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## ► To cite this version:

Gilles Jeannot, Barry Goodchild, Paul Hickman. Professions, Occupational Roles and Skills in Urban Policy: A Reworking of the debate in England and France. *Urban Studies*, SAGE Publications, 2010, 47 (12), pp.2555-2572. <hal-00583811>

HAL Id: hal-00583811

<https://hal-enpc.archives-ouvertes.fr/hal-00583811>

Submitted on 29 Jan 2016

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## ***Professions, occupational roles and skills in urban policy: a reworking of the debates in England and France***

Gilles Jeannot, Barry Goodchild, Paul Hickman

Urban studies, 2010, 47 (12), 2555-2572

### Summary

*The past few years has seen a proliferation of skills analysis in urban regeneration in England. In France, in contrast, researchers have linked questions of skills to the styles and form of public sector work. This paper reworks the debates in the two countries to provide a comparative analysis of neighbourhood management. There are three main sections and themes- the implications of a bottom-up perspective in the study of policy implementation; the emergence in France of the 'chef de projet' as an ideal type figure of transversal working; and finally in relation to England, the fragmentation and diversity of policy initiatives, agencies and funding streams. This fragmentation and diversity has implied, in turn, an emphasis on flexibility and generic rather than specialist skills in urban regeneration.*

Despite a huge increase in the numbers employed in various aspects of urban regeneration in Britain over the past ten years, a feeling remains that the relevant 'human resources' are lacking. A common assumption, since at least the publication of the Report of the Urban Task Force (1999), is of a 'skills deficit' amongst relevant professionals. The demands of policy and practice, it is suggested, have run ahead the skills available in the available professional workforce.

In response, a series of studies have sought to identify the relevant skills and to specify how these might best be developed. In England, the Egan report (ODPM 2004) is probably the most important and most comprehensive. Others have been prepared from the viewpoint of neighbourhood regeneration (NRU, 2002), of urban

design (CABE 2003) and of professional town planning (Kitchen 2007). In Scotland, parallel studies have been undertaken into the skills necessary for community regeneration.<sup>1</sup> The analysis has continued with an enquiry undertaken by a Select Committee of the House of Commons into the 'skills capacity within local government to deliver sustainable communities'.<sup>2</sup> As the subsequent report (House of Commons, 2008) noted, report has followed report, often with a degree of duplication and overlap.

In France, the professional and occupational requirements of urban policy have also been analysed, notably by Brévan and Picard (2000) in a report prepared for the urban ministry (*Délégation interministérielle à la ville*). The French experience has received little or no attention in the numerous British studies. It provides, nevertheless, a means of comparing professional work in the context of trends, such as globalisation and European policy harmonisation, that might suggest a degree of convergence (Hawarth et al 2004). It also provides a different way of conceptualising skills, not so much as individual qualities but in relation to the type of work and its organisational context. Conversely, from a French viewpoint, the experience in England provides a test as to whether similar trends exist in another European country.

### **Aims, method and structure**

To summarise the aims of the paper: It is to use an Anglo-French comparison to identify common themes and difference in the policy and practice in the two countries. It also reworks the skills debate in England to relate this to the working environment in which individuals find themselves.

The paper is informed by the results of numerous interviews with practitioners in local government, social housing agencies and the voluntary sector. In 2007 and 2008, the authors conducted 13 interviews in Rennes (France) and 18 in Sheffield and Kirklees (England) as well as a focus group of early career urban regeneration professionals in England. The interviews paid attention to the daily routines of

practitioners, the scope of their responsibilities, the way they saw their work, the way they saw their relationship to others and their career to date. Individuals were identified from web-searches, formal job descriptions and, as research progressed, from recommendations made by previous interviewees. The interviews are, nevertheless, presented in such a way as to protect confidentiality. In addition, to avoid an overemphasis on a few specific localities, the account draws on the experience of the authors in undertaking policy evaluation elsewhere in England and France, notably in connection with resident participation and with innovations in neighbourhood management. The need to generalise from the experience of the specific case study also means that, in part, the presentation takes the form of a literature review, bringing together a wide range of policy-oriented literature.

There are three main sections. The first section explains the rationale for and assumptions of a bottom-up approach to policy evaluation that starts with street-level and neighbourhood-level bureaucrats. The second section examines how the ‘skills deficit’ in urban regeneration is conceptualised in different ways in France and England and shows, in addition, how French research has led to the conceptualisation of a model of ‘fuzzy’, transversal professional work. The third section examines the organisational and occupational aspects of urban policy in England, giving relevant examples of transversal working. It also discusses the conditions under which these new types of organisational working have emerged.

### **Micro and macro studies**

The assumption throughout is that the working practices of public service organisations, from the street and the neighbourhood upwards, facilitate or block the implementation of public policy. The assumption is also that research in urban policy should encompass the working practices of staff and their occupational responsibilities and not simply formal policy statements.

The concern is not new. Lipsky (1971), in particular, conceptualised a category of ‘street-level bureaucrats’ who are crucial in determining the reputation of public

service providers in the US. Such a focus remains, moreover, particularly appropriate to the analysis of policies for neighbourhoods. In England, in particular, the term 'neighbourhood management' and related terms such as 'social balance' are open to a variety of different perspective and practices (Goodchild and Cole 2001). In addition, a bottom-up occupational perspective is valuable in identifying common features and differences in a comparative study. Otherwise, the analysis has to proceed from the top through a specification of national policy aims and institutional mechanisms and these are invariably complicated and variable from year to year.

A bottom-up perspective means, in turn, a concern with micro-sociology and the mechanisms that link the micro world of social interaction tied into the macro, whilst also allowing for the distinctiveness of each. Operationalising a bottom-up perspective means a series of case studies. It means undertaking a series of interviews with those responsible for the formulation and implementation of policy.

The logical implication is 'grounded theory', that is to say a theory whose conceptual categories are grounded in and emerge from the concerns of the participants and how they manage their roles (Glaser and Strauss 1967). Yet, grounded theory, like other bottom-up approaches, has its limits. Interpretation in any single context, cannot be wholly specific to that context if they are to be generally understood. Interpretation has to appeal to widely understood theoretical categories and it must also refer to processes that originate outside the locality.

In this context, Sabatier (1986) has argued for a synthesis of top-down and bottom-up perspectives. Such a synthesis would adopt 'the bottom-uppers' unit of analysis - a whole variety of public and private actors involved with a policy problem - as well as their concerns with understanding the perspectives and strategies of all major categories of actors.' It would combine this 'starting point' with the concerns of top-downers, namely 'the manner in which socio-economic conditions and legal instruments constrain behavior' (ibid, 39.) The logic of a synthesis can, moreover, be illustrated with reference to partnership working in local government in both France (Nicholls 2006) and England (Geddes 2006). It would seem naïve to analyse local

administrative practice without also acknowledging how they are moulded by the administrative and financial context in which professionals work.

The analysis at one level does not preclude reference to influences at another, however. The distinction between the micro and the macro is best merely considered as a distinction in the starting point. The micro is implicit in the macro in the sense that policies have to be implemented and the quality of implementation depends on local actors and their interaction. Conversely the macro is implicit in the micro in concepts and practices of negotiation as a means of resolving conflict and compromise (Strauss, 1978).

This latter may be explained in more detail. Negotiation is, in part, an exercise in working out a response to factors beyond the control of an organisation. Changes in the level and type of funding provide an example. If organisations, including public sector organisations wish to remain viable and solvent, they have to adapt and to anticipate changes in the financial context in which they work. Moreover, negotiation involves another process that implicitly recognises the existence of external constraints. This is the process whereby one person is answerable to another. In the public services, individual workers are simultaneously accountable, in different ways, to their users and to the rules that emanate from their organisation. They possess an intermediate position that of itself requires a degree of individual discretion (Jeannot, 2008).

The management of social housing provides an example (Eymard-Duvernay and Marchal 1994). Housing managers have to ensure that their tenants do not allow their surroundings to become dirty; that they pay their rent on time and that do not create a nuisance for others. They may also have to ensure that repairs are undertaken properly and that any complaints are investigated. In doing all this, moreover, housing managers work within rules laid down by their employing organisation and which neither they nor all their tenants may completely accept. As a result, they are also likely to find that detailed, specific, ad hoc negotiations and compromise are necessary.

The management of urban regeneration in England is similar (Southern 2001). On one hand, the managers of urban regeneration are 'regularly monitored by the regional offices of government and the Regional Development Agencies. On the other hand, they have to deal with local communities and prepare proposals in the light of policies and accountancy rules that constrain the selection of priorities. On one hand, they have to present the views of the outside world to local communities and, given the tight time-scale of initiatives in England, this has often been the dominant task (Diamond 2001). Equally they have to present the views of the local community to the wider world.

Such an intermediate role does not necessarily imply stability and it also does not imply some smooth process of mediation. Risks exist of both over-control and under-control. In housing management in Britain, for example, Sprigings (2002) has argued that an increased policy emphasis on financial targets and business management methods has caused housing associations to become less accountable to their tenants and more likely to pursue standardised procedures to deal with problems. Conversely, inadequate control may encourage street and neighbourhood level workers to make arbitrary or biased decisions, as Lipsky (1971, 402) argued.

Counter measures for excessive control include revising the framework of rules to take specific cases into account and measures to delegate more discretion to officials in the field. The opposite danger, that of unresponsive street level bureaucracies, implies, according to Lipsky (1971) a combination of measures, for example, training to improve performance, the measurement of performance and more community control. Such a package would be familiar with the modernisation measures of the Labour government, first elected in 1997.

### **Reflecting on practice in France**

Of the various levels of policy implementation, a focus on the national highlights the differences in approach. In England, official reports and research into the occupational requirements of urban policy have typically taken a limited and functional view that

focuses on skills. They have defined a list of skills necessary for building a 'sustainable community' or, as is a more recent theme, a 'cohesive community'. They have mostly ignored the way in which skills are actually used or not used in the workplace (Kagan 2007) and have, in addition, paid little attention to organisational cultures and informal learning in the workplace (Bailey 2005). In France, in contrast, the usual assumption, as reflected in the Brévan-Picard report, for example, is that it is the new way of working that poses the challenge for professionals and organisations, more than the possession of new specific skills.

### *Explaining the differences*

The assumptions of the Brévan-Picard report reflect, in turn, the way in which policy in France has been informed by social research. The report contains an appendix, by Blanc and Sipp (2000), that summarises the lessons of almost twenty years of social research and that, in doing this, attempts to define the 'invariant' characteristics of the new type of urban profession. These invariants include the task of mediating between different actors who have little experience of working together; the presentation of multiple professional identities according to specific circumstances; the promotion of competence rather than the use of qualifications as a legitimising device; and finally a concern with situations, above all problematic or 'hot' situations rather than fixed programmes of action.

In addition, at a more general level, the debate about skills in the two countries has taken place against the background of differences in the role of professions. Throughout the twentieth century, local government in Britain relied heavily on professional qualifications and professional organisations to guarantee competence and a non-partisan approach. Each specialism of local government- social work, education, housing, environmental health and town planning- has had its own professional organisation that defined social problems from a particular perspective and promoted a particular set of skills and approaches to tackle those problems. These public sector professions, moreover, interacted with other, more private sector-based



professions such as law, surveying and architecture, all of which have also been influential in local government.

In France, in contrast, the professions have in general been weaker or non-existent. For example, housing management has not even been an emergent profession as in Britain. Social housing agencies have usually employed generalist business manager or engineers or, in the case of estate managers, staff with a background in property. Likewise, the town planning profession in France has until recently been divided between those who see this as a mere extension of architecture and those who see this as an administrative function of the state. For the most part, professional organisations are associated with different social institutions or branches of government (*corps administratifs*) and have been passive elements in the restructuring of public administration.

Social work is a partial exception. The emergence of community development in France amounted, in some interpretations, to a crisis in conventional methods of client-based social work (Cousin, 1996). However, those involved in community development and more broadly in urban policy have come from a wide variety of educational and technical backgrounds. Most social workers have continued to keep their distance from the various partnerships established under the *politique de la ville* (Maillard, 2002b).

The greater level of autonomy and independence of professions in Britain colours debates about public administration, urban regeneration included. Both the Egan report and its implementing agency the Academy of Sustainable Communities (renamed in 2008 the Homes and Communities Academy) have seen the engagement of professional bodies as an initial step in the promotion of the relevant policy agendas. In contrast, the idea of profession in relation to urban policy in France has a more general meaning as a vocation or specialised occupation. Professionalisation becomes, in this context, a search for identity and competence amongst those working for the state. Moreover, the key question for research becomes less the definition of

skills and more the administrative context in which professionals work, as well as their precise job description.

The typical conception of a profession as an independent agent in Britain has also raised other questions. The autonomy of professions implies, in part, a potential conflict between their role and the broader public interest. The professions seek to safeguard their autonomy and status and to protect their members from what they would see as unjustified outside interference. The result is an implied conflict between professionalisation and modernisation. The Egan report (ODPM 2004) was itself part of a drive to modernise public administration and to reduce the power of the professions. The report sought to redefine occupational skills in urban regeneration terms of the language of business and management competences and, in consequence, it received a lukewarm response from the planning profession in particular (Kitchen 2007, 235-235).

#### *The growth of new urban professions in France*

The influence of social research in France was apparent from the first experimental urban policy measures, undertaken in the early 1980s. Urban policy, particularly policies for neighbourhood regeneration, involved the establishment of a post of '*chef de projet*', a job description that was borrowed from private industry but differed from similarly titled private sector posts in the absence of a clear executive responsibility. Those involved in the first neighbourhood-based initiatives such as Le Petit Séminaire in Marseilles or Alma Gare in Roubaix found themselves in a novel situation and started to reflect on their role. The authorities responded by asking an urban research cooperative called *Acadie* to organise a labour cum information exchange and to draw up a progress report on the changing profile of this type of occupation.

Another line of reflection concerned the links between the local authorities and the state. The employment of these new types of project managers, together with the urban policy that they sought to implement, implied a new role for the state. All this implied a move away from the regulation of local authority activities and move, in

addition, away from the direct provision of public services. It implied instead the model of the facilitating state (*état animateur*) that seeks to ‘animate’ the activities of a variety of different agencies (Donzelot and Estèbe, 1994). Equally, it involved a process of contractualisation whereby the French state sought to reconcile the conflicting requirements of central control on one hand and decentralisation and increased local diversity on the other (Gaudin, 1999). In this context, the organisation of urban policy provided an insight into the changing role of the state as this responded to the limitations of bureaucracy in the face of economic and social change, uncertainty and new patterns of inequality.

The role of the state as ‘animator’ was also evident in a policy of promoting local and regional ‘resource centres’ that might facilitate exchanges between those working in urban policy and also provide a mean of reflecting on how the work and job descriptions changed over time. The voluntary association *Profession Banlieue*, created in 1993 and led by Bénédicte Madelin, a former *chef de projet*, provides an example. *Profession Banlieue* has organised numerous meetings between those involved in urban policy in Seine Saint Denis (a deprived district immediately to the north of the city of Paris); it has documented their professional history; undertaken studies of new types of post such as that of ‘community leader’ (*adulte relais*, a previously unemployed person charged with promoting social harmony in deprived neighbourhoods) and provided consultancy services for public sector industries and services such as the post office, the local public transport agencies, the national railways and the social security, all of which face management and facility problems in deprived urban neighbourhoods.

### *The new professions as a social phenomenon*

Concepts of the state, as for example, the concepts of the facilitating state or the contractual state define the context of the new urban professions. They have also offered a top-down explanation of their emergence. At the same time, other, more detailed, ‘micro-studies’ studies have provided a picture of how daily routines have

progressively emerged from atypical activities and working practices, especially from the working practices of the '*chefs de projet*'.

The detailed studies suggest a degree of convergence in their conclusions (Behar and Estèbe 1996: Maillard 2000: Péraldi, 1995). Certain themes are recurrent—the proximity of staff to problems in the field, a simultaneous orientation towards the local community and the local institutions (the role of ambassador, of translator or of critical questioner), a refusal to respect thematic or hierarchical boundaries, a proximity to policy making and an attempt to manage varied tensions. The *chef de projet* acts as a link between the local political leadership and municipal administration on one hand and local residents on the other in a way that would not be easy in the usually much larger English local authorities. The *chef de projet* acts as a generalist in public policy, equally at ease in discussions with local residents as in the preparation of financial plans or in the reorganisation of local administrative functions.

Nevertheless, as Blanc and Sipp (2000), emphasise, the generalist role can itself be regarded, in part, as a specialism within systems of local administration to the extent that can realistically claim a direct contact with events on the ground. The *chef de projet* is a generalist in terms of the problem of neighbourhood management and regeneration and a specialist in terms of processes and practices. This specialism in turn often involves detailed local knowledge about appropriate contacts, working relationships, procedures and organisational structures.

The ability to work across hierarchies does not necessarily imply the participation of residents or of residents in policy making, however. The main lines of local policy are laid out in the *contrat de ville* as agreed by the state with the various levels of local government of which the most local level, the *commune* is only one. Local voluntary groups may, for example, implement aspects of the policy, but the extent and the form of their involvement is dependent on a predetermined set of detailed objectives and funding arrangements (Maillard 2002a) and more broadly on the negotiations undertaken in the preparation of the relevant *contrat* (Nicholls 2006).

In any case, the implementation of neighbourhood management has, in the larger towns and cities, created its own hierarchy. In this, the *chef de projet* reports to higher levels within the local authority, but not other more junior staff employed at a neighbourhood level, including staff responsible for organising routine meetings with local residents.

A final tendency concerns the diffusion of similar working methods and similar roles amongst other agencies involved in urban policy- central government (through the appointment of local officials charged with monitoring deprived neighbourhoods), the technical services of local government, various public sector enterprises (for example municipal transport) and social housing agencies. Especially in the larger cities, the work of the *chef de projet* has become a collective exercise that involves a team of community workers who seek to practice integrated neighbourhood management (*gestion urbaine de proximité*) covering such issues as health, security, open space, education or the management of rubbish or housing management. As part of this, job responsibilities associated with established roles, such as social work (Cousin, 1996) and caretaking (Stébé 2005), have been redefined to include social mediation. In addition, other, national policy innovations have led to the appointment of various types of thematic and specialised community workers such as those responsible for security (Wivekens, 1999), youth and education or social inclusion (Astier, 1997) and access to employment (Baron and Nivolle, 2005).

The growth of integrated neighbourhood management does not mean, however, that all local authority services are present in a neighbourhood. For example, the neighbourhood services may not include a service for the cleaning of the streets and the removal of rubbish. Tensions can still arise between the local neighbourhood workers and the local authority or between local neighbourhood workers and other agencies.

*“ La gestion urbaine de proximité, c’est la propreté, les espaces, le lien social, la sécurité et surtout la collecte des déchets. On a mis en place des modules de formation interprofessionnelle pour arriver à trouver des modes opératoires*

*communs. On a une coordonnatrice qui a mis cela en place mais on veut que chacun soit maître de tout car c'est plus une méthodologie qu'un poste. Même les bailleurs sociaux financent. Mais on est en conflit parfois avec les bailleurs sur la philosophie même de la GUP. Eux veulent faire payer le moins leur locataires usagers. Mais je leur dis qu'ils sont des acteurs de l'aménagement. Dès qu'il y a un problème ils font reposer la responsabilité sur la collectivité. »*

Coordonnateur politique de la ville

### *Pragmatism and the limits of institutionalisation*

All this has involved a pragmatic approach to innovation in policy. On the side of researchers, the approach has been pragmatic in its focus is on the most ordinary and mundane working practices and, as part of this, the way in which those involved in urban policy have sought to avoid a series of traps- in the coordination of different actors, in the relation between public sector organisations and in conflicts with local people. Pragmatism is, in any case, implicit in the assumptions of interactionist perspectives, notably in their refusal to take the world as fixed and pre-determined (Shalin 1986). On the side of public authorities, the approach is pragmatic in the sense that they wish to start from and help develop realistic working practices such as they are and not as they ought to be.

The underlying, though rarely stated assumptions of both researchers and their administrative clients are, firstly that the distinctiveness of the *contrat de ville* lay in the management of human resources and second that effective policy implementation involves giving a degree of autonomy to people who work in ill-defined roles and who seek to invent new ways of working. The corollary is that the continuation of this innovation involves an exercise in consolidating and institutionalising the characteristics of these new ways of working, beyond the moment of their invention. This is the idea of 'professionalisation' that gives direction to the Brévan-Picard (2000) report. To ensure such professionalisation, the report made numerous detailed proposals, including amongst others- to establish an "observatory" to monitor

occupational requirements, to bring together those involved in policy evaluation and those involved in policy implementation, to clarify job responsibilities for key posts, to offer training programmes, to create regional resource centres, improve job security and so on (ibid, 161-165).

At the same time, the experience of urban policy suggests limits to the extent of institutionalisation, or professionalisation to use the term favoured by Brévan-Picard. Innovation is inherently hard, perhaps even impossible, to institutionalise. Innovation is, in part, an exercise in breaking institutional ties and assumptions. Moreover the context in which the *chef de projet* works is too variable to permit the emergence of a single model. The *contrat de ville* is an expression of a national urban policy, but the detailed application leads to almost limitless variations at a local level, according for example to the size and number of *communes* in an urban area, the severity of the local problem and the characteristics of the ruling local party or parties. The policies and practices that result from local negotiations and contracts are, in any case, sometimes fragile and open to continuing interpretations amongst different institutional actors with different interests, some of which are antagonistic to the very principle of a programme targeted on priority areas (Maillard 2004).

#### *A less supportive context?*

In addition, both the institutional and policy context have, over the past few years, becomes less supportive of the type of local mediation and coordination in which the *chef de projet* specialises. Working across vertical hierarchies has become more complex owing to the partial amalgamation of small *communes* into inter-communal structures, that is to groupings of *communes*. Selon la loi le groupement de commune est obligatoirement responsable de la politique de la ville, mais parfois l'essentiel des problèmes des moyens se trouvent depuis longtemps dans la ville centre. Cela crée un recouvrement des responsabilités et une position inconfortable pour les coordinateurs des groupements de communes.

“La mission est très compliquée et malgré ce qui est écrit sur la répartition des tâches entre la ville et l’agglomération, on ne peut pas dire ‘moi je fais ça et toi tu fais ça’. Maintenant les chargés de mission (en charge de quartiers) ne sont plus dirigés par la ville centre, mais ils travaillent dans les mairies de quartier et avec les élus de quartier et on a dû trouver des passerelles avec les équipes de terrain qui appartiennent à la ville centre. C’est surtout les chargés de mission et les élus qui se perdent entre la ville centre et l’agglomération. L’agglomération a pris beaucoup de place mais il y a une rivalité claire et nette ».

#### Chargée de mission agglomération

The effective distance between local residents and senior levels of municipal administration (et intercommunale) has grown in consequence. The mechanisms for resident consultation are invariably at the level of the *communes* rather than the newer intercommunal structures.

Finally, the government has introduced separate, centralised procedures for the approval of projects involving the redevelopment of estates in deprived areas. These projects, undertaken through the *l’Agence Nationale pour la Rénovation Urbaine (l’ANRU)* (established 2003) require approval in Paris according to national criteria. For Epstein (2005), the procedures of *l’ANRU*, together with the introduction of selective performance targets, represent a departure from the previous era of negotiated urban policy in favour of a new style of ‘government by remote control’ (*gouverner à distance*). Government by remote control means that the state avoids becoming involved in routine urban management, whilst retaining technical control over strategic projects.

Though Epstein does not say so, the centralised procedures of *l’ANRU* have had other consequences. They have done little or nothing to promote the involvement of residents in either design or the setting of priorities (CES-l’ANRU, 2008, p.70) They also mean a loss of coherence at a local level. The management of *l’ANRU* projects operate alongside the work of the *chef de projet* responsible for social development under the *contrat de ville* (known as the *contrat urban de cohésion sociale* or *CUCS*



since 2007). However, management typically operates in a compartmentalised manner with cooperation depending largely on personal relationships (CES-I'ANRU, 2008, p.53).

### **Reflecting on practice in England**

In comparison to France, the evaluation of urban policy in England is more difficult to conceptualise in terms of its implications for occupational roles and professions. There is no single equivalent to the *chef de projet* to act as a figure and focus for analysis. There is also no equivalent to the five yearly *contrats de ville* or *CUCS* that give a semblance of coherence and shared assumptions, even if the detailed administration lacks detailed coherence at a local level.

#### *A multiplicity of initiatives and funding streams*

The scope and form of intervention may again be related to changing conceptions of the state. Skelcher (2007) has, in particular, distinguished between the 'hollowed out' and the 'congested state' as a means of understanding the recent history of urban policy in England. The former, the 'hollowed out' state is exemplified by the rise of market ideologies in the 1980s and of new public management in the 1990s with their emphasis on deregulation and competition. The hollowed out state involved the contracting out of services and a reduction in the role of local authorities. The latter, the congested state, in contrast is reflective of the complex of networked relationships and partnerships that is typical of contemporary practice and is necessary for governments to implement public programmes, including those for deprived neighbourhoods.

The congested state therefore amounts therefore to a negotiated urban policy corresponding to the principles of 'joined-up government' associated with New Labour in the period from 1997 to about 2002. It is based on partnership working between the various institutional actors and intended to bring together a multiplicity of funding streams and initiatives, including some of which (for example, the New Deal for

Communities, the Housing Market Pathfinders) are implemented by agencies outside the direct control of local authorities (Also see: McGregor 2001). Equally, however and this is an aspect of policy not fully covered in Skelcher's original concept of the congested state, the policy of New Labour did not abandon the search for efficiency implicit in previous exercises in deregulation and contracting out. Instead, New Labour sought to promote efficiency by means of value for money tests and performance monitoring.

A combination of multiple initiatives and intensive performance monitoring remains the defining features of neighbourhood policies at a local level. The process of performance monitoring has broad similarities to the 'government by remote control', identified by Epstein as a new stage in urban policy in France. It is used more widely and more intensively in England, however. In the course of the case study interviews, local government officers in England, as well as those working in the voluntary sector and using public funds, made routine reference to the demonstration of appropriate outputs in a way that did not happen in France. Moreover and this was particularly apparent at a relatively senior level, officers explained, how in the single policy field of housing and neighbourhood improvement, different technical criteria and different time horizons were used for different funding streams in a way that, even for specialists, was confusing. One officer commented

*'the performance management for each one of these streams requires something different and we found ourselves having to bid on almost a yearly basis to either renew or refresh a particular funding stream, then satisfy the conditions around the appraisal process for projects and schemes and score and report back on a number of different outcomes and outputs'.*

These particular arrangements are seldom subject to negotiation and are, from the point of view of officers, a potential source of uncertainty. They tend to erode the capacity of local institutions, the local authority included, to pursue coherent, long term strategies.

The existence of varied time horizons in different initiatives means, in addition, a degree of instability in job roles and a requirement of staff to move on from one post

to another. A focus group of junior level professionals in urban regeneration revealed an acceptance of job mobility to a greater extent than would have been common in France. Instability does not necessarily mean insecurity, however. Much depends on the exact terms on which staff are employed and on the characteristics of their employers. Local authorities in England are generally large enough to redeploy staff from one service area to another. Those involved in regeneration work would, in any case, claim that they possess generic skills, notably project management skills that can be applied in different contexts. Staff may also only work on projects on a part-time basis, alongside other responsibilities. In contrast, for voluntary associations, including community groups in receipt of time-limited funds and for those on short-term contracts, there is a higher likelihood of redundancy.

#### *Degrees and types of coordination*

The existence of targets and separate funding streams does not, of course, do away with the need for some type of arrangement to cope with the impact of one programme on another. In some ways a lack of overall programme coordination necessitates even more attention to partnership working. The Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) is the closest equivalent to the *contrat de ville* or its successor the *contrat urbain (CUCS)*. The LSP was initially established to prepare a community plan for local authorities in receipt of Neighbourhood Renewal Funds. Through the preparation of the Sustainable Community Strategy and Local Area Agreement (LAA), the LSP continues, moreover, to have a role in neighbourhood management and regeneration, as this is conceived in official guidance as ‘community empowerment’ and the preparation of ‘local and neighbourhood plans’ (H.M. Government 2008, p’s19, 30-31)

However, the origins of the LSP at a national level are misleading as to its current role. The LSP has a broader remit than neighbourhood management and a broader remit than the *contrat de ville* or *CUCS*. Unlike urban contracts in France, the LSP also includes representatives from the voluntary sector and private business. The

LSP is intended to ‘exercise a leadership and governing role’ according to official guidance (ibid, p.15). It is essentially about ‘community governance’ (Cochrane 2004) that is to say the collaboration of different institutional actors rather than the coordination in relation to a specific policy problem agenda. Sometimes it is also understood as a ‘partnership of partnerships’ as it also contains a series of thematic committees that deal with various service delivery areas including housing and neighbourhoods.

For those who manage the LSP, the result is a relatively open-ended and ambiguous role that involves a series of dilemmas about how far to go in securing change in any direction whilst retaining the support of the key institutional and political actors. The LSP is independent of the local authority, but is typically hosted by the local authority in the sense that this latter provides the offices and other support. The local authority also prepares the LAA. From the point of view of an outsider, for example looking at a local authority website, it is often impossible to say where the local authority stops and the LSP starts. The management of the LSP must work closely with the local authority as the only local institution whose leadership is subject to direct elections. Equally, the management of the LSP must somehow, promote a separate identity and deal with a variety of different partners that have their own interests and may, as in the case of business groups, only participate if they see a direct advantage in doing so.

The management of LSPs provides an example where the relevant skills are generic, to use the language of Egan. Not all partnership and coordinating work has this characteristic. Spatial co-ordination, in the form of master planning and other related planning processes, involves a specialist language in urban design and also requires an understanding of the implications for the statutory planning system. As a result, master planning generally involves the input of professional planning staff or the employment, for example at the stage of plan preparation of outside consultants. However, master planning is itself a flexible and open-ended approach compared to the equivalent procedures in France, namely the procedure *Zone d’Aménagement*

*Concerté* or the procedures for plan submission to *l'ANRU*. Moreover, master planning and more general town planning is subject to the same pressures as others working in local government.

Most accounts of master plans stress their origins in a concern to promote good quality urban design (CABE 2008: Tiesdell and Macfarlane, 2007). In the context of housing renewal, master plans are also seen as a means of testing local public opinion (Lester et al 2007). Irrespective of whether they achieve such aims, master plans make good sense as a means of coping with an uncertain investment programme. They are about linking short-term measures and development projects to a longer vision and strategy. They indicate a series of projects that can be implemented as and when the finance becomes available. They also provide a means of justifying bids for funds, a means of bringing different actors together and a means of managing different interests and priorities in a place.

Planning in relation to urban regeneration has been conceptualised as collaborative planning (Healey 1998a) and also as stakeholder planning (Healey 1998b). Like collaborative planning, master planning practice combines technical and general skills, above all skills in communication and negotiation. It also involves professionals seeking to satisfy the sometimes conflicting demands and requirement of different actors within a short time span and within relatively open ended procedures.

It is arguable, however, whether these are new skills. Negotiation and communication have long been an aspect of professional town planning work. Communication in particular has long an aspect of professional education in planning. Egan and other reports have repeatedly talked of a 'skills gap' in this context. Apart from labour shortages, the reference to skills gap is, most likely, an indication that collaborative planning is simply more demanding. Practitioners are having to use their professional skills more intensively and more reflexively and, though this is difficult to demonstrate, probably at a more junior stage in their career.

### *Innovation and mainstreaming*

Amongst the variety of funding streams, it is possible to find examples of cross-cutting initiatives that have paralleled those in France and have sought to co-ordinate policy and practice for deprived neighbourhoods. These most notable examples comprise two centrally funded, time limited programmes, the New Deal for Communities (NDC) initiative that started work, for a ten year period, on the regeneration of 39 very deprived neighbourhoods in 1998 and 1999 and the Neighbourhood Management Pathfinders initiatives that started work in 25 areas for a seven year period in 2002 and 2004. Both initiatives have enabled specific neighbourhoods to be prioritised for action, whilst also ensuring service delivery integration through an agreed local policy framework and timetable (Diamond, 2001). In the case of the most ambitious local initiatives, notably the NDC, the programmes has involved separate departments dealing with training, community involvement and finance and a wide range of interventions covering, youth, security, the environment and so on.

Both the local neighbourhood initiatives and the LSP originated as part of the National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal (SEU 2000), intended to promote joined-up policies to tackle urban deprivation (Hall 2003). The novelty of the NSNR must not be exaggerated, however. The City Challenge and the Single Regeneration Budget initiatives of the 1990s had already amounted to a shift from a wholly property-led approach and had established a precedent for a tripartite local partnership comprising residents, the local authority and business (Ball and Maguinn 2005: Foley and Martin 2000). Equally significant in terms of subsequent practice was the experience during the 1980s and 1990s of initiatives that, though led by social housing providers, already aspired to a comprehensive approach. These initiatives include: the Priority Estates Project, Estates Action and 'Housing Plus' all of which also favoured resident involvement and were backed by training regimes for their workers (Diamond 2001).<sup>3</sup>

Social housing agencies have an interest in effective measures to counter the decline of areas where they own a significant proportion of the local stock. As a result, they have often been at the forefront of calls for integrated neighbourhood programmes (Cole et al 1999). The housing management profession is also often regarded as an 'exemplar' in the way that it has embraced an integrated policy agendas to urban regeneration (ICC 2007). Management staff see neighbourhood problems at first hand, but realise that their solution requires a wide range of different interventions. However, without additional funding and integration into broader initiatives, it is arguable whether social housing agencies embrace the full neighbourhood management agenda. Especially where they own only a proportion of the stock, economic logic would suggest, for example, that they would adopt a limited conception that focuses on their property and that redefines job roles accordingly.

The NSNR offered a distinct model of change. It sought to go beyond social housing agencies and beyond specific neighbourhood initiatives in an exercise of 'mainstreaming', to use local government jargon. In other words, it sought to ensure that the lessons of neighbourhood management were learnt and applied to other types of public sector agencies and other areas experiencing similar environmental problems. The subsequent experience has, at best, been patchy.

In Sheffield an example exists of an educational initiative being taken up by the local authority after its successful demonstration in a NDC area. It is possible that other, small-scale specific initiatives have been taken up elsewhere but not widely reported. In contrast, few local authorities have sought to 'roll out' the full model. In the words of the national evaluation for the Neighbourhood Pathfinders no local authority, 'even those clearly enthusiastic about rolling out neighbourhood management, are proposing the use of mainstream funds' (SQW 2007, 59). Where local authorities are committed to neighbourhood management, they intend to use time-limited funds, mostly intended for slightly different purposes notably community safety and security.

### *Constraints and exit strategies*

Why the apparent unwillingness to mainstream neighbourhood initiatives on the model of the national initiatives? Organisational inflexibility has been one constraint.

<sup>4</sup> A desire to focus attention on the national programmes and ensure that these work properly first has been another. For example, that much of the discussion about mainstreaming in relation to NDC areas was about the case for redistributing funds into NDC areas, rather than mainstreaming the NDC or similar model of management elsewhere (Stewart and Howard 2004). A disconnection between neighbourhood initiatives and the LSP has been a further constraint. The need for a closer working relationship between LSPs and neighbourhood management initiatives has been a repeated theme in monitoring and evaluation reports (NRU 2004, 5: NRU 2005: White and Dickinson 2006). Compared to French practice, there are fewer examples of cross-hierarchical working, that is to say fewer examples of community workers who are able, on a routine basis, to mediate directly between the local authority leadership or the LSP leadership and local neighbourhoods.

However, the single most important constraint is almost certainly that of costs and resources. The management of neighbourhoods does not require heavy investment on the scale associated with the NDC initiatives. It does, nevertheless, involve additional staffing. The full model is for the appointment of a team of 6 or 7 neighbourhood staff (SQW 2004, 3). In contrast, local authorities are likely to favour a stripped-down, less intensively resourced version that, nevertheless, allows them to say that they are promoting neighbourhood management (White and Dickinson 2006, p.60). Numerous options are possible- the use of a single community worker; regular consultation meetings with local residents, but no permanent community workers; a reliance on housing staff to undertake the work, perhaps with the addition of a part-time post; and finally a reliance on community groups and voluntary sector agencies using a combination of private and public funds.

Over the past two years, the focus of the policy debate has shifted towards working out an exit strategy, able to cope with the withdrawal of initiative funding.



Depending on their date of commencement and planned duration, all the New Deal for Communities initiatives are expected to finish by 2010 and all the Neighbourhood Management Pathfinders by 2011. The future for neighbourhood management is uncertain, with the risk that the lessons of the neighbourhood initiatives of the past ten years may be lost. Continuity in team management and local management structures is clearly at risk. However, the emergence of cross-cutting work, including neighbourhood management does not depend simply on government initiatives. It depends also on the character of a problem, namely urban deprivation, that requires a variety of actions involving different institutional actors (Harrison 2000: Stewart 2000, 58-62: Williams 2002). Most therefore likely, neighbourhood interventions will continue to require local co-ordination, as well as the employment of staff to tackle problems involving different public services and different interest groups.

## **Conclusions**

International comparisons beg the question as to whether policy and practice are experiencing a degree of convergence or divergence or a parallel movement, characterised by neither convergence nor divergence. The trend mostly suggests a parallel movement. In both France and England, governments have sought more policy integration at a local level and a greater emphasis on management and communication skills. Professionals in local government and other local agencies have faced new types of urban policy, new styles of state intervention and new and more onerous types of accountability, including accountability to local communities and to a wider range of organisations. As a side effect, they are also faced with more meetings, a wider range of administrative tasks and, depending on overall staffing level a heavier workload (Jeannot, 2008). Though there are numerous examples of conferences and exchanges, including initiatives at a European level, the trend has proceeded without extensive borrowing of policy innovations and without, in addition, a significant interchange of staff. The trend is mostly a result of policy makers tackling similar problems at a similar time.

At the same time, this parallel movement conceals a variety of differences- the existence of a particularly strong and short term performance culture in public administration in England, the existence in France of a more technical and specialist orientation amongst staff involved in the physical remodelling of estates and urban areas and finally the greater institutionalisation of occupational roles at a neighbourhood level in France. Therein lies a further difference in the way in which governments have sought to encourage innovative practices in neighbourhood management. In England, governments have promoted innovation in neighbourhood management through a variety of national initiatives and through policy exhortation in favour of mainstreaming in a way that can, at the best, be described as only of limited success. In France governments have used local/ central contracts to redefine occupational roles and restructure local administrations in favour of neighbourhood management.

In the long term, the skills debate in Britain of the past five years will probably look like a once-off event, mostly tied to the top-down modernisation agenda of the Labour government. The promotion of skills will probably revert to the type of routine, pragmatic activity that was endorsed by the Brévan Picard report in France and in addition by British critics of Egan. These routine activities include in-house training, continuing professional development, the creation of regional practitioner centres and of professional networks. Education and training should not be viewed in isolation from their organisational and policy context. Conversely, urban policy should have an occupational and organisational dimension and urban policy research should be concerned, *inter alia*, with working practices at the level of the street and neighbourhoods.

### **Acknowledgements**

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