

Matthews, P. and D. O'Brien (2015). Chapter 3 - Connecting community to a post-regeneration era. *After Urban Regeneration: Communities, policy and place*. D. O'Brien and P. Matthews (Eds.) Bristol, Policy Press: 27-44.

### **Chapter 3 *Connecting community to the post-regeneration era*. Peter Matthews and Dave O'Brien**

This chapter aims to bridge the discussion of the history of community in urban regeneration with the rest of the book. It does this by advancing a central argument- that urban policy has entered a post-regeneration era- along with a specific discussion of the Connected Communities programme. The chapter begins by outlining how and why the era of urban regeneration came to an end, building on the discussion in chapter two, with a specific focus on the combination of broader socio-economic structures and ideological decisions that have shaped urban policy since 2010. The ideas of localism, city mayors, big society and de-centralisation are all considered, along with practical developments such as the National Planning Policy Framework. These agendas and events are then used to understand the Connected Communities programme and the way that its focus, specifically on co-production and co-development with communities, has come to represent the leading edge of academic research in this area. The chapter concludes by looking forward to the rest of the book, noting the caution struck by chapter 12.

#### ***Intro***

One of the key questions animating the discussions in this book is that of the impact of a major, research council-led, research programmes on academic practice as well as policy-making. Leaving aside the question as to the benefits, or 'impact', of the Connected Communities programme for wider society, there is the need for reflection on the impact of the programme for the academic communities participating in the project. This chapter frames this question in the context of urban regeneration policy and analysis, the core topic addressed in the book. The chapter does this in three ways. In the first instance it questions the sustainability of discussing regeneration in the current policy context. It therefore introduces the idea that the UK, but England in particular, may be in a "post-regeneration" state, based on current academic definitions of the term. This builds on discussions of the post-political that featured in both the scoping for Connected Communities (Tsouvalis and Waterton, 2011) and discussions of urban regeneration itself (Deas 2013). In this context, the unquestioned dominance of much of the 'what works?' approach to urban policy (as discussed by Nathan in chapter X) along with the insistence on the primacy of economic growth, has led policy narratives away from what have traditionally been seen as the defining features of urban regeneration: both spatially targeted initiatives in specific neighbourhoods (Deas 2013)(Matthews 2012) and as linked to major building and development projects (Plaza REF, Miles REF). The argument here is that the lack of public and private funding along with the marginalisation of those elements adding value to regeneration projects, such as culture or community development, means a different era is facing those involved in the practice of, or research on, regeneration. It is also, much more importantly,

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facing those living with the consequences of what comes after the great regeneration boom under New Labour, most notably people facing immediate hardships in the most deprived neighbourhoods in the UK.

Secondly, the argument for post-regeneration is continued in the extension of the discussion of the history of community in urban regeneration begun in chapter (SWH's chapter). We present a brief overview of policy and practice under the Coalition, particularly the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs), showing how continuity in the form of competition and central control sits uneasily with important developments in the levels of funding afforded to the local level and the narrative of "empowering" communities and individuals at the lowest level.

Finally, this chapter uses lessons from a range of AHRC Connected Communities scoping studies to engage with the policy developments outlined in the previous sections of the chapter. As a result of the deployment of selected scoping studies, the chapter shows both how policy and practice can be characterised as post-regeneration and how the Connected Communities programme, in the form of best practice lessons drawn from the extensive set of literature reviews commissioned by AHRC, has played a part in bringing post-regeneration policy into being. The *practice* of post-regeneration is thus an important point of dialogue for the set of case studies that follow in the rest of the book.

### ***Are we in a post-regeneration era?***

Analysing current policy practices that are privileging the role of communities over other forms of development such as spending on large buildings, for example museums or libraries, or large area-based initiatives, immediately suggests we are in an era of post-regeneration. The various meanings of urban regeneration also suggest this is the case. This can be shown by considering three definitions found in two introductory texts. For Tallon (2013:4) urban regeneration 'in the 1980s focused on economic growth and property development, and used public funds to lever in largely undirected market investment, as exemplified in London's Docklands'. Here urban regeneration is contrasted with ideas of state-led urban renewal in the 1960s and 1970s or the much wider concern with community and social exclusion found in urban regeneration policy in the New Labour era of the 1990s and 2000s. Turok (2005, cited in Tallon 2013:5) offers a tripartite understanding of urban regeneration, whereby it changes the nature of a place by involving communities and local agencies, it cuts across the departmental expertise and capabilities of government based on the problems needing to be solved, and it involves partnerships between different stakeholders. For Turok urban regeneration is, ultimately, the bringing together of people, business and place. This is consistent with the New Labour narrative of urban regeneration, reflected in policy approaches that sought to cut across both levels and sectors of government activity.

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However, Jones and Evans (2013) highlight how regeneration is most usually associated with the built environment, rather than questions of community. They draw the distinction between community focused forms of *renewal* under New Labour in England and *regeneration* that was more closely linked to both building projects and economic activity. This distinction is important, as we argue that the dominant focus on organic community activism is one of the important forms of contemporary urban policy that is distinct from previous regeneration policy in England, amongst a broader collection of changes associated with the election of the UK Coalition in 2010. Indeed this cuts across party lines. There are many parallels between the "Blue Labour" coproduction and cooperative agenda being pursued by Ed Milliband as leader of the opposition and localism and the Big Society (Sage 2012), and the eventual quiescence of Labour to the view that there is no alternative to austerity, suggest a permanent shift in policy framing has occurred in the UK. The "good times" of regeneration in the decade of growth will never return. Definitional questions aside, the divergence between transformations of the urban fabric and community focused projects gestures towards a more fundamental change in the landscape of urban policy making. There has been a continued rescaling of the grounds upon which policy interventions take place for communities and government at all levels.

### ***Where are we now – urban policy in an age of austerity***

As Stuart Wilks-Heeg discussed in the previous chapter, urban policy in England has now moved into a new era. The New Labour era, which focused on spatial redistribution through strong interventions at a variety of levels has ceased (Allmendinger and Haughton 2012). These included regional development agencies (RDAs) and regional planning; neighbourhood renewal; along with initiatives such as TotalPlace (Bailey and Pill 2011; Baker and Wong 2012; Matthews 2012). In 2011 the Communities and Local Government committee sternly criticised the eponymous department stating that it's regeneration strategy 'gives us little confidence that the Government has a clear strategy for addressing the country's regeneration needs' (Communities and Local Government Committee 2011: 3). It seems we have returned to the "patchwork quilt" of regeneration, as famously criticised by the Audit Commission in their 1991 report (ref).

Current policy may best be described as a "mixed economy" of interventions. The Localism Act and the associated Big Society programme have provided a legislative framework for communities to be empowered to run their own local services and own assets to become more sustainable (Communities and Local Government 2010). Many of these powers are paralleled in the Community Empowerment and Renewal Bill in Scotland (Scottish Government 2012). Regional planning and economic development has been replaced by Local Enterprise Partnerships and the "duty to cooperate" (Baker and Wong 2012). At its best this is leading to striking examples of partnership working, such as in Merseyside. Elsewhere the failure to cooperate is

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preventing economic development. Cities such as Manchester and Glasgow are signing city agreements to take advantage, through increased income, of economic development they deliver.

However, as we began to suggest above, the policy change is most marked by its focus on the "local" through Localism. Localism is, of course, not a singular concept nor does it have a well-defined core. Moreover, as Hildreth (2011) identifies, the Localism Act itself contains at least three forms of localism, conditional, community and representative. However there is a clear contrast between Coalition localism and the approaches adopted by New Labour, even the latter concepts of "double-devolution" used during the Brown era (Durose 2009). The ideological drive behind this change is the view that the New Labour era was one of Big Government, particularly in the prime ministership of Gordon Brown (Shaw and Robinson 2012 detail these debates in the North East of England). This Big Government took responsibility from individuals and communities and left them dependent on the state, so the argument goes. The state needed to be reduced to allow a Big Society to flourish in its place, whereby government is left to act as 'a leading force for progress in social responsibility...by breaking [open] state monopolies, allowing charities, social enterprises, and companies to provide public services, devolving power down to neighborhoods, making government more accountable' (Cameron, 2010:1, cited in Raco 2013:46)

This differential, unequal implementation of this ideology can be explored through two policy areas that were synonymous with the regeneration era of the Labour governments: land use planning and regional economic development in the form of local enterprise partnerships. In the former, in their pre-election "Green Paper" *Open Source Planning* the Conservative Party placed the blame for low housing development levels at a regional planning system that was top-down and forced communities to accept massive new developments with little local benefit. Rather, *Open Source Planning* would lead to a development of good Conservative values and: will engage local communities and foster a spirit of innovation and entrepreneurship" (Conservative Party 2009: 2). If communities could, firstly be economically incentivised, and secondly be empowered through neighbourhood planning to choose how much new housing they wanted and where, then new home completions would increase. Arguably, this misunderstood opponents to new housing as rational economic actors, but it did empower the vocal, affluent communities that are particularly against new housing development and are effective at stopping it (Matthews et.al. 2014). The contradictions of this policy in implementation were exemplified by successive Conservative planning ministers, and the Chancellor of the Exchequer himself, supporting opponents of new development within their own constituencies, while favouring massive increases in housing development nationally with the presumption in favour of sustainable development in the National Planning Policy Framework.

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The implementation of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) also exemplified this ongoing tension between localism and centralisation that has been a marker of UK policy for decades (Allmendinger and Haughton 2012). Given statutory weight by the Localism Act, the NPPF sought to combine the numerous previous central government planning policy documents into a single document. This, in itself, was not that controversial, however the document also contained a "presumption in favour of sustainable development". That is, if a local area did not have an up-to-date Local Development Framework or Neighbourhood Plan in place, then development had to be allowed if it met a test for sustainability (Communities and Local Government 2012). In legal terms, this was merely a reiteration of an existing position. However, the furore, particularly in the right-wing press, over the belief that the presumption in favour of development would lead to vast swathes of rural southern England being concreted over stung the Coalition and the consultation had to be extended. While the legal points of the presumption in favour of development can be discussed at length, in its presentation this policy looked like the government centralising decision-making on the one-hand, while devolving responsibility for planning to neighbourhoods on the other hand (Allmendinger and Haughton 2012).

Further, all subsidiary plans have to be in agreement with the NPPF, including any neighbourhood plans produced under the other provisions of the Localism Act. This meant neighbourhoods could not oppose all development – they had to allow sufficient land for all types of development based on the technical tools of planners, such as housing market needs and demands assessments, as well as any international and national environmental designations. This was highly circumscribed localism that could only be successfully negotiated by those with the necessary skills and knowledge.

This iteration of localism is displayed in the other example from Coalition policy, the Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs). The LEPs were designed to fill the gap between both the rescaled urban policy following the removal of the regional level, but also reflected the partial development of cross-agency working at local level under labour. The LEPs were set up on a voluntary basis, with the initial 39 LEPs replacing eight RDAs. The move from regional development to LEPs is reflected in the spatial scale of the LEP, with most of the 39 consisting of cross-local authority conglomerates mapping onto metropolitan or smaller sub regional levels, for example Derby and Nottingham, Greater Manchester, The Leeds City region, and Croydon to Brighton. There is no single model for the LEP, although the northern cities reflect both the economic footprint of the city at the core of the LEP and the pre-1980s county council areas (although this is not the case in the West Midlands with several LEPs outside of Birmingham). Back to the future, as it were, for sub regional policy.

In some ways LEPs return to older longstanding themes in urban policy with their role in delivering economic growth, the competitive nature of LEP funding and the

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over representation of business on the LEP boards (Pugalis and Shutt 2012, Ward and Hardy 2013). Indeed the focus of almost all 39 of the LEPs was economic growth, in particular the partnership with businesses (Pugalis and Shutt 2012).

This focus on partnership activity to deliver economic growth may question the post-regeneration thesis. On the one hand the dominance of business and the focus on LEPs competing for funding reflects very traditional Conservative urban policy, in keeping with much of the regeneration era identified by Turok (2013) (see also: Deakin and Edwards 1993). However, LEPs have been starved of funding and reflect the deeply uneven set of policy outcomes associated with a localism (Pike *et al* 2013) that, much like the NPPF, involves devolving the responsibility to cross-local authority partnerships but, in the grand tradition of English policy, keeping the finances firmly centralised. Indeed it is easy to agree with Haughton and Allmendinger's (2013: 2) assessment that:

'With every new government for the past 20 years proclaiming its supposed allegiance to greater local empowerment and repudiation of past centralist approaches, it is hard not to be skeptical about the current claims that are being made about radical changes in approach. Such skepticism is not assuaged by the none-too-subtle criticisms of planning as a 'burden on business' by some in Government, the dusting off of repackaged initiatives such as enterprise zones and the deployment of centralizing and growth driven policies under a thin veneer of localism in the National Planning Policy Framework'.

Moreover Peck *et al* (2013) argue that, perversely, LEPs have led to the need for more central command and control in terms of industrial policy as they lack the capacity to do effective industrial policy at the scale upon which they were created. This centralising thrust is supported by Deas *et al*'s (2013) research on the capacity of LEPs, suggesting an uneven set of resources across the 39, contradicting the insistence that LEPs be a nationally comprehensive urban policy focused on growth in their respective areas. What is notable about LEPs is structures foregrounding both business and economic growth exist at the same as the rhetoric is framed very strongly by ideas of removing power from the centre, bringing levels of government closer to individuals and place-based communities, and making those same sets of actors responsible for the success or failure of local area economic policy. This idea, albeit ambivalent in terms of an argument for post-regeneration, has been crucial in the critiques of regeneration and the subsequent forms of best practice constructed by community focused academic interventions.

### **The unequal nature of localism**

The unequal nature of the responsabilisation and empowerment agenda is part of a much wider suite of changes to social policy pursued by the Coalition. The context matters as, following Raco's (2013) assessment of the relationship between broader social policy and New Labour's planning policy, the form which ideas such as

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localism takes is shaped by the larger narratives of state/society relations displayed in the Coalition's general approach to social issues. Just as the state, in planning, will be reconfigured to allow for citizen control, a package of reforms, including the cap on welfare benefits, the Bedroom Tax (or "removal of the spare room subsidy") and Universal Credit have been explicitly designed to lessen welfare "dependency", witnessed by the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions Iain Duncan-Smith in his Easterhouse epiphany (Slater 2012) (Macdonald, Shildrick et al. 2014). Focused on those groups that were typically the subject of spatial urban regeneration policies – the long term unemployed, young unemployed people, lone parents – these reforms derived from the view that people had become dependent on an overly-generous welfare state, trapped on benefits that paid more than employment. The system had to be changed to make work pay; even if the work was casual, insecure, on zero-hours contracts and left households in extreme poverty.

This is both a continuation and contrast to urban policy from 1997-2008, which was predicated on macro-economic growth and the associated expansion of public funds (Jones and Evans, 2013). A rising tide of GDP would pour into the most deprived cities and neighbourhoods, producing new economic opportunities in derelict inner-cities (Atkinson and Eckardt 2004). Regeneration programmes and labour market interventions in deprived neighbourhoods would connect residents to these new economic opportunities – trendy coffee shops provided the millennial generation with semi-skilled employment (Whitehead 2004). The double-dip recession from 2008 destroyed this model. The narrative of austerity emerging afterwards turned a crisis of private debt – exemplified by the empty city-centre buy-to-let flats in places such as Manchester and Leeds – into a crisis of public debt as banks were nationalised. Discursively this was used to drive the policy changes described above. Welfare benefits were no longer affordable because of austerity. Neighbourhood planning, and the presumption in favour of development, were needed to restore the UK economy to its previous dependence on the construction sector, and to depress ever-increasing house prices that stretched out of reach of a population with falling incomes. However whilst public funds were afforded to some local areas, the revanchist nature of much of urban policy did not go unnoticed in academic work (Lees 2014 offers a summary of this continuity).

Whilst the ideological nature of localism and the Big Society has been noted (Bednarek 2011; Buser 2012; Sage 2012) a continued criticism of these policies at a local level is that austerity has meant they are simply not resourced sufficiently to be successful. Analysis of where the cuts to the local government budget in England are falling have demonstrated that those areas that are seeing the biggest cuts are those which received substantial quantities of discretionary regeneration, economic development and sports and cultural funding under the New Labour governments. Deprived local authorities saw their budgets cuts by up to 21 per cent compared to 15 per cent in the most affluent local authorities, and even increases in some of the richest areas of the country (Hastings, Bailey et al. 2013). Raco (2013) further

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highlights that the simplistic state/society dualism present in much of the Coalitions' planning policy ignores the need for state support for capital growth. The point here is that regeneration policy, in localism and the LEPs, will be useless without robust links to areas of policy such as transport and social welfare. The NPPF and LEPs have conspicuously left out cross-cutting, cross departmental policy working from the devolution of responsibility, provided little direct financing, and burdened the local level with responsibility for successful delivery. This is a major break with New Labour's *attempts* at joined up policy making. Further, basic services to support the Big Society and put localism, or community empowerment, into action in a meaningful way are the very services that are seen as the "low hanging fruit" for cash-strapped local authorities to cut across the UK: community education and development; community arts and cultural policy; museums and art galleries; and libraries.

### ***Connected Communities* and urban policy: critical voices and best practices**

Localism in the previous section is essentially an elite form, whereby local "leaders" are charged with responsibility for economic growth. This, of course, is in keeping with both local democracy and the Westminster tradition (Rhodes 1997). However it is largely untroubled by the growing sound of dissent from academic understandings of what being and doing local is, most notably around the idea of community. These critiques are exemplified in recent work by Lees (2014), a longstanding critic of urban policy in the UK. Regeneration, for Lees, often presented communities with false choices between forms of social exclusion by property development, or the decline and collapse of local housing estates. Most crucially, for Lees, residents' views and ideas were commonly misrepresented in the process of consultation and involvement, raising profound questions for the policy process associated with regeneration. In this respect, 'the mode of governance, however, remains as top down as it did in the 1960s urban renewal schemes, despite new processes of public participation.' (Lees 2014:932)

This example ties into how the term "community" was deployed during the height of the regeneration era (Wallace 2010). Lees' recent work is one of many voices showing how the ideas of community were transformed from representation and participation to techniques of financial and risk management (Dicks 2012), forms of governmental control (Raco and Flint, 2001)(Imrie and Raco 2003), or class based conflict (and, in some ways, defeat) (Lees et al 2013)(Allen 2008).

Critical voices surrounding the way community has been deployed in policy are touched on in the introduction to the book. The Connected Communities programme raised some controversy during its early phase and some questions have persisted. In the era as described above, with cuts to services by local and national authorities to the very things Connected Communities is interested in – community development; coproduction; community heritage; participatory arts practice – one

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major criticism has to be voiced as to whether the AHRC has merely stepped into a funding void left by others. Is Connected Communities very expensive community development project that should be funded by mainstream funding?

If Connected Communities did replace some of this expenditure then it was not necessarily distributed according to need, as with former regeneration expenditure, but rather whether the research application met the characteristics of rigorous, high quality research as defined by the AHRC. Allocation of scarce resources then becomes a lottery based on the social or geographic propinquity of a community to a university with access to funding (as one Connected Communities grant recipient openly acknowledged "we received the funding and then went looking for a nearby community to work with") or whether the community had an existing relationship with a university (see Pahl and Pool in this volume). It could even be the case that the funding was not supporting communities – ordinarily those most economically deprived – that needed help in coproducing research with academics. Research council funding could have been spent on facilitating relationships with middle class, or more affluent communities, that had the existing stock of social and cultural capital to effectively engage with university partners, and perhaps could use this relationship to further their own aims, even if this exacerbated existing socio-economic inequalities.

One part of Connected Communities that may be able to offer clues as to how to move beyond these criticisms, as well as critically engaging with core policy terms such as community, co-production and localism, are the series of scoping studies funded during the initial phase of Connected Communities. The first wave funded and published 44 studies (with a further 31 on-going in a second round focusing on Arts and Humanities perspectives), including work on ethics, time, authority, transnationalism and the historic environment. Given the discussion of the definitional issues associated with regeneration that opened this chapter, it is difficult to demarcate those studies that are and those that are not, relevant to thinking about best practice, or the state of the art, in this area. Examples such as online social networking, schools policy, place specific histories or sport volunteering could all be seen to fit some aspect of regeneration in its widest sense. However, in light of the policy focus on economic growth and its elision with often punitive welfare policy the remainder of the discussion is confined to those areas that are directly relevant to this set of ideas.

This leaves 11 studies, with a focus on co-production (as an important tool in both research and policy); power; the big society or localist political agendas; and urban policy or politics. The 11 exclude policy focused reviews in areas such as policing, migration and health care. The scoping studies offer clues as to the state of the art in community research, as to the meaning of community, and in addition as to the relationship between the academy and society.

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There are five key points to be drawn from the 11 selected studies. Firstly, the question of power is never absent from any form of research, whether co-produced, participatory or merely aimed at communities. Indeed, new models of 'power to', as opposed to 'power over' are needed to negotiate work in contexts that 'are not homogenous, egalitarian social spaces where people are just waiting for the government to hand over power so that they can pursue pre-formed agendas.' (Pearce DATE:4). 'Power to' thus requires capacity building and needs to move beyond the simplistic dichotomy of an over-mighty state with communities as its subjects or indeed its victims.

Secondly, the dominant policy model for community involvement is one that aims at getting citizens to be involved in the existing practices of the local and national state. This misses the opportunity to develop independent (and alternative) community action of the type demanded in the Coalition's rhetoric of localism and big society (Goodson et al 2011, Laffin et al 2011, Painter et al 2011). Most notable in this context is the need for government to relinquish funds, control and create supportive legal environments, all of which are important lessons in the case studies that follow.

Thirdly, there is, to a lesser or greater extent, still the danger of an elision, even where consciously avoided, between 'community' and social problems. This was a core characteristic of New Labour policy (Lees 2014) and thus even colours some of the reviews (Hamalainen and Jones DATE summarise the problems with these discourse). Community can be used positively to represent social belonging, collective well-being, solidarity and support, but also negatively in relation to social problems and problem populations (Crow and Mah DATE p3). It is here that work needs to be done in reclaiming the positive associations of community from the negative focus which is how it has ended up playing out in policy.

Fourth, Tsouvalis and Waterton (2011) stress that notions of participation are used to depoliticise questions of urban policy. This has parallels in the discussion of both NPPF and LEPs, whereby shifts to more localised forms of decision making are accompanied both by major funding cuts (or reallocation of funds in ways that makes them more unevenly spread) and the retention of specific decision making powers by the centre paying lip service to localism and participation. Whilst this new approach is not co-opting citizens' participation to justify often pre-ordained policy approaches, it is some distance from the rhetoric and promise of localist discourse.

Finally, three of the reviews (Durose et al, DCRT, Durie 2011) looked at co-production from a variety of perspectives, identifying the multiple nature of this idea. It can apply to a range of activities, some of which are about the sharing of power, some of which are about the recognition of expertise and some of which are about neither, ending up replicating the issues co-production is being used to alleviate or challenge.

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There is little or nothing in any of the reviews that is about economic growth. Thus communities, co-production and localism are all ultimately, in the ways outlined in Connected Communities, very distant from the real purpose of how policy has imagined these words and the discourses associated with them.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter was an attempt to introduce the idea of "post-regeneration" as a way of framing current urban policy. It did this by exploring two of the Coalition's core policies, in the form of NPPF and LEPs. These two policies were framed by the context of state restructuring around the disputed narratives of austerity, localism and the big society. These developments were seen as being partially continuations of existing policy themes, such as centralisation, but also the stripping away of resources along with the increased claims of devolution of power and localism marking these out as discontinuous with the past. Most notably the chapter used lessons from Connected Communities work designed to clear the ground for research projects to critique and engage with Coalition policy. The use of this set of Connected Communities work provides a bridge between the discussions in the opening section of the book, around the policy focused discussions, and the case studies and academically reflective chapters that follow in parts three and four.

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