example, historical sociologists and social historians have argued that comparative research, both between and within cases, has greater potential than analysis of single cases, phenomena or contexts because the process of identifying similarities, differences, common themes, issues and concepts leads to the generation of



theory (Burawoy 2005; Calhoun 1993; Skocpol 1984). I argue that making comparisons across not only space but also time is important, particularly in the context of issues such as urban redevelopment, where layers of past policies continue to shape current policies. As Henderson et al (2007, p. 1442) argue,

Rather than the latest policies wiping the slate clean and signalling a fresh start, urban areas in need of regeneration experience the layering of national policies over considerable periods of time. Decisions that have been made in earlier periods create path dependencies that shape how future policies will be implemented. Importantly such path dependencies may act to encourage the adoption of national policy frameworks as often as they hinder their implementation.

This article argues that the influence of past policies on current policies tends to be forgotten as each 'new' urban imaginary of the future city is recast, that the historical layers go back further in time than many people might imagine. If past policies and path-dependencies are so important in shaping urban development trajectories, then is important to critically examine the logics and imaginaries underpinning these policies.

Comparing different places and times presents considerable methodological challenges, and several methodological approaches to have been developed to address these challenges within historical sociology, including the use of narrative and 'path dependency', generalising variable-based comparisons, and interpretive or 'individualising' frameworks (Bonnell 1980; Skocpol 1984; Somers 1992). Haydu (1998) advances a particularly useful methodology for historical comparison which links different time periods with recurring social problems, such as 'the dependent poor', 'homelessness', or 'capital-labour relations'. He argues that the heuristic device of problem solving overcomes the tensions between continuities and contrasts found within comparative case studies, for '(s)olutions may embody contradictions that generate later crises, and they bequeath tools and understandings with which later actors confront those crises' (Haydu 1998, p. 354). In other words, it is important to see how similar problems or issues have been tackled in different historical contexts especially when evaluating past and potential solutions or outcomes and their broader implications. For the purposes of this article, the recurring 'problem' of property-led 'demolition for development' policies will be used to link the different historical time periods in Birmingham and Newcastle upon Tyne.

Late nineteenth-century Birmingham acquired not only a national but an international reputation as an exemplar of municipal governance (Briggs 1952; Cherry 1994; Hennock 1973). In the 1870s, the mayor of Birmingham Joseph Chamberlain clearly articulated and implemented an 'urban imaginary' of public-spirited capitalism, described by historians as the 'civic gospel' (Briggs 1952) and the 'municipal gospel' (Hennock 1973). Chamberlain was responsible for the development of public services through the municipalisation of the gas and water, and for the City Improvement Scheme which involved extensive slum clearances of working class homes and the construction of new streets, shops and services. The 'civic gospel' was to have an enduring effect on the city's governance and identity. However, despite the positive reputation of Chamberlain's municipal vision, the Birmingham City Council neglected to replace most of the housing it had demolished, and insufficient housing for the working classes remained the most glaring omission in official municipal policy until after the First World War.

By contrast, late nineteenth-century Newcastle upon Tyne was at the height of its industrial powers in coal, shipbuilding and engineering. Both Birmingham and Newcastle expanded during the Industrial Revolution, but Newcastle was small by comparison.<sup>2</sup> Unlike the Victorian cities Birmingham, Manchester and Leeds, which were each associated with different municipal visions (Briggs 1968), Newcastle did not gain an equivalent reputation. Newcastle's economy first suffered a major downturn in 1910 during a national slump that hit the coal and engineering trades particularly hard. The economy revived during the First World War, suffered again in the 1930s, revived briefly during the 1950s post-war boom, and has been in serious decline since the 1970s (Tomaney and Ward 2001). The decline of manufacturing has been accompanied by limited service sector growth, with jobs in shipyards and factories being replaced by jobs in call centres, night clubs and shopping malls. Many critics have been sceptical about the ability of the 'service economy' to offer long-term prospects for economic growth in Newcastle (Hollands and Chatterton 2002; Richardson, et al. 2000). Since the 1980s, Newcastle City Council has focused on urban regeneration to counter trends of depopulation and economic decline, but it has lacked a coherent vision, relying disproportionately on arts and-property-led development strategies for renewal. Although the regeneration of Newcastle-Gateshead quayside has been successful in transforming the appearance of the city centre, housing-led neighbourhood regeneration has proved disastrous in deprived areas just beyond the city centre such as the West End

(Scotswood) and East End (Walker), where houses have been demolished, new housing projects have stalled, and the areas face continued deprivation and stigmatisation (cf. Robinson, 2005).

My research methods for analysing urban imaginaries of demolition for development in Birmingham (1875-1914) and Newcastle upon Tyne (2000-2011) have necessarily been different for each case. In Birmingham, I have examined historical published sources and archival documents in the Birmingham City Archives and the House of Commons Parliamentary Papers. In Newcastle upon Tyne, my research has drawn primarily on in-depth interviews and ethnographic observations with City Council officials, workers, residents, and other local actors between 2005 and 2009.<sup>3</sup> In the following section, official urban imaginaries of ‘demolition for development’ will be analysed through examining government and policy-making perspectives in both cities.

### **Case studies: Birmingham (1870-1914) and Walker, Newcastle upon Tyne (2000-2011)**

Official urban imaginaries reflect the guiding visions, principles and aspirations of government officials, municipal leaders, city planners and developers. This section will examine the policy logics in each city underpinning common policy visions of ‘demolition for development’ in Birmingham and Walker, Newcastle upon Tyne. In both cases, official urban imaginaries are closely linked to the logic of the market, prioritising economic growth and development over social concerns, and to the conflicting logic of civic duty or the public good. Birmingham’s ‘municipal transformation’ of the 1870s is often linked to municipal socialism, with a combined focus on civic and social responsibility on the one hand, and economic growth and efficiency on the other. By contrast, housing-led regeneration in Newcastle upon Tyne has its roots in an urban regeneration programme dating from the late 1990s called ‘Going for Growth’, which emphasises economic growth and competition, with very little regard for social responsibility.

#### ***Birmingham City Improvement Scheme***

Late nineteenth-century Birmingham was a national and international exemplar of municipal civic transformation, described as the ‘best-governed city in the world’ (Ralph,

1890). The municipal reform movement in Birmingham began in the 1870s, inspired by Non-conformist religious ideas about civic responsibility and Liberal market notions of free enterprise (Briggs 1952; Hennock 1973; Muirhead 1911). As Hennock (1973, p. 172) argues, the crucial innovation of the Birmingham municipal reform movement was ‘a new vision of the function and nature of the corporation (City Council).’ The key figure associated with the municipal reform movement was Joseph Chamberlain, Mayor of Birmingham between 1873 and 1876 and MP for Birmingham between 1876 and 1914. Chamberlain’s main achievements included the municipalisation of gas, the municipalisation of water, and the City Improvement Scheme, which cleared away insanitary slum housing and constructed new streets, shops, and public buildings. Much of late-nineteenth-century Birmingham’s success was related to its peculiar industrial structure as a ‘city of a thousand trades’, with industries operating in a range of small factories where there were close relations between masters and skilled craftsmen. Birmingham suffered less than many other cities in times of economic hardship, for the ‘tradition of skill, the variety of trades, and the adaptability of the finishing industries were to prove as beneficial to the city in the dark days of the Great Depression after 1929 as they have done in the nineteenth century’ (Briggs 1952, p. 5).

The City Improvement Scheme was made possible through the National Government’s Artisans’ Dwellings Act of 1875. The Artisan’s Dwellings Act provided for the acquisition by certain types of local authorities of ‘insanitary areas’ within the limits of their towns, which they could buy ‘compulsorily’. Once land was acquired, local authorities could remove buildings unsuitable for habitation, arrange for the building of a dwelling, and carry out other improvements. However, local authorities were not allowed to build working-class houses themselves without the special authority of the Local Government Board (Briggs 1952, p. 77). In 1875, Chamberlain appointed the ‘Improvement Committee’ to clean up some of the poorest slum areas in Birmingham. Corporation Street was the principle achievement of this scheme, ‘a great street, as broad as a Parisian boulevard, from New Street to the Aston Road,’ and it was designed to be Birmingham’s premier shopping street (Upton 1993, p. 155). The building of Corporation Street met with criticism due to its high expenditure and the long duration of the building process. The street was built over a number of years, ‘its local popularity fluctuating with local prosperity’(Briggs 1952, p. 19). By 1892, all of the available sites had been built upon, with the Victoria Law Courts, the Grant Theatre, Cobden’s Hotel, and a number of shops. However, the City Improvement Scheme was perhaps the least

successful of Chamberlain's three 'achievements', for while it enabled the building of a 'great street', it largely neglected the issue of building new working class homes to replace the slum clearances.

As in many other cities in Britain which had expanded rapidly with industrialisation and urbanisation in the late nineteenth century, the vast majority of the working poor lived in overcrowded and insanitary 'slum' housing conditions, with high incidences of death and disease. Chamberlain spoke widely and empathetically about the deplorable conditions of housing: 'What folly it is to talk about the moral and intellectual elevation of the masses when the conditions of life are such as to render elevation impossible!' (Chamberlain, quoted in Hennock 1973, p. 140) However, in practice, Birmingham lagged behind other cities in its housing policies. For example, Liverpool was a progressive city in terms of its housing policy; it passed a Sanitary Act in 1846 peculiar to the city and a year later appointed the country's first medical officer of health (Chinn 1999, p. 4). Manchester followed the example of Liverpool by banning the building of back-to-backs from 1844. By contrast, in Birmingham there was a great deal of resistance to large-scale slum clearance and to the municipal building of working class houses until after the war, and the Artisans' Dwellings Act permitted the buying and clearing of slum properties but did not authorise new building. Indeed, very few working class houses were built at affordable rates between 1875 and 1914; many more homes were destroyed than replaced, and many slums remained untouched.

In 1875, Birmingham's Medical Officer of Health drew attention to the difference between the annual death rate in the affluent Edgbaston area of Birmingham, at 13.11 per thousand and that of the slum area of St Mary's Ward at 26.86 (Chinn 1999, p. 7). The Birmingham Corporation (another word for City Council at the time) continued to express the view that private developers would build houses to replace slum clearances, but by 1889, they were forced to take action due to the lack of private development. The Corporation built twenty-two houses in Ryder Street which were let quickly to 'respectable', well-paid working class families. Although the scheme was successful, it was limited in its small scale and its exclusion of poorer working class families. By 1885, only 62 new houses had been built but 653 had been destroyed (Upton 1993, p. 155). A series of articles appeared in 1901 in the *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, a Conservative-supporting newspaper, provoking public outrage at the housing conditions of the working classes. The articles were written by J. C. Walters, called *Scenes in Slumland*, and he argued that 'the pen of Zola' could scarcely do justice to the horrors in some of

the slums of Birmingham, 'in Christian England, and in the best-governed city in the world, with the finest Health Committee and the most enterprising municipality ever known' (Walters, quoted in Chinn 1999, p. 14). Despite deep controversy within the Corporation over the issue of slum housing, the Housing Committee resisted the notion of large-scale housing demolition, preferring selective slum demolitions and a policy of property improvement referred to as 'slum patching' by critics (Chinn 1999, p. 16). In the period between 1870 and 1914, there was a fall in infant mortality and general death rates in the city's poorest areas due to improvements in health and sanitation in the city. However, moderate improvement of slum properties was only a short-term measure to address a mounting crisis of housing shortage. The logic of the market, which emphasised people's individual responsibility to find and afford adequate housing, prevailed in the years leading up to the First World War, when there were acute housing shortages in the city.

Chamberlain's overarching municipal vision was not the only official urban imaginary during this period. An alternative vision was mapped out in 1895, when the Birmingham-based chocolate-maker John Cadbury built a prototype of the ideal urban community, Bournville, designed around a new factory located four miles outside of Birmingham. At Bournville, Cadbury provided a different range of services to his employees than those offered within the city of Birmingham, the advantages of outdoor life, a school, a church, playgrounds, the potential for self-government, and above all, respite from the insufficient and insanitary housing associated with inner city life (Briggs 1952; Cherry 1994; Upton 1993). These services highlight differences between Chamberlain and Cadbury in their urban imaginaries of working life in cities: Cadbury's was a vision of benevolent paternalism and cloistered garden-suburb life, whereas Chamberlain's was a vision of civic enterprise (twinned with imperial ambitions of grandiosity) based on the Victorian notion of self-help, where people would improve their own lives through hard work and thrift, once provided with adequate resources and services (Fraser 1979). Neither urban imaginary adequately addressed issues of employment or housing concerning the poorest working classes. As Chinn (1999, p. 25) points out, the poor did not share in the benefits of Bournville: it was intended for the wealthier, more 'respectable' working classes, as were the public services provided under Chamberlain.

The official urban imaginary of the Birmingham Corporation's 'civic gospel' had real consequences in policy; it improved the lives of many people through provision of

affordable public transport, water, electricity, gas, libraries, museums, parks and galleries. However, the Corporation's reluctance to replace working class homes that were demolished through the City Improvement Scheme also had real negative consequences for working people's lives. For example, evidence from the Royal Commission on the Poor Laws *Report on the Relation of Industrial and Sanitary Conditions to Pauperism* (Steel-Maitland and Squire 1909, p. 143) included a detailed survey on the re-housing of families displaced by the Birmingham City Improvement Scheme. The social investigator visited a number of tenants in Birmingham who were on the verge of having to leave their condemned housing courts, describing a range of bleak cases of people suffering from extreme poverty, disease, depression, alcoholism, and apathy due to their precarious situations. Moreover, the Corporation's policies led to an acute housing shortage in Birmingham by the beginning of the First World War, which was to be greatly exacerbated during the war by a national moratorium on house building and by the influx of migrants to the city for the industrial war effort.

Chamberlain stressed two objectives in his Improvement Scheme: the need to improve the conditions for the working class, and the desire to enhance the look and reputation of Birmingham as a grand city within the British empire (Chinn 1999, p. 8). Clearly, the latter objective was more important than the former, and it has clear parallels with the entrepreneurial city strategies of today. In keeping with the overall logic of municipal civic enterprise, the 'civic' was the first to be lost from the equation. The Corporation avoided municipal building of housing for the working classes except under intense political pressure, relied on 'slum patching', and focused instead on municipal expansion into the suburbs to contain the problem of slums. As Cherry (1994, p. 72) argues, Birmingham City Council undertook in the late nineteenth-century 'what we today would call "urban renewal" in the removal of some of the town's worst slums.'

Next, we will turn to a case of urban renewal premised on the urban imaginary of 'demolition for development' in the present.

### ***Housing-Led Regeneration in Walker, Newcastle upon Tyne***

Newcastle upon Tyne was one of the first cities in Britain to experience massive deindustrialisation, with experiences of industrial decline dating from the early twentieth century. The shipyards and other heavy industries have been in serious decline since the 1970s, and this process has been long and drawn out. Although the majority of plant

closures in Newcastle occurred throughout the 1970s and 1980s, closures continued through the 1990s and into the 2000s. Many of the call centres which opened in the 1990s have since moved to India, amongst other places in Asia (Richardson, et al. 2000). Swan Hunter shipyard achieved iconic stature as the last 'last shipyard of the Tyne' (Rae and Smith 2001), surviving through periods of near-death and resurrection, and finally closing in July 2006. City Council-led regeneration schemes in the city date to the early 1980s, with efforts since the late 1990s focused principally on housing-led regeneration. In general, Newcastle's regeneration policy has followed national trends in UK regeneration policy, focused on arts, culture and property development as engines of redevelopment, while avoiding deeper socioeconomic issues such as unemployment, poverty and social exclusion. Regeneration policies in the UK since the 1990s have also tended to assume a context of economic growth rather than decline (Cochrane 2006; Imrie and Raco 2003; Tallon 2010). According to a recent report on the history of regeneration of the Newcastle-Gateshead quayside (Morgan 2009), regeneration efforts over the years have been piecemeal, lack a coherent vision and strategy, and rely a great deal on developers.

In 1999, Newcastle City Council branded itself as 'competitive Newcastle', launching a controversial ten-year economic redevelopment plan entitled 'Going for Growth'. This housing-led regeneration plan aimed to replace old housing stock with new, middle-class homes in an effort to combat depopulation, raising concerns about the displacement of working class populations (Byrne 2000; Cameron 2003). The rationale behind this scheme was not unique to Newcastle, but fit into the wider UK regeneration strategy of Rogers Urban Task Force and New Labour (cf. Imrie and Raco 2003). After a great deal of criticism for its heavy-handed approach, the City Council abandoned the 'Going for Growth' label, although the legacy of this approach remains evident, particularly in area-based housing-led regeneration schemes. Recent flagship arts-led regeneration efforts have focused on the Newcastle-Gateshead quayside, with the 2002 transformation of the 1950s Baltic Flour Mill into the Baltic Contemporary Art Gallery, the construction of the Millennium Bridge which connects the municipalities of Newcastle and Gateshead, and the 2005 Norman Foster designed Sage Music Centre. The regeneration of the Newcastle-Gateshead quayside has been heralded as a good example of post-industrial renewal: 'Gateshead Quayside stands as one of the clearest examples in Europe, and perhaps the world, of urban regeneration led by arts and cultural investment' (Bailey, et al. 2004, p. 51). However, most of the arts-led



regeneration along Newcastle-Gateshead quayside relied on National Lottery funds, whereas Newcastle's neighbourhood regeneration projects have relied primarily on housing-led development. Walker, a deprived area in the East End of Newcastle, has been the focus of regeneration efforts since the 1980s, but regeneration has yet to succeed in the area.

Over the past forty years, Walker has experienced severe population loss, industrial decline, and an erosion of shops, services, and housing. According to the 2000 English Indices of Deprivation, the Walker ward ranked the worst of all twenty-six wards in Newcastle and thirtieth worst of all 8414 wards in England against the 2000 (Noble, et al. 2000). The majority of the total housing stock (77% in 1991, with little or no rebuilding until the regeneration in 2006) in Walker consisted of local authority housing, much of which was built during the 1930s (Madanipour and Bevan 1999). Walker has long been associated with the shipbuilding industry, from the bygone days of bustling shipyards and cranes, to the present image of industrial decline. The most recent City Council-led regeneration plan for Walker dates to 2000 but was not officially approved until 2006. The plan was initially part of the controversial 'Going for Growth' scheme, but the residents of Walker protested strongly against the proposed regeneration, as the plans involved a considerable number of housing demolitions. The community backlash prevented regeneration from progressing according to plan. This contrasted with other parts of the city such as the West End of Newcastle, which had already undergone several waves of demolitions and redevelopments over the past forty years, with relatively little resistance on the part of the community *this* time around.<sup>4</sup> A regeneration and housing company was brought in as the regeneration partner for Walker following community engagement in 2002. According to Newcastle City Council and its regeneration development partner (various interviews, 2005-2006), the main aim of the regeneration of Walker was to deal with the systemic and long-standing social and economic problems in the area, including population loss, high rates of unemployment, low demand for housing, poor quality of housing and infrastructure, few local shops and services, and inadequate public transport. In 2002 the Walker Riverside regeneration scheme became part of the Bridging Newcastle Gateshead Housing Market Renewal (HMR) Pathfinder, one of nine HMR areas identified within the North and the Midlands of the UK in 2002 as areas of 'low housing demand' with depopulation, dereliction, poor services and poor social conditions (Long and Wilson 2011).

After a number of contentious issues surrounding the proposed demolition of housing in Walker, further consultation with the 'community' was undertaken in November 2004, and consultations continued until October 2005. The 'community' was then asked to choose one of three options: minor, moderate or major impact, with minor involving no demolition of homes, moderate involving some demolition, and major involving considerable demolition (700 homes). With the exception of the Labour Councillors for the Walker Ward, the Liberal-Democrat-run City Council clearly favoured the third option and with that option alone promised the community investment in schools, local infrastructure and shops. The proposed regeneration of Walker under 'option three' involved a great deal of change to the area, with the aim of bringing in new housing, better parks and services, and a wave of new population. Many of the demolitions of 1930s council houses were concentrated on the riverside area of Pottery Bank, as this was an attractive place to build new homes. The City proposed that residents who were displaced by demolitions move into different housing, with the 'option' to buy or rent the new houses that would be built in their place. However, following numerous other housing-led regeneration schemes in the UK, Newcastle City Council was set on a mixture of 80% ownership and 20% rental tenure, and most of the residents in Walker could not afford the prices of the new houses. Local residents remained sceptical about the prospects for change; for example, one resident Laura remembered regeneration efforts along her local street which had failed completely or else stopped halfway through. When Laura took me on an informal walking tour of the area, she pointed out half a block of houses with new double-glazed windows and partial refurbishments (interview and walking tour, 22 March 2006).

Based on analysis of regeneration policy and practice, one could argue that the 'demolition for development' scheme advanced by the City Council and its development partner was a case of planned gentrification. The strategy was to demolish existing council homes in 'desirable' riverside areas, build new middle class homes, improve the property values in the area, attract new middle class residents from other areas of the city, and relocate displaced 'working class' populations outside of the coveted new development area. Of course, Newcastle City Council did not explicitly use the negative and loaded terminology of 'planned gentrification' to describe their strategy. Rather, they euphemistically promoted the idea of Walker as a 'place of choice' which would attract middle-income groups to reverse depopulation and decline. The manager of the City's development partner noted there were fears amongst residents that developers were

trying to displace them and to turn their community into a yuppie area. She denied that this was the case, but she stated that ‘frankly, a sprinkling of yuppies would be good for the economy’, in the sense of ‘promoting social and economic diversity through the mixture of tenure and income groups’ (Interview, 2 December 2005).

The City Council attempted to downplay the underlying ‘demolition for development’ and planned gentrification purposes of its proposed regeneration. The regeneration plan for the Walker community was initially termed ‘Community Focus’ in 2005, but once the regeneration process was underway in 2006, the official literature changed to emphasise harmony, with the phrase ‘Heart of Walker’ representing the vision of Walker as a regenerated community. Unlike the previous ‘Community Focus’ slogan found on the regeneration website, the ‘Heart of Walker’ slogan did not focus on the decline in the area nor on the need for regeneration. Rather, it emphasised the new version of Walker that it was selling:

Walker is a great place to live. It is not just about housing, it is a lifestyle. Only minutes from Newcastle city centre and the quayside it is certainly a great place to be. With new homes, shops, schools and a host of other facilities on the way, it is a wonderful community and a first class location.

(<http://www.walker-riverside.co.uk/living.html>, accessed December 2007)

The ‘Heart of Walker’ campaign advertised the regenerated landscape of Walker as though it already existed.

Three years later, in July 2009, almost nothing from the vision of the ‘third option’ for the regeneration of Walker had materialised. Follow-up interviews with a Labour City Councillor, a City Council Officer for Economic Development, a former City Council Regeneration Manager and two local residents (interviews, 8-9 July 2009) revealed that the plan had been a failure. Many houses had been demolished and many of the new houses had been built, but few of the new houses had been sold. By July 2009, no yuppies had come to Walker as a ‘place of choice’; the area had not been gentrified as planned. Furthermore, no new shops or services had been built, as promised under the agreement between the developers and the City Council, for the logic was of trickle-down: property development first, and services later (Interview, Labour Councillor, 9 July 2009). By 2009, the cosy ‘Heart of Walker’ regeneration slogan of 2007 had been changed to ‘passion-pride-potential’. The new sales tone was more cautious, referring to the improvement of the Walker riverside and targeting the local population as well as newcomers: ‘The Walker Riverside is being improved to become a location of choice.

Current residents will choose to stay in the area, people looking to move into the east end of Newcastle will want to choose to move to Walker Riverside' (<http://www.walker-riverside.co.uk/homes.html>, accessed July 2009).

There were two main issues during my follow-up visit in 2009 that had arisen in the Walker community as a result of the failure of housing-led development: racial tensions and overcrowding. Both of these issues stemmed from an acute housing shortage caused by the demolitions and lack of available social or affordable housing. Problems of racial tensions and acute overcrowding provide strong evidence of the short-sightedness of official housing-led 'urban imaginaries'. Rather than attracting young professionals and families to the newly built homes, the main newcomers in the area were African asylum-seekers who had been arriving in Walker since 2000, when the UK government introduced a dispersal system through which asylum seekers were to be placed in designated deprived areas in 'hard to let' housing such as Walker. Many of the asylum-seekers had now been granted refugee status and were competing with local residents for increasingly limited social housing. This caused serious racial tensions and conflicts in the area, which already existed to an extent at the beginning of the regeneration in 2005-2006 but had since escalated. According to the Labour City Councillor for Walker, racial tensions had led to a rise in votes for the BNP in what has traditionally been a Labour ward (interview, 8 July 2009). Similarly, a Walker resident who worked at a local community development organisation noted that the organisation had focused a lot of its attention on easing racial tensions in Walker, for example through a collaborative community photography project (interview, 9 July 2009).

An independent report on neighbourhood regeneration in Newcastle was released by the Audit Commission in June 2009 which criticised the City Council for the fact that 'no new housing has been built in Scotswood [the West End] and no new shops and limited community facilities in Walker', and for 'significant gaps between the most deprived and least deprived areas in the City' (Audit Commission 2009, p. 7). The report stated that Walker's regeneration strategy was principally physically focused and housing led, and that '(g)iven the slow progress on the physical regeneration, and the lack of a holistic approach, there is a risk of failure.' (p. 37) Another criticism of the Audit Commission was that 'the Council has had a reputation for slow and cumbersome processes and decision-making in the past' (p. 4), and when the City Council Officer for Economic Development spoke to me of yet another 'Masterplan' in the works to re-evaluate Newcastle's regeneration plans (interview, 8 July 2009), this seemed like an

accurate observation. But much of the blame for the failures of regeneration was placed on the context of economic recession.

The funding for the Housing Market Renewal Pathfinders (£2.75 billion between 2002 and 2011) was cut by the Coalition Government in March 2011, six years earlier than expected, in the spending review of October 2010 (Long and Wilson 2011). This sparked considerable concern about people in pathfinder areas including Walker who had been displaced or were living next to demolished or half-demolished houses, although blame was primarily placed on the economic recession rather than the overall regeneration strategy (Cooper 2011; Long and Wilson 2011). Indeed, the economic recession has inspired urban policy-makers and academics to consider arguments for seriously rethinking regeneration strategies. A report by the UK Department of Communities and Government (Parkinson 2008) about the impacts of the credit crunch on regeneration cautiously argues that current models of finance regeneration may no longer be viable because of their high levels of risk. Taking a more market-oriented approach, Gibb and O'Sullivan (2010) argue that residential-led approaches to regeneration will survive the economic recession, based on their confidence that developers will once again be prepared to take risks when 'global financial normality' is restored. By contrast, Ward (2009) argues that there is 'a highly specific crisis of housing, housing markets, and affordable housing', and that even 'when the good times return', regeneration policies that have worked well for the past twenty to thirty years will no longer be effective.

The economic recession is clearly an important context in which to rethink regeneration strategies which have deep historical and ideological roots. But the recession is not the only reason to rethink regeneration: area-based housing-led regeneration schemes have failed repeatedly in the West and East Ends of Newcastle since the 1980s, as well as in chronically 'deprived' areas throughout the UK. Another important factor to consider is the 'urban imaginary'. The most recent regeneration plan for Newcastle in 2021 highlights the importance of image in regenerating cities: 'Image matters- negative images of people and places can seriously undermine regeneration efforts' (Newcastle City Council 2008, p. 13). This is a lesson that has been learned through places like Walker, where despite efforts to promote positive alternative visions of an area which has long suffered from social deprivation and stigmatisation, negative images persist. The City Council Officer for Economic Development admitted that while Newcastle was doing 'reasonably well' in terms of its city centre focus on culture and entertainment, in

the east and west ends of the city where the bulk of the population live and where the former shipyards were, things weren't going so well. For example, he said that in Walker: ... the image is still difficult in terms of attracting people to come and live there. The regeneration programmes have stalled because of the economic climate. Developers aren't coming forward with housing developments; the profits aren't there, therefore the developers aren't coming forward, so things aren't going as well as we might have expected.' (interview, 8 July 2009).

The case of Walker suggests that areas marked by decline and stigmatisation rather than growth, there is a need for different regeneration strategies, different time scales and different imaginaries. Walker also highlights a danger in advocating one-size-fits-all regeneration policies such as housing-led regeneration, premised on the assumption that property development leads to gentrification, profits, and a trickle-down effect for community development.

## **Conclusions**

Urban imaginaries of renewal and change play a strong role in urban development trajectories and in processes of economic growth and decline, with real consequences for individuals, families and communities. In both Birmingham and Newcastle upon Tyne, official urban imaginaries of 'demolition for development' were overwhelmingly future-oriented, where elements of the past and present were discarded in the wake of urban development. At the heart of both cases is the classic modern dilemma of capitalist development, of creative destruction and its associated social costs, a theme that is eloquently explored in Marshall Berman's analysis of Goethe's *Faust* in his final tragic modern life stage as a rampant property developer (Berman 1983). These modern capitalist dilemmas were evident in the official urban imaginaries that were explored in both cities, with a clash between market imperatives and social and civic responsibility.

Official urban imaginaries illustrate the limits of the 'post-industrial' imagination, which promotes the service sector, knowledge economy and creative industries, relies on arts and property-led regeneration as engines of economic growth, and is premised on the idea of economic growth rather than contraction. However, these forms of regeneration have limited potential for economic and community development, particularly in the post-2008 context of recession. Physical renewal is not enough; social and economic issues of employment opportunities, skills retention, and skills training

within the local community need to be addressed in any scheme which would have real impacts for urban development. In Birmingham, many of the human costs of urban development over a century ago have long been buried or forgotten. Despite its failure in housing policies, Chamberlain's municipal vision of public-spirited capitalism in Birmingham was a relative 'success' because the city was transformed not only physically and economically, but also socially and culturally. Furthermore, slum clearances were necessary not only from the perspective of capitalist development but for the purposes of sanitation and public health. The main failure of the slum clearance policies in Birmingham was in neglecting to provide adequate working class housing to replace the slum housing. By drawing attention to the social costs of the Birmingham City Improvement Plan, we can see how certain urban issues have historically been prioritised over others, laying the grounds for particular pathways of development. 'Demolition for development' policies have consistently overlooked such social costs, and the dominant historical narratives tend to highlight the myriad successes of modern capitalist development rather than its destructive wake.

Newcastle upon Tyne's vision, with its roots in 'Going for Growth' and its connection to national regeneration policy trends in the UK, has focused almost exclusively on physical regeneration, while neglecting social dimensions. Newcastle has followed the precedents set by cities around the world, not only in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, but spanning back as far as the late-nineteenth century, with the beginnings of modern capitalism, urbanisation and industrialisation. In comparison with Chamberlain's vision of municipal transformation in late nineteenth-century Birmingham, policy visions and solutions in Newcastle at the turn of the twenty-first century have been less imaginative, less reflexive and more imitative of previous strategies. In contrast with Birmingham, the housing demolitions in Walker were not necessary from the perspective of sanitation or public health; according to many interviewees, most of the houses that were demolished were solid 1930s council houses, demolished in order to reverse 'stigma' and diversify the housing stock. However, the Newcastle City Council was also similar to Birmingham in that it ultimately failed to rehouse the people who it displaced, in this case due to over-reliance on the whims of property developers rather than overt neglect. The failed regeneration scheme in Walker relates not only to the different context of economic decline and a shrinking labour market but also to the formulaic and short-term vision of planned gentrification. Both academic and policy literatures tend to frame gentrification as the sad but inevitable

consequence of urban redevelopment, for better or for worse. However, even if gentrification is the desired outcome of city planners, it does not necessarily follow that either gentrification or economic growth will occur. City planners and urban policy-makers would benefit from considering alternative perspectives to the market logic of expansion, through engaging with communities and residents to discover how people cope with social and economic change. Without the ability or scope for imagining futures, people feel powerless and isolated, and stigmatisation of communities and areas only increases, as policy makers discovered in their latest failed round of regeneration in Walker.

There are similarities between Birmingham in the past and Newcastle in the present, but there are also differences. What worked for Birmingham in the past in terms of policies and visions of urban development will not necessarily work for Newcastle in the present, given a different context of industrial decline and a shrinking labour market rather than industrial growth and labour market expansion. In contexts of economic decline, the implications of housing-led renewal are not the same as in contexts of economic growth. Housing-led renewal is premised upon profitable development, usually at the cost of demolishing old buildings and displacing people. However, while the human costs of displacement may be similar across different cases, the ‘benefits’ are not. When the economy cannot sustain new development—when neither the ‘image’ nor the ‘reality’ attracts new populations or jobs—then developers can simply abandon urban renewal projects, as in the case of housing-led regeneration in Walker and in other deprived areas throughout the UK.

Urban imaginaries are important in shaping urban development trajectories, but there is no single imaginary that will produce prosperous, liveable and equitable cities. Rather, urban imaginaries are diverse and contradictory, situated in particular times and places, and different forms of urban imaginaries often clash. Urban imaginaries of ‘demolition for development’ in Birmingham (1875-1914) and Walker, Newcastle upon Tyne (2000-2011) illustrate the contradictions and limitations embedded in particular visions and the need to negotiate and articulate alternatives.

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<sup>1</sup> Within these two broad models of urban regeneration in recent decades, there are also differences between flagship regeneration projects which are meant to act as catalysts for widespread urban and economic change, and neighbourhood or area-based projects, which tend to focus on revitalising deprived communities.

<sup>2</sup>According to the 1901 Census, Newcastle had a population of approximately 250,000, whereas Birmingham had a population of over 500,000. In 2007, Newcastle's population was roughly the same as in 1901, at 270,000, having experienced depopulation since peaking at 340,000 in the mid-century. By contrast, in 2007 Birmingham had a population of over 1,000,000. These opposing population dynamics illustrate wider trends of industrial growth and decline throughout the twentieth century.

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<sup>3</sup> I conducted 30 interviews between June 2005 and March 2006 and five follow-up interviews with key interviewees in July 2009 to trace changes and developments. All interviewees have been kept anonymous or given pseudonyms to protect their identities.

<sup>4</sup> In September 1991 there were riots in the West End of Newcastle related to severe problems of social exclusion in the area, which highlighted the failures of previous regeneration policies. The riots created fears throughout the city that the area would become a place of lawlessness and anarchy (cf. Robinson, 2005).