

URBAN WORLDS

Your Life Chances Affect Where You Live: A Critique of the 'Cottage Industry' of Neighbourhood Effects Research

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Abstract

This article advances a critique of the 'neighbourhood effects' genre in urban studies, by arguing that an acceptance of the 'where you live affects your life chances' thesis, however well-intentioned, misses the key structural question of why people live where they do in cities. By examining the structural factors that give rise to differential life chances and the inequalities they produce, and by inverting the neighbourhood effects thesis to: your life chances affect where you live, the problem becomes one of understanding life chances via a theory of capital accumulation and class struggle in cities. Such a theory provides an understanding of the injustices inherent in letting the market (buttressed by the state) be the force that determines the cost of housing and therefore being the major determinant of where people live. The article draws on Marxist urban theory to contend that the residential mobility programs advocated by neighbourhood effects proponents stand on shaky ground, for if it is true that 'neighbourhood effects' exceed what would be predicted by poverty alone, moving the poor to a richer place would only eliminate that incremental difference, without addressing the capitalist institutional arrangements that create poverty.

Introduction

It is not even necessary to engage reality to reveal the fundamental practical difficulty posed in existing market economies with respect to social justice, within the restricted terms of the free-market model itself. This is the dependence of the distribution of life chances being generated on the pre-existing distribution of income, wealth and other

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resources. Those with most money will have the greatest power to influence what is produced, while those who happen to own (or otherwise control) land and its natural resources or have capital to invest can exert an influence denied those with only their labour to sell. Very simply, the claim to generate social justice depends on the justice of the distribution that already drives the system.

David M. Smith (1994: 281)

A decade ago, Robert Sampson and colleagues (Sampson *et al.*, 2002: 444) wryly observed that ‘the study of neighborhood effects, for better or worse, has become something of a cottage industry in the social sciences’.¹ Their observation was made in a thorough review of the neighbourhood effects literature, in which they noticed that ‘the mid 1990s to the year 2000 saw more than a doubling of neighborhood studies to the level of about 100 papers per year’ (*ibid.*). This prodigious output indeed matched that of the earlier intellectual cottage industry on the so-called ‘underclass’ (Wacquant, 1996), to which the neighbourhood effects literature is closely related. A great deal of time, money and ink has been consumed by scholars in several disciplines working on neighbourhood effects, and a newcomer to the literature is struck immediately by, first, its sheer size — ‘hundreds more’ studies have appeared in the decade since the abovementioned review (Sampson, 2012: 46) — second, by the tautology exponents of the genre regularly demonstrate, and third, by the near-total dominance of statistical approaches (including the somewhat soporific use of the word ‘controlling’ for a range of individual and place characteristics in respect of trying to identify such effects).

The genre of ‘neighbourhood effects’ stems from an understanding of society that adheres to one overarching assumption, that ‘where you live affects your life chances’. It is seductively simple, and on the surface, very convincing. Somebody growing up in, say, a seven-bedroom mansion in a leafy residential suburb surrounded by golf courses in the stockbroker belt of Surrey, England, will have far more chances in life than somebody growing up in a stigmatized social-housing estate less than 30 miles away in the London borough of Tower Hamlets (for decades one of the most ‘multiply deprived’ parts of England, with high levels of unemployment, poor health outcomes and little green space). Who could argue against that? The striking simplicity and inherent ‘*fait accompli*’ of this line of thinking in a complex world has led to the emergence of *analytic hegemony* in urban studies: neighbourhoods matter and shape the fate of their residents (and their young residents most acutely), and therefore, urban policies must be geared towards poor neighbourhoods, seen as incubators of social dysfunction. A belief in *causal* neighbourhood effects is now the dominant paradigm among policy elites, mainstream urban scholars, journalists and think-tank researchers.

In cities of advanced societies, an acceptance of the neighbourhood effects thesis is not something confined to journal pages and conference discussions. The ‘where you live affects your life chances’ view has shaped flagship urban and housing policies to a significant extent, most famously in the case of the federal Moving to Opportunity (MTO) experiment in the US. MTO randomly allocated housing vouchers to poor families from poor neighbourhoods in five cities to induce their movement into low-poverty neighbourhoods. Families living in ‘concentrated poverty’ (40% or greater) in those cities were deemed eligible to apply for vouchers, and those who did so were

1 It is fascinating how the meaning of ‘cottage industry’ has developed ambiguity over time. Originally it was associated with proto-industrialization, particularly in association with west Yorkshire woollens, and referred to a geographically dispersed but nonetheless regulated system of production that did not involve ‘machinofacture’ or the intense concentration of labour (Houston and Snell, 1984). In scholarly circles today it usually refers to the intense concentration of research activity and output on a specific theme or sub-theme of inquiry. Thanks to Innes Keighren and Charlie Withers for the historical clarification.

randomly assigned to one of three groups: the experimental (who were assisted in a move to a neighbourhood with a poverty rate of less than 10%, almost always suburban in the US), the comparison (who received a ‘Section 8’ voucher — a rent subsidy — with no restrictions on where they could move, but with few options available in tight housing markets), and the control (who stayed in public housing). This was an experiment premised entirely on an assumption that the *neighbourhood causes poverty*, where the way to ‘fight ghetto poverty’ (Briggs *et al.*, 2010) was to assist families in moving to neighbourhoods with better schools, lower crime rates, more jobs, more positive role models, and so on. Despite the proclamation of the Brookings Institution’s Bruce Katz that MTO was a ‘“home run” in social science research’ owing to its clean experimental design (quoted in Goering, 2003), the outcomes of MTO are modest, to put it mildly. Five sets of outcomes were studied (mental health, physical health, adult economic ‘self-sufficiency’, education and ‘risky behaviour’ — the language is revealing and will be discussed later under the heading Structural deficiencies) and ‘null effects have been reported for a number of outcomes’ (Sampson, 2012: 263), adverse effects on the ‘delinquency’ (one of the ‘risky behaviours’) and physical health of adolescent males, and positive effects on adult mental health and the education and health of young women (Briggs *et al.*, 2010: 223–37). Despite the mixed outcomes reported, urban scholars in the US have consistently trumpeted the ‘significant positive effects’ of the experiment, notably in the wake of Hurricane Katrina in 2005 (Imbroscio, 2008).

I should stress from the outset that it would be grossly inaccurate and unfair to state that anyone pressing the neighbourhood effects view of cities is intent on causing misery among the poor. Many of the leading voices in the debate are well-intentioned scholars who are driven by a strong sense of social justice. Their research agendas are guided by an honest and entirely admirable wish to determine the extent to which neighbourhoods matter in people’s lives in many different respects, in the hope that their research findings will offer the evidence necessary for policy remediation vis-à-vis entrenched poverty and stunted life chances (in respect of health, education, crime, employment, and so on). Despite those good intentions, this article is primarily concerned with an absolutely fundamental *structural* question that is rarely, if ever, tabled at virtual or actual gatherings of those concerned with neighbourhood effects. That question is: *why do people live where they do in cities?* If *where* any given individual lives affects their life chances as deeply as neighbourhood effects proponents believe, it seems crucial to understand *why* that individual is living there in the first place. It has long been a scientific fact and predicament that in most cities of the world there are neighbourhoods of astounding affluence and neighbourhoods of persistent (and often deepening) poverty, often side by side. Life chances will, of course, be very different for residents of these very different neighbourhoods, but stating the obvious and ‘controlling’ for various externalities (especially popular among statistically oriented urban sociologists) does not explain why such urban inequality exists. My contention in this article is that neighbourhood effects, when viewed through *explanatory* rather than descriptive analytic lenses, take the appearance of phantoms. I therefore attempt to exorcise them by examining the structural factors that give rise to differential life chances and the inequalities they produce. If we invert the neighbourhood effects thesis to *your life chances affect where you live*, then the problem becomes one of understanding life chances via a theory of capital accumulation and class struggle in cities. Such a theory provides an understanding of the injustices inherent in letting the market (buttressed by the state) be the force that determines the cost of land and housing, and correspondingly, the major determinant of where people live. The ecological determinism practiced by neighbourhood effects believers stands on very shaky ground when placed within the context of well over a century of theoretical advances in respect of how differential life chances are created in cities.

I begin by summoning Engels’ famous writings on the industrial proletariat in nineteenth-century Manchester — for his arguments on what shaped their life chances provide the theoretical context for my analysis, which draws upon influential Marxist critiques of neoclassical urban land theory, a topic I discuss at length in the context of

neighbourhood effects research. I then proceed to call into question some studies that purport to demonstrate neighbourhood effects at work, and argue that such effects are instruments of accusation, which entice through their use of sophisticated quantitative methods (specifically, regression analyses) but ignore the structural and institutional arrangements driving and sustaining poverty and inequality. I conclude by advocating a research agenda that rejects neighbourhood effects and focuses instead on the stigmatization of poor neighbourhoods, and how this can be challenged via work uncovering how and why spaces are coveted by those who stand to be removed from them by urban policies rooted in a belief in causal neighbourhood effects.

Some lessons from 'Cottonopolis'

The question of why people live where they do in cities is not new, and numerous competing explanations have been advanced in a substantial theoretical and empirical literature. In one article it is impossible to do justice to all the urban applications of long-established theories of residential differentiation, not to mention the rich intellectual traditions from which they are drawn and the conflicts between those traditions. As Eric Clark (1987: 5) notes, citing Andrew Sayer: 'given the complexity of processes which comprise the broad notion of urban change, it should not surprise us to find that "characteristically explanations are relatively incomplete, approximate and contestable"'. But for our purposes it is a useful starting point to remind ourselves of the lessons provided by an impressionable 24-year-old in 1845 who three years earlier had been despatched by his industrialist father from his native Germany to Manchester, England, in order to learn the practices of sound factory management, and in particular, how to extract maximum value from the proletariat. The outcome of this parental decision was not what was intended.

In 1840s Manchester — the cradle of the English cotton industry, which was undergoing astonishingly rapid urbanization during the first half of the nineteenth century (to the extent that historians refer to it today as the archetypal 'shock city') — Friedrich Engels was so horrified by what he saw that his destiny as a cotton lord was arrested and the seeds of communist theory were sown.² The abysmal living conditions of the working-class labourers of the cotton mills were documented with poignant eloquence:

[O]n re-reading my description, I am forced to admit that instead of being exaggerated, it is far from black enough to convey a true impression of the filth, ruin, and uninhabitableness, the defiance of all considerations of cleanliness, ventilation, and health which characterise the construction of this single district, containing at least twenty to thirty thousand inhabitants. And such a district exists in the heart of the second city of England, the first manufacturing city of the world. If any one wishes to see in how little space a human being can move, how little air — and such air! — he can breathe, how little of civilization he may share and yet live, it is only necessary to travel hither (Engels, 1845 [2009]: 65).

But was it working people's quarters per se that *created* these conditions? Or, put in another way, was it the insalubrious neighbourhoods to which workers were confined that stunted their life chances? Far from it:

Everything which here arouses horror and indignation is of recent origin, belongs to the industrial epoch. The couple of hundred houses, which belong to old Manchester, have been

2 According to radical historian Jonathan Schofield, '[w]ithout Manchester there would have been no Soviet Union. And the history of the 20th century would have been very different' (quoted in Jeffries, 2006: n.p.).

long since abandoned by their original inhabitants; the industrial epoch alone has crammed into them the swarms of workers whom they now shelter; the industrial epoch alone has built up every spot between these old houses to win a covering for the masses whom it has conjured hither from the agricultural districts and from Ireland; the industrial epoch alone enables the owners of these cattlesheds to rent them for high prices to human beings, to plunder the poverty of the workers, to undermine the health of thousands, in order that they alone, the owners, may grow rich (*ibid.*: 65–6).

Engels' explanation for the grim life and meagre life chances of Manchester's industrial proletariat could not be clearer. In this passage, we learn that it was *capitalist urbanization* that condemned workers to social suffering on an epic scale. The dense *concentration* of a particular (poor) category of urban dwellers in certain neighbourhoods of Manchester and the *effects* generated by that concentration was not the central issue to be addressed; in fact, such a concern appears ludicrous. By contrast, the villain was the capitalist quest for profit, both from industrial expansion and from the valuable land upon which workers dwelled. In an earlier essay, Engels (1843) identified *private property rights* as the chief institutional arrangement that made capitalist urban expansion possible, for it 'encompassed all the myriad features of political economy — wages, trade, value, price, money — that he had seen at work in Manchester' (Hunt, 2009: 98). It was private property rights that had created not only grinding urban poverty but also a profoundly unequal city, captured in words that are as relevant to countless cities worldwide today as they were to Manchester in 1845:

The town itself is peculiarly built, so that a person may live in it for years, and go in and out daily without coming into contact with a working-people's quarter or even with workers, that is, so long as he confines himself to his business or to pleasure walks. This arises chiefly from the fact that, by unconscious tacit agreement, as well as with outspoken conscious determination, the working-people's quarters are sharply separated from the sections of the city reserved for the middle-class . . . I have never seen so systematic a shutting out of the working-class from the thoroughfares, so tender a concealment of everything which might affront the eye and the nerves of the bourgeoisie, as in Manchester (Engels, 1845 [2009]: 57).

For Engels, the grotesque social divides of the 'cottonopolis' and the unequal life chances within it were wrought by the system ('systematic') — one sustained by private property rights. They were not wrought by the 'effects' on life chances of different categories of resident living in starkly contrasting residential districts.

The villain of the piece is further magnified once we consider the equally powerful lessons to be learned from Engels in three essays published as a pamphlet entitled *The Housing Question* (1872) — a polemical, often exhilarating excoriation of private property rights. In addition to its blistering critique of the French 'bourgeois socialist' Pierre-Joseph Proudhon's view that homeownership among the proletariat offers revolutionary potential,³ the pamphlet is particularly astute on the way in which, to use Engels' words, 'the bourgeoisie solves the housing question': by moving poverty around. In a famous passage that drew inspiration from his own visits to Paris during the reign of Napoleon III, Engels states:

In reality the bourgeoisie has only one method of solving the housing question after its fashion — that is to say, of solving it in such a way that the solution continually reproduces the question anew. This method is called 'Haussmann' . . . By 'Haussmann' I mean the practice which has now become general of making breaches in the working class quarters of our big towns, and particularly in those which are centrally situated . . . No matter how different the reasons may

3 Engels' critique of Proudhon offers much to challenge the hugely popular and often unchallenged doctrine that once people become homeowners, nations will prosper. Scott (1980: 84) noted that 'the spirit of Proudhon continues to live on . . . especially during urban property booms when land-use conflicts begin to proliferate throughout the urban system'.

be, the result is everywhere the same: the scandalous alleys and lanes disappear to the accompaniment of lavish self-praise from the bourgeoisie on account of this tremendous success, but they appear again immediately somewhere else and often in the immediate neighborhood . . . The breeding places of disease, the infamous holes and cellars in which the capitalist mode of production confines our workers night after night, are not abolished; they are merely *shifted elsewhere!* The same economic necessity which produced them in the first place, produces them in the next place also (Engels, 1872: n.p.; original emphasis).

It is instructive to consider these sentences in the context of the HOPE (Housing Opportunities for People Everywhere) VI program in the US, where nearly all public housing projects classified in a 1993 federal audit as ‘severely distressed’ have now been demolished, and their very low-income, predominantly African-American residents subjected to ‘dispersal’. HOPE VI had many motives, and addressing the terrible legacy of racial segregation via public housing (Hirsch, 1983) and the shocking condition of so many housing projects (Monroe and Goldman, 1988; Kotlowitz, 1991; Venkatesh, 2000) was a welcome development, but the view that ‘concentrated poverty’ was detrimental to the life chances of those living in the projects arguably swamped the initial concerns for racial desegregation (Crump, 2002).⁴ Upon reading the bleak conclusions of a tracking study of displaced HOPE VI tenants in Chicago, the consequences of the program appear in their true light, and Engels’ words become chillingly prescient:

Recent findings from Chicago public housing point to problems with the relocation process . . . *Most displaced residents moved to poor black communities not far from their original public housing developments.* Counselling services were inadequate, and administrative — and political — problems undermined the relocation effort (Popkin *et al.*, 2005: 394–95, emphasis added).

It is also striking that the gentrified townhouse landscapes that are replacing public housing projects — and which house next to none of their former public housing tenants — were inspired by the New Urbanism cult, its founder Andrés Duany a long-time advocate of gentrification.⁵

An equally large-scale but less researched policy was Housing Market Renewal (HMR) in England, which gained momentum in 2001 when the Labour government launched its National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal, with one central and highly ambitious goal: that ‘within 10 to 20 years, nobody should be seriously disadvantaged by where they live’ (SEU, 2001: 8). HMR, designed by British housing scholars (Cole and Nevin, 2004; Nevin, 2010), designated large swathes of urban land in northern England as poorly performing housing markets (reflected in low house prices relative to regional and national averages) owing to the existence of ‘obsolete’ terraced housing. The view among the policy’s architects was that low house prices were stifling economic growth, and therefore had detrimental effects on the life chances of those living in the areas targeted by HMR. Substantial funds were released by the then Labour government to allow municipal authorities to use Compulsory Purchase Orders to acquire land and

4 It did not take long for policy elites and developers to realize that the land upon which the projects stood could be put to ‘higher and better’ use, and that profits were to be made from urban space without the one-for-one replacement of housing or a ‘right of return’ for those who lost their homes (Wyly and Hammel, 2000; Goetz, 2003; Hackworth, 2006; Hammel, 2006; DeFilippis and Fraser, 2010; Steinberg, 2010b). Since the early 2000s, policy elites from European cities have been travelling to Chicago, a city particularly affected by HOPE VI demolitions, to learn about the program. Many travelled back home and recommended HOPE VI as an example of best practice in the drive to break up ‘concentrated poverty’ in their own societies and create ‘mixed-income’ communities (see Berube, 2005; Lupton and Fuller, 2009).

5 ‘Gentrification rebalances a concentration of poverty by providing the tax base, rub-off work ethic, and political effectiveness of a middle class, and in the process improves the quality of life for all a community’s residents. It is the rising tide that lifts all boats’ (Duany, 2001: 39).

housing from owner occupiers so that the ‘obsolete’ dwellings could be demolished in favour of newly built housing developments aimed at wealthier prospective buyers. In both HOPE VI and HMR, the human costs have been immense — studies of persons displaced under these programs document a litany of social harms, among them broken social networks, continued housing problems, inadequate counselling services, health deterioration and various forms of psychosocial stress, particularly acute among the elderly, where reactions to the demolition of their long-time homes can be classified as grief (Goetz, 2003; Fullilove, 2004; Popkin *et al.*, 2005; Bennett *et al.*, 2006; Allen, 2008; Crookes, 2011).

Those who trumpet the benefits of demolition and dispersal programs for poor urban dwellers are (sometimes wilfully) ignorant of the important and lasting lessons to be learned from the pugnacious prose of a cotton lord turned communist. HOPE VI and HMR have simply shifted poverty elsewhere. The mode of production that shapes the urban environments in which we live produces concentrations of poverty that many rejoice in breaking up; yet that mode of production — churning, intact — produces further ‘concentrations’ just down the street.⁶ In this respect it is helpful to elucidate the analytic tradition from which the Marxist critique of capitalist urbanization emerged in the mid- to late twentieth century, to which I now turn. The symptomatic silence over Marxist analyses among mainstream urban and housing scholars necessitates the task of recounting what can be learned from such analyses, particularly vis-à-vis neighbourhood effects.

Locational see-saws

Urban reality does not derive its various observable characteristics from some autonomous ‘urbanism’ . . . but from the global social, economic, and cultural forces and arrangements that make up the totality of capitalist society.

Allen J. Scott (1980: 137)

At the time Engels was penning his indictments of private property rights, ‘urban studies’ was not even a fledgling field of social science inquiry — the field as we know it was arguably born in 1920s Chicago as a consequence of the prolific writings of Robert Park and his colleagues, based at the University of Chicago’s sociology department. There was little place for Marxist reasoning amidst all their land-use models, ethnographic accounts of Chicago life, appeals to natural-science metaphors and interpretations of the city as social ‘laboratory’. By the 1960s, urban studies had crystallized into a hegemonic blend of the social and spatial theories of the Chicago School, infused with the methods and assumptions of neoclassical economics. Morphological analyses, with, suspiciously, ‘half the city submerged under Lake Michigan’ (Smith, 1992: 110), portrayed the suburbanization of middle-class and wealthy households as *the* driving force of urban growth, suburban expansion and overall metropolitan housing market change. Among the numerous legacies of the Chicago School, arguably the most enduring was the idea that the urban environment tends towards ‘equilibrium’ much as an organism does, with individuals and groups sorting themselves into ‘natural areas’ that constituted a city symbiotically balanced between cooperation and conflict (Metzger, 2000). This logic — an attempt to account for why certain population categories lived in certain districts of the city — laid the foundation for ideas of *spatial equilibrium* and economic competition

6 I make this argument mindful of being accused of pressing a ‘totalizing discourse’, but as David Harvey once replied to such an accusation at a 2002 conference I attended, ‘Well, it’s a totalizing system!’

that were used to develop neoclassical models of urban land markets in the late 1950s and early 1960s (Alonso, 1964; Muth, 1969). These models explained suburbanization in terms of an overriding *consumer preference* for space, combined with differences in the ability of high- and low-income households to engage in locational trade-offs between access to centralized employment and the cheaper land prices available on the lower-density urban periphery. The neoclassical models seemed to account for the spatial paradox of the US city: middle-class and wealthy households living on cheap suburban land, poor and working-class households forced to crowd into dense apartment blocks on expensive, centrally located inner-city land.

However, in the course of creating elegant land-use models, the neoclassical urbanists had built everything on the dubious foundation of *consumer sovereignty*. Viewed through neoclassical analytic lenses, the form and function of the city is always and everywhere attributable to the result of *choices* made by individual consumers of land and housing. Individual consumers 'rationally choose' among available options in order to maximize their 'utility', subject to the constraints of their available resources. Institutions then compete against each other to serve the needs of these utility-maximizing consumers. In respect of neighbourhoods and housing, the resulting market will produce the spatial trade-offs between space and accessibility that structure different residential patterns. All that remains to complete the calculus are the 'optimal' political-economic conditions for the operation of such a competitive market; if it is allowed to operate free of any constrictive regulations enforced by the state, the incentives for both producers and consumers to make 'rational' and economically sound decisions will push the urban environment towards equilibrium while yielding the maximum amount of utility for the maximum number of people.

Neoclassical theories have come to dominate urban theory and especially urban policy (Lees *et al.*, 2008: 46), and they constitute the analytic foundation of proponents of neighbourhood effects, who leave political-economic structures unquestioned in the same way as they assume that people living where they do is a matter of individual choices made under resource constraints. But the very conceptual simplicity of neoclassical urban thought leaves it wide open to critique. If we are interested in resource constraints, surely we need to know how those constraints come about? Surely the more urgent task is to consider the *limits* on individual choice, the *boundaries* set by ever-present inequalities of wealth and power? What about the limited choices available to the poor and working classes?⁷ Surely there is far more to the question of neighbourhood change than descriptive accounts of who moves in and who moves out? These questions were at the forefront of a radical shift in how we understand cities that began in the early 1970s, and they continue to shape a critical imagination, where concerns for a more socially just spatial arrangement of urban places under a different mode of production drives intellectual inquiry. Sadly, much of the literature reflecting such concerns has bypassed the research agendas of those locked within the neighbourhood effects paradigm.

In 1969, David Harvey decamped from his first teaching post in Bristol, England, and arrived in Baltimore, Maryland, a city with districts hit hard by grotesque racial injustices, systematic disinvestment and rioting in the wake of the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. The previous year Harvey had submitted the manuscript of *Explanation in Geography* (a landmark text in the quantitative/positivist geographical tradition), and felt politically irresponsible:

7 Imbroscio (2008: 114) advanced a fascinating critique of how mainstream housing-policy researchers in the US treat choice in respect of low-income categories: '[T]he expansion of residential choices for the urban poor only exists when the ability to exit is enhanced; it does not include enhancing – in Chester Hartman's (1984) useful phrase – "the right [or ability] to stay put"'. Viewed through such critical lenses, we can see that 'choice' is perhaps the ultimate luxury good. I am grateful to David Manley for this point.

I turned in the manuscript in the summer of 1968 with near revolutions going on in Paris, Berlin, Mexico City, Bangkok, Chicago and San Francisco. I had hardly noticed what was happening. I felt sort of idiotic. It seemed absurd to be writing when the world was collapsing in chaos around me and cities were going up in flames (Harvey, 2006: 187).

In order to understand the origins of inequality and injustice in the city in which he now resided, Harvey quickly became the leading force in establishing a new analytic framework that returned to the roots of contemporary neoclassical theory — the classical political-economy debates between Smith, Ricardo, Malthus and Marx. Harvey's *Social Justice and the City* (1973) was the manifesto of this new urban-studies approach, and contained his critique of the dominant neoclassical explanation of inner-city decline and ghetto formation, now crucial for any analytic interrogation of neighbourhood effects. He took aim at the models of urban structure that Alonso (1964) and Muth (1969) had built using the principles of agricultural land-use patterns that had been devised by a Prussian landowner, von Thünen (1793–1850):

After an analytic presentation of the theory, Muth seeks to evaluate the empirical relevance of the theory by testing it against the existing structure of residential land use in Chicago. His tests indicate that the theory is broadly correct, with, however, certain deviations explicable by such things as racial discrimination in the housing market. We may thus infer that the theory is a true theory. This truth, arrived at by classical positivist means, can be used to help us identify the problem. What for Muth was a successful test of a social theory becomes an indicator of what the problem is. *The theory predicts that poor groups must, of necessity, live where they can least afford to live.*

Our objective is to eliminate ghettos. Therefore, the only valid policy . . . is to eliminate the conditions which give rise to the truth of the theory. In other words, we wish the von Thünen theory of the urban land market to become not true. *The simplest approach here is to eliminate those mechanisms which serve to generate the theory. The mechanism in this case is very simple — competitive bidding for the use of the land* (Harvey, 1973: 137, emphasis added).

This critique is acutely relevant today, at a time when neoclassical assumptions have been revitalized and appropriated by the political triumphs of neoliberalism, where cities 'have become the incubators for many of the major political and ideological strategies through which the dominance of neoliberalism is being maintained' (Brenner and Theodore, 2002: 375–76). Municipal administrations now act less as regulators of markets to protect marginalized residents and more as *entrepreneurial* agents of market processes and capital accumulation (Harvey, 1989; Peck, 2005; Weber, 2010), resulting in spectacular wealth inequalities within and between cities.

Any scholar working at the forefront of exciting theoretical advances is bound to attract strong graduate students, and so it was that Harvey was joined in the late 1970s by Neil Smith, whose work on gentrification and uneven development was profoundly intertwined with the deep engagement with Marx (and Marxist thought) exhibited by his advisor. Both scholars added a geographical, spatial dimension to something that had fascinated Marx — the powerful contradictions of capital investment and accumulation. Investments are required to create the places that must exist in order for profits to be made — offices, factories, shops, homes and all the rest of the infrastructure that constitutes a city. Yet once these investments are committed to a certain place, capital cannot be quickly or easily shifted to newer, more profitable opportunities elsewhere. This is because capitalists are always forced to choose between investing to maintain the viability of previous capital commitments (or exploiting new opportunities), and neglecting or abandoning the old. Therefore capital investment is always animated by a geographical tension: between the need to *equalise* conditions and seek out new markets in new places, versus the need for *differentiation* (and particularly a division of labour that is matched to various places' comparative advantage). The result is a dynamic 'see-saw' of investment and disinvestment over time and across space, in an ongoing process of uneven geographical development (Harvey, 1973; 1982; Smith, 1982; 1984;

Harvey, 2003). Capitalism is always creating new places, new environments designed for profit and accumulation, in the process devalorizing previous investments and landscapes:

The logic behind uneven development is that the development of one area creates barriers to further development, thus leading to underdevelopment, and that the underdevelopment of that area creates opportunities for a new phase of development. Geographically this leads to the possibility of what we might call a 'locational seesaw': the successive development, underdevelopment, and redevelopment of given areas as capital jumps from one place to another, then back again, both creating and destroying its own opportunities for development' (Smith, 1982: 151).

Capital investment in a particular land use will eventually face an unavoidable depreciation: buildings and other infrastructure age, and require ongoing labour and capital for maintenance and repair. As new urban growth adopts better construction and design technologies, land uses developed in previous generations become less competitive and less profitable. The resultant flight of capital away from certain areas of the city — depreciation and disinvestment — has devastating implications for people living at the base of the see-saw, the bottom of the urban class structure. To take one example from the domain of housing: landlords in poorer inner-city neighbourhoods are often holding investments in buildings that represented what economists and urban planners call the 'highest and best use' over a century ago; spending money to maintain these assets as low-cost rental units becomes ever more difficult to justify with each passing year, since the investments will be difficult to recover from low-income tenants. It becomes rational and logical for landlords to 'milk' the property, extracting rent from the tenants, spending the *absolute minimum* to maintain the structure and waiting as potential ground rent increases, in the hopes of eventually capturing a windfall through redevelopment and gentrification (Smith, 1979). Over time, the deferred maintenance becomes apparent: people with the money to do so will leave a neighbourhood, and financial institutions 'redline' the neighbourhood as too risky to make loans (Squires, 1992; Aalbers, 2011). Neighbourhood decline accelerates, and moderate-income residents and businesses moving away are replaced by successively poorer tenants who move in (as they cannot access housing anywhere else). The lack of maintenance expenditure leads to tough housing conditions for those poorer tenants, amidst myriad other consequences of capital disinvestment, such as high unemployment, poor schools, inadequate retail services, dismal health outcomes, and so on. Crucially, and in sharp contrast to much popular and intellectual perception, such areas usually see social networks and community ties within them *strengthen* as a coping mechanism for the withdrawal of capital. Residents living in disinvested parts of cities fall back on what they know and what they have — each other.

What is the relevance of this account of uneven development to a critique of neighbourhood effects? Recall the textbook definition: that where you live affects your life chances. Applied to poor people, it infers that the influences of what surrounds them have caused their poverty — it is all about negative role models and miscreants mired in a culture of concentrated poverty that stops people rising up and finding a better life and escaping their neighbourhood. As Steinberg (2010a) has argued, '[s]tripped of its prosaic veneer, the "neighborhood effects" model assumes that poverty feeds on itself, that it metastasizes and is a cancer on the body politic'. So, in any society where class inequality is present, or diffracted through a racial-ethnic prism (or through any other aspect of socio-cultural polarization), residential turnover leading to entrenched disinvestment almost invariably unleashes an all-encompassing, discriminatory and stigmatizing argument: that the *clustering of a poor population category is causing neighbourhood decline*. But the Marxist view of capitalist urbanization explains that poorer residents and businesses can only afford to move in *after* a neighbourhood has been devalorized — *after* capital disinvestment and the departure of the wealthy and

middle classes. Structural factors cause neighbourhood disinvestment and truncate the life chances of the poor, who become stuck in place owing to the exclusive nature of a city's highly competitive housing market.

In capitalist property markets, the decisive 'consumer preference', to take the neoclassical language, is *the desire to achieve a reasonable rate of return on a sound financial investment* (Smith, 1979). Private property rights feed those desires, but there is a price to pay to access those 'rights'. As Allen Scott showed in his conceptualization of the 'urban land nexus', a city is 'a land-use system consisting of interpenetrating private and public spaces' (Scott, 1980: 3), and one governed by contradictory patterns of property rights:

Precisely because urban land development is privately controlled, the final outcomes of this process are necessarily and paradoxically out of control . . . [U]rban land is privately appropriated, exchanged, and utilized, and yet can never be produced or consumed in discrete packages like tons of wheat or yards of cloth, but it is replete with locational interdependencies that consistently evade the integrative logic of the market (*ibid.*: 138–39).

The production of urban space by owners of capital (developers, manufacturers, homeowners) means that 'individually optimal' decisions have considerable social costs (described as 'negative spillovers' by Scott), and a long list of urban problems from pollution and congestion to abandonment and displacement. Contrary to the neoclassical paradigm, there is nothing natural about such a situation. The clear injustice is that the owners of capital tend to see spectacular wealth gains at the expense of those residing in neighbourhoods robbed (often quite literally) of adequate investment. When the see-saw tips again and investment does arrive, it is seldom geared to the interests of the poor; on the contrary, tenants are evicted and displaced, as 'rent gaps' (Smith, 1979; Clark, 1987) are exploited and gentrification begins. Although the term 'gentrification' was not coined until 1964, Engels recognized the systemic injustices upon which it thrives as early as 1872:

The expansion of the big modern cities gives the land in certain sections of them, particularly in those which are centrally situated, an artificial and often enormously increasing value; the buildings erected in these areas depress this value, instead of increasing it, because they no longer correspond to the changed circumstances. They are pulled down and replaced by others. This takes place above all with centrally located workers' houses, whose rents, even with the greatest overcrowding, can never, or only very slowly, increase above a certain maximum. They are pulled down and in their stead shops, warehouses, and public buildings are erected . . . The result is that the workers are forced out of the center of the towns towards the outskirts . . . (Engels, 1872: n.p.).

Capitalist property markets, in short, favour the creation of urban environments to serve the needs of capital accumulation:

Capitalist development has therefore to negotiate a knife-edge path between preserving the exchange values of past capital investments in the built environment and destroying the value of these investments in order to open up fresh room for accumulation. Under capitalism there is, then, a perpetual struggle in which capital builds a physical landscape appropriate to its own condition at a particular moment in time, only to have to destroy it, usually in the course of a crisis, at a subsequent point in time (Harvey, 1978: 124).

Harvey was quick to show that the urban process under capitalism was far more than a matter of capital flows: it was about class inequality, the formation of an exploited and alienated urban working class and 'the violence which the capitalist form of accumulation inevitably inflicts upon it' (*ibid.*: 124), and the possibilities the contradictions of capitalism create for resistance by the working class (class struggle). On that final point, Engels noted that the intensity of working-class clustering and oppression in particular districts of Manchester meant that 'the spatial configuration of the city only accelerated the nurturing of class consciousness' (Hunt, 2009: 109),

something which is never mentioned among scholars of neighbourhood effects on the lookout for social pathology. So, where Pierre Bourdieu *et al.* (1993) may have been correct in offering a view of 'site effects' whereby 'bringing together on a single site a population homogeneous in its dispossession strengthens that dispossession' (*ibid.*: 129), the history of class struggle and social movements teaches us that such dispossession can strengthen the possibilities for *repossession* of a 'right to the city' (Lefebvre, 1970).

Structural deficiencies

In short, a policy predicated on the claim that the demolition of their homes will advance the interests of the very people whose homes are being destroyed is a preposterous sham. Stephen Steinberg (2010b: 222).

Having summarized the analytic tradition of Marxist theory towards addressing the urbanization question, and having offered a glimpse of the lessons it offers in respect of understanding why people live where they do, we turn now to some of the conclusions and arguments of proponents of the neighbourhood effects thesis, and particularly, a consideration of the *political* implications of such scholarship. Due to the sheer size of the literature I can only offer a taster and initial critique of some of the work that reflects the popular view that where you live affects your life chances at precisely the same time as it ignores systemic injustices.⁸ In doing so it becomes pertinent to draw upon some of the lonely yet crucial critiques that have been advanced in recent years to call the neighbourhood effects paradigm into question and, in particular, to elucidate its troubling political import.

As Manley *et al.* (2011) explain, the initial stimulus to engage with neighbourhood effects was provided by Wilson (1987; 1991) in his influential attempts to wrench the 'underclass' term away from conservative researchers and give it an economic and spatial foundation, one faithful to the initial coinage of the term by Gunnar Myrdal in the 1960s. Wilson was particularly persistent with the research question of entrenched unemployment in neighbourhoods exhibiting high poverty; he attributed 'joblessness' (to use his preferred term) not only to the refusal of employers to hire residents from certain neighbourhoods with a negative reputation, but to the very *concentration* of residents experiencing long-term unemployment, which led to 'negative social dispositions, limited aspirations, and casual work habits' (Wilson, 1991, quoted in Manley *et al.*, 2011: 153). Wilson's arguments influenced a generation of liberal scholars interested in far more than simply the labour market outcomes of 'concentrated poverty', as Manley *et al.* summarize:

explanations of neighbourhood effects ... include role model effects and peer group influences, social and physical disconnection from job-finding networks, a culture of poverty leading to dysfunctional values, discrimination by employers and other gatekeepers, access to low quality public services, and high exposure to criminal behaviour (*ibid.*: 153).

We are dealing, then, with *ecological thematics*: for the liberal proponents of the thesis, it is the *neighbourhood* that is the problem to be addressed by policy, over and above the personal characteristics of its residents (the exclusive focus of conservative scholars). Bauder (2002: 85) captures these thematics succinctly:

The idea of neighbourhood effects suggests that *the demographic context of poor neighbourhoods* instills 'dysfunctional' norms, values and behaviours into individuals and

8 As Sampson (2012: 46) comments when reflecting on his 2002 review of neighbourhood effects studies, '[i]t was impossible to review them all then and would be even more so now'.

triggers a cycle of social pathology and poverty that few residents escape . . . [It] implies that the residents of the so-called ghettos, barrios and slums are ultimately responsible for their own social and economic situation.

'Neighbourhood effects' is therefore more than merely a concept — it is an *instrument of accusation*, a veiled form of class antagonism that conveniently has no place for any concern over what happens *outside* the very neighbourhoods under scrutiny. Take, for instance, the conclusions of a logit regression analysis of 'school dropout rates' among Australian teenagers from various socioeconomic categories (Overman, 2002). After stating that 'living in an area where the immediate neighbourhood has low socioeconomic status has a negative effect on dropout propensities' (*ibid.*: 128), the author offers the following policy recommendation:

[G]overnment policies placing small clusters of low SES [socio-economic status] families in better [sic] neighbourhoods may have little significant impact on dropout rates. 'Forced' mixing through government housing programmes may need to ensure that low SES families are well dispersed throughout more affluent neighbourhoods, rather than concentrated in 'sink' estates (*ibid.*: 128)

This article is completely silent on the general quality of the education system, the relevance of the school curriculum to the hopes and dreams of young people, the availability of inspiring teachers, the educational opportunities beyond school corridors (such as in apprenticeships and mentoring schemes), the possibility that leaving school early to find work might be an economic necessity (part of a household survival strategy), or that teenagers may have to sacrifice their studies to help care for a frail relative. These issues are ignored in favour of recommending that the Australian government disperse poor teenagers and their families as widely as possible, because when clustered together, they feed off each other in a shameful school dropout culture. Were these conclusions not dressed up in scientific language and legitimized by numbing tables of parameter values, they would be highly controversial. Unequal educational attainment needs to be considered as an offshoot of the unequal provision of public goods and unequal treatment by the state of the different areas. The degree of inequality between neighbourhoods with bad schools and good schools is *not a property of the neighbourhood*, but a property of the school system (Elliot *et al.*, 2006). However, Overman's analysis offers considerable ammunition for an embrace of the neighbourhood effects thesis: concentrations of poverty in 'low-status' neighbourhoods in Australia apparently harm life chances, so reducing those concentrations by scattering poor young Australians among richer young Australians (prospective educational 'role models', presumably) apparently solves the problem.

Another example comes from a recent study of 'neighbourhood income mix' in respect of the earnings of adults in Sweden. Galster *et al.* (2008: 868) deploy regression analysis of government data on income, education, labour market and population, commenting that their 'robust results' are:

. . . consistent with the view that, for males who are not fully employed, low-income neighbors provide negative role models and middle-income (but not high-income) neighbors provide access to networks with valuable employment-related information. For those already fully employed, high-income neighbors probably are valuable because they provide access to networks with information about opportunities for more lucrative employment.

Most troubling of all about these words is that *not a single Swede of any income category was interviewed* for the study. Therefore, the authors of this study could not possibly offer detailed analytical insights about social networks vis-à-vis employment opportunities in different urban districts of Sweden (it is not a social networks analysis, for a start). Their conclusions also contradict ethnographic inquiries that offer strong evidence that one thing common to the experience of living in a poor neighbourhood anywhere is precisely the 'valuable employment-related information' that is passed

around as a collective economic survival strategy (see, for example, Newman, 2001; Venkatesh, 2006). As Cheshire (2006: 1240) reminds us, ‘people derive welfare from living near to other complementary — usually similar — households’. Furthermore, rather than serve as role models for those worse off, middle-income neighbours are in fact far more likely to socialize and share information *among themselves*, as has been documented in countless sociological analyses of the middle classes (see, for example, Butler and Robson, 2003). In addition, to men who are ‘not fully employed’, low-income neighbours offer solidarity, empathy, informal social care, community and kinship. They may not lead the way to full employment, but that does not make them ‘negative role models’. Moreover, aside from the underclass caricatures invoked by that language, it speaks volumes of the neighbourhood effects literature that not a single scholar of the genre ever asks the burning question: what turns someone into a destructive influence on someone else’s life? What leads someone to impress on others the view that everyone is against them, that there is no hope in their neighbourhood, so they might as well give up on education and the formal economy and join a gang and immerse themselves into a world of drugs, crime and violence? The answers can be found in phenomena that are rarely ‘controlled’ for: a hostile entry-level labour market, the lack of a living wage or basic income, the absolute indignity of living in a stigmatized territory, the expansion of the penal fist of the state, the compassion fatigue displayed by civic institutions — the tragedy is that there are simply so many structural factors that condemn so many to poverty and social suffering (Bourgois, 2003; Wacquant, 2008).

The assumptions of that article are matched in a study of whether neighbourhoods matter in the ‘transition from welfare to work’ in the Dutch city of Rotterdam (van der Klaauw and van Ours, 2003). Before any data are presented and analysed, here is what the authors assume, and what guides their empirical inquiry:

On the one hand in a neighbourhood with high unemployment, there might be less (informal) information about jobs available, i.e. social networks in these neighbourhoods are less valuable when searching for a job. On the other hand, the attitude towards joblessness and the social norms concerning work may differ between low and high unemployment neighbourhoods (*ibid.*: 961).

The language is both revealing and disturbing: ‘less valuable’, ‘attitude towards joblessness’ and ‘social norms’ — the instrument of accusation at work. Another regression analysis later, here are the authors’ principal finding and recommended policy package:

Our empirical results show that the neighbourhood affects the individual transition rates from welfare to work of young Dutch welfare recipients. These transition rates are lower if the unemployment rate within the neighbourhood is higher . . . From a policy point of view this implies that when it comes to youth unemployment policy special attention should be given to young welfare recipients in high unemployment neighborhoods . . . [I]f high unemployment rates have a negative effect on individual transition rates from welfare to work because they cause a negative attitude towards work then a policy of strict monitoring is useful (*ibid.*: 984).

The structural factors that give rise to a toughening entry-level labour market for young people in Rotterdam (Uitermark *et al.*, 2007) are strategically, perhaps judiciously, disregarded. In addition, the ‘strict monitoring’ recommended is particularly worrisome — effectively the authors are suggesting that the Dutch authorities need to travel down the US welfare-to-work program path, regardless of its widely documented devastation of poor communities across the US (see, for example, Trudeau and Cope, 2003). The title of their article suggests as much, as does their comment that ‘in most literature on neighbourhood effects in the US results similar to ours are found’ (van Klaauw and van Ours, 2003: 982).

Considered together, the articles I have discussed above provide a snapshot of the neighbourhood effects genre, where authors are as quick to make sweeping assertions

about communities into which they rarely (if ever) set foot as they are to ignore the political implications of their scholarship. Bauder (2002: 89) has advanced a powerful critique:

The direct causality implied by neighbourhood effects models presents a simple and 'straight-forward' explanation for the social and economic marginality of inner-city residents, which entices through its use of quantitative methods and its claim to be objective and value-free. Yet . . . this literature makes ideological assumptions that remain unacknowledged by many researchers. One of these assumptions is that suburban middle-class lifestyles are normal, and inner-city, minority lifestyles are pathological.

A note here on methodology becomes necessary. It is unwise, politically, to cast aside the radical potential of quantitative exploration, especially when considered in creative tension with qualitative accounts (Sheppard, 2001; Wyly, 2011). But there is a serious analytical booby trap that afflicts those working with regression techniques (which appear to be something of an obsession in the neighbourhood effects literature): regressions appear to show that it is not only that poor people live in poor neighbourhoods, but that the neighbourhood effects *exceed* what would be predicted by poverty alone. But even if that is true, dispersing the poor to wealthier places, as is so often advocated, would only eliminate that incremental difference (the 'concentration effect'), without even pretending to address the institutional and structural arrangements driving poverty.⁹ The incremental 'after-controlling-for' logic and discourse thus seem deeply misguided. It is underpinned by a *ceteris paribus* argument that is false — statistically controlling for characteristics of entrants into different neighbourhoods *does not make these individuals equal* because we know via Marxist analyses discussed earlier that the processes of allocation through space are not random, and highly *unequal*. As two astute practitioners of the quantitative craft working on housing foreclosures in the US have warned: 'When we control for everything, we lose control' (Wyly and Ponder, 2011: 560). Sampson (2012) has attempted to transcend these difficulties in his impressive *magnum opus* on neighbourhood effects in Chicago, but his reluctance to engage at any level with the institutional apparatus of capitalist urbanization renders incomplete his insistence on viewing 'individual selection' into different neighbourhoods as something 'embedded in a process of structural sorting' (*ibid.*: 378).¹⁰

The lack of attention to wider structures is not only an occupational hazard of the statistician. Those who spend time in poor communities can fall into the trap of becoming so immersed in their research context that they fail to consider in significant depth the broader institutional political economy that would shed light on their findings. For instance, in a Chicago study of racial differences in neighbourhood social networks, Small (2007: 339) claims that his 'findings are most consistent with the work of [William Julius] Wilson' after arguing that

9 As Scott (1980: 5) pointed out, treating urban phenomena as 'independent variables' leads to a situation where 'locational patterns of firms and households in urban space are so frequently reduced to the status of simple geometric abstractions', blocking us from viewing those patterns as 'concrete social phenomena'.

10 Throughout his book, Sampson (2012) insists that 'selection bias' (the term quantitative analysts use to describe the effect of people grouping themselves together on common characteristics) is itself a neighbourhood effect, as 'neighbourhoods choose people and information flows' rather than the other way around, and that 'there is an ongoing social structure that is continually operating and within which any individual and family makes decisions' (*ibid.*: 377). This is a useful intervention into a debate dominated by those who argue that the effects we attribute to poor neighbourhoods are caused by the characteristics of families and individuals living in them, but Sampson holds fast to the view that *neighbourhoods* cause and/or amplify poverty and inequality at the expense of a consideration of the economic and political structures responsible for differential life chances. As I see it, 'selection bias' is the modelling equivalent of saying that your life chances affect where you live, but few analysts make the link that far (or make it explicit).

... the consistency of the neighborhood poverty effect across different types of outcomes makes it difficult to rule out a neighborhood effect ... At a minimum, it is certainly the case that individuals with identical observed characteristics face alarmingly higher rates of social isolation if they live in high poverty neighborhoods than if they live in low poverty neighborhoods.

But is social isolation in a high-poverty neighbourhood a 'neighbourhood effect', or something much deeper? In an exhaustive review of area-based policies in advanced capitalist societies, Andersson and Musterd (2005: 386) remarked that 'we should keep in mind that problems in the neighbourhood are seldom problems of the neighbourhood ... an area focus cannot by itself tackle the broader structural problems, such as unemployment, that underlie the problems of small areas'. In a similar vein, Wacquant (2008: 284) argues that neighbourhood effects convey a 'falsely depoliticized vision of urban inequality' and are best understood as *the effects of the state inscribed into urban space*: 'in reality they track the extent to which the state works or fails to equalize basic life conditions and strategies across places'. Small *et al.* (2008: 408) attempt to protect themselves from such a critique when they state that their study of organizational ties (specifically, childcare provision) in New York City neighbourhoods 'points to the importance of reconsidering the state and the non-profit sector, especially under the current political economy'. Yet in their article we actually learn very little about the historical path to the state's renouncement (at various scales) of its regulatory and protective functions that have placed such major pressures on the providers of social care for the population living at the bottom of the class structure in that city.

Demolition and emplacement

Researchers should be particularly critical of neighbourhood effects because the concept lends itself as a political tool to blame inner-city communities for their own marginality ... [and] provides scientific legitimacy to neighbourhood stereotypes among employers, educators and institutional staff, and justifies slum-clearance and acculturation policies.
Harald Bauder (2002: 90)

I began this article by drawing attention to Sampson *et al.*'s (2002: 444) observation of neighbourhood effects research as a cottage industry. The authors did not see this as a problem per se — more troubling to them was that 'the bad news is that this recent spurt in quantity has not been equally matched in quality; much hard work remains to be done'. In the decade that followed these remarks, the cottage industry has shown no signs of relenting, and beyond the standard fare of measurement and 'controlling' debates, the literature appears to serve primarily as ideological justification for the policy hubris of creating 'mixed income communities' via 'poverty deconcentration'. Cheshire (2006: 1241) has elaborated the ramifications of such policies:

Forcing neighbourhoods to be mixed in social and economic terms is treating the symptoms of inequality: it is on a par with applying leeches to lower a fever. At the same time, if there are welfare benefits derived from living in specialized neighbourhoods with other complementary households, the policy is directly destroying a potential source of welfare and a portion of the consumption benefits cities are capable of delivering.

Whilst I have some sympathy with Manley *et al.*'s (2011) argument that we need far better information on how individuals sort into neighbourhoods, I do not share their view that:

[t]he future for quantitative neighbourhood effects studies lies in the use of more sophisticated and tailored data which allows detailed geocoding of individuals and allows the modelling of selection mechanisms into neighbourhoods (*ibid.*: 168).

More sophisticated and tailored data are unlikely to be used for anything other than *decision-based evidence making* by policy elites on the hunt for scientific legitimacy for agendas that trample over the rights of the poor who, through a combination of bad luck and systemic injustices, are relegated to stigmatized neighbourhoods that become the problem rather than the expression of the problem to be addressed. 'Neighbourhood effects' is a field of intellectual inquiry that is now so divorced from the raw realities of capitalist urbanization that only one solution seems appropriate, given its failure to say much of substance about what is causing class inequality in cities. It requires the same *demolition* that many of its authors prescribe for housing in the communities they study.

Recall that one of the main weapons in the policy elite's arsenal is the activation of an intense stigma already attached to the parts of the city where poverty is high. When a city district becomes blemished by all kinds of derogatory terms and phrases, it makes the job of implementing drastic policies considerably easier for their architects:

Once a place is publicly labelled as a 'lawless zone' or 'outlaw estate', outside the common norm, it is easy for the authorities to justify special measures, deviating from both law and custom, which can have the effect — if not the intention — of destabilizing and further marginalizing their occupants, subjecting them to the dictates of the deregulated labour market, and rendering them invisible or driving them out of a coveted space (Wacquant, 2007: 69).¹¹

Therefore, in order to consign the neighbourhood effects genre to the intellectual dustbin, it is of paramount importance for a new cottage industry to emerge in the form of a research agenda that complements the theoretical and political insights of Marxist approaches to capitalist urbanization to show exactly how and why spaces are coveted by those who stand to be removed from them. Crookes (2011) has called this a need for 'emplacement' studies in urban research, geared towards resisting the displacement fetish among urban policy elites. For his fieldwork among displacees from a northern English city subjected to Housing Market Renewal (see the earlier section, 'Some lessons from Cottonopolis'), Crookes draws on Fullilove's mandate (2004: 20) that 'we can't understand the losses unless we first appreciate what was there' to argue that place attachment is especially strong in lower-income neighbourhoods, and in direct response to marginalization and residents' psychosocial and material needs, and the policy assumption that people *want* to leave is highly questionable (see also Goetz, 2003). Whilst by no means under any romantic illusions about poor areas (to argue that living in a poor area is somehow a wonderful experience across the board would, of course, be both naïve and absurd), he convincingly points out that scholars of all political stripes are guilty of referring to poorer neighbourhoods in terms (decayed, traumatized, and so on) that do little to correct the hegemonic view — the 'dispersal consensus' (Imbroscio, 2008)¹² — that people within them should be moved for their own good. In respect of gentrification he says that:

Beginning at 'home' helps us to think gentrification differently by shifting the focus of our attention from displacement to what is already there and what could be lost . . . From this perspective gentrification is no longer about the production of space for more affluent users but the violent dispossession of home for people who, for various reasons, may have a much stronger connection to home and place than those that do the taking (Crookes, 2011: 188).

11 Maloutas (2009: 830) has argued that when Wacquant writes of territorial stigmatization he is 'definitely arguing about a growing neighbourhood effect'. However, this misconstrues stigmatization, which is not a property of the neighbourhood, but rather a *gaze trained on it*. Its effects are the effects of symbolic structures applied to the neighbourhood, not those of the neighbourhood.

12 As Imbroscio (2008: 121-22) notes: 'One of the fundamental starting premises of the DC [dispersal consensus] is that helping the poor where they live — through place-based economic (or community) development — is destined to be of limited success'. Context, however, is crucial: in European nations, many citizen demands on 'keeping the place' have been recognized and respected, such as the (now defunct) Catalan Llei de Barris (Law on Neighbourhoods) (Nel-lo, 2010).

This crucial perspective and research agenda must serve as a point of departure for a serious challenge to unjust policies that are targeted at supposedly ‘dysfunctional’ neighbourhoods, and to the literature from which those policies draw credibility. It is also essential for urban scholars and social scientists to reflect upon why there is such an absence of research on extremely rich neighbourhoods, and correspondingly, of policies aimed at dispersing the rich when their concentration may have played a part in grievous collective disasters such as the 2008 financial crisis.

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