

The Clyde Gateway: A New Urban Frontier

Neil Gray

“Not only does ‘urban regeneration’ represent the next wave of gentrification, planned and financed on an unprecedented scale, but the victory of this language in anesthetizing our critical understanding of gentrification in Europe represents a considerable ideological victory for neo-liberal visions of the city.”
Neil Smith¹

“The Clyde is now one of the largest and most visionary renewal projects being undertaken in Europe. I believe that this is only the beginning of this tartan tiger’s awakening.”
Stephen Purcell, Glasgow City Council leader²

Glasgow’s urban regeneration converges most symbolically around the £5.6 billion Clyde Waterfront project to transform 13 miles of the Clyde river corridor into an “...internationally competitive ‘central belt’ for business, employment, living and tourism.”³ The Clyde Gateway project, an ancillary development situated in the east of the city, is deemed a vital part of this broader long term project to re-brand and transform Glasgow’s image from that of recalcitrant ‘Red Clydeside’ into that of consumerist ‘Glasgow: Scotland with Style’. The scale of the Clyde Gateway project – which includes the site for the 2014 Commonwealth Games – is enormous: Stewart Maxwell, the minister for Communities and Sport, recently described the development as: “The biggest regeneration programme in Scotland.”⁴

City boosters have been quick to point to poverty, deprivation and dereliction in the east of Glasgow to legitimise large-scale regeneration. They argue that the Clyde Gateway initiative will ensure the provision of jobs and housing, the remediation and reclamation of contaminated land, and bring wider benefits to the local and national economy. Above all, they argue that the project is essential to ensure Glasgow’s ‘edge’ in the competitive global economy. Yet, the over-arching reality is that urban regeneration has for some time been writ large as a global urban strategy of gentrification and capitalist accumulation. The disjuncture between the triumphal neo-liberal *ideology* of the city – of successful self-regulating markets achieving optimally balanced economic growth – and the everyday reality of uneven development, intensifying inequality, and generalized social insecurity is ever increasing.

These contradictions are routinely obscured by

the language of regeneration which “sugarcoats”⁵ the class content of gentrification, disavowing the displacement and economic instrumentalism behind the spatial reconfigurations of capital. The underhand discourse of regeneration is further augmented by discursive regimes which systematically stigmatize areas targeted for renewal, providing a crucial neo-liberal alibi for creative destruction of the urban environment. The Clyde Gateway area – with its tracts of derelict land and deeply impoverished population – lends itself most profitably to a ‘discourse of decline’ which makes renewal and regeneration appear both natural and irresistible.

Gentrification And The New Urban Frontier

Neil Smith has argued that Frederick Turner’s influential essay *The significance of the frontier in American history* (1893) has crucial import for those challenging contemporary strategies of urban gentrification. For Turner, the western frontier was envisioned as “the outer edge of the wave – the meeting point between savagery and civilization.” The ‘wilderness’ of the west was seen to be breached by “lines of civilizations growing ever more numerous”, its penetration part and parcel of a colonial attempt to make “liveable space out of an unruly and uncooperative nature.”⁶ Ultimately for Turner, the frontier expansion of the ‘Wild West’ defined the uniqueness of the American character; each wave westward in the conquest of people and nature contributed to new enclosures of land and space and was seen as part of a wider mission to civilize unruly human nature⁷.

In the latter part of the American 20th century, Smith contends, Turner’s imagery of wilderness and the frontier has been applied “less to the plains, mountains and forests of the West [...] and more to cities back East.”⁸ In the modern reconfiguration of frontier lines, parts of major US cities were increasingly demarcated as “urban wilderness.” Urban theorists of the 1950s and ‘60s propagated discourses of “blight”, “decline” and “social malaise” and inner-city areas were negatively stereotyped as “slums”, “ghettos” and worse: “urban jungles.” By the 1960s, the ‘discourse of decline’ in the city – exacerbated by the impact of de-industrialisation and a concomitant middle-class ‘white flight’ from increasingly ethnic inner-city areas – was

symbolically yoked to the inner-city slum. In the 1970’s however, these narratives of decay were challenged by boosterist discourses of an urban renaissance through property development and gentrification. And by the 1980s these entrepreneurial discourses had intensified: the “urban jungle” would be put to the sword by a new breed of urban hero.

The appeal to frontier imagery and vocabulary was mercilessly plundered during the Reagan era: “urban pioneers”, “urban homesteaders” and “urban cowboys” were the new “folk heroes of the urban frontier”, while modern discourses of blight and decay represented

urban working-class populations in the targeted areas as “less than social” and the frontier area as “not yet socially inhabited.”⁹ For Smith, the important conclusion to be drawn from frontier discourses is that they attempt to “rationalise and legitimate a process of conquest, whether in the eighteenth and nineteenth century American West, or in the late-twentieth-century inner city.”¹⁰ The “highly resonant imagery” of the frontier, epitomized in the past by the Hollywood western, works precisely because it manages to capture a complex series of aspirations “bound up with economic progress and historical destiny, rugged individualism and the romance of danger, national optimism, race and class superiority”¹¹.

Yet, as Smith argues, if Hollywood’s ‘dream factory’ were really to capture the most significant events in the West, its films would have to reconcile themselves to the ‘land grabs’ of the property and real estate markets. Turner’s frontier line was extended less by individual pioneers, homesteaders and rugged individualists, and more by “banks, railways, the state and other collective sources of capital.”¹² Nevertheless, the scripting of gentrification as a ‘new urban frontier’ continues to encapsulate a host of accumulated symbolic meanings drawn from the colonial domestication of the ‘Wild West’, including “the social differences between ‘us’ and ‘them’, the historical difference between past and future, and the economic difference between existing market and profitable opportunity.”¹³

Blight as Neoliberal Alibi

Economic expansion in the present era rarely takes place via *absolute* geographical expansion; instead, it involves internal differentiation of already developed spaces. Rachel Weber argues that discourses of ‘blight’ and ‘decay’ are mobilised as neo-liberal alibis to stigmatise places targeted for ‘renewal’. The state’s willingness to subject its property and land base to market rule, and its desire to control and disperse native populations, accounts for the zeal with which it stigmatizes certain people and certain places. For Weber, regeneration policies, backed by negative discursive regimes, can be seen as little more than “property speculation and public giveaways to guide the pace and place of the speculative activity.”¹⁴

In order to make the built environment more “flexible and responsive”¹⁵ to the capitalist demand for liquidity, local states routinely provide financial inducements to reduce the risks and costs of development for capital. Local governments are then compelled to juggle the political imperative of ‘managing’ potentially recalcitrant local populations, with the financial imperative of maintaining or creating the conditions for profitable capitalist investment. This balancing act – between accumulation and legitimation – is in part achieved by place-specific discourses of blight and decay which act as a “convenient incantation”, and justification, for the devaluation and disposal of *unprofitable* properties and land. Here, a discourse of decline functions to create a convergence of thinking “around such critical issues as the economic life of buildings, the priority given to different components of value, the sources of devaluation, and interrelationships between buildings and neighbourhoods.”¹⁶

The idea of blight metaphorically adopts associations from plant pathology and medicine to conflate descriptions of areas and people with death and decay. Between 1949 and 1965 one



million people from US cities – predominantly low-income – were evicted from their homes in the name of eliminating blight. Blight provided a quasi-scientific basis for the use and abuse of redevelopment powers to legitimise projects that were *already planned*. Weber cites L.Friedman who argued that finding blight in the American inner-city merely meant “defining a neighbourhood that cannot effectively fight back, but which is either an eyesore or is well-located for some particular construction project that important interests wish to build.”¹⁷ Unsurprisingly, ‘indicators’ of blight typically conflated the race and class of the residents in the areas targeted for demolition with the condition of the buildings themselves. In the Chicago Plan Commission of 1942 for instance, one of the three indicators of blight included “percentage of Negroes.”¹⁸

Eastwards Ho!

“The impression at once felt is one of intrusion. No nautical explorer ever fell among savages who looked with greater wonder at his approach.”
*‘Shadow’ on the Bridgewater, 1858*¹⁹

“From the late 60’s onwards, Glasgow became a jungle into which the media fearlessly ventured to portray the wild animals.”
*Sean Damer, 1990*²⁰

Glasgow has never had trouble attracting a negative image. Perhaps the most lurid example is Alexander McArthur’s and H.Kingsley Long’s best-selling novel ‘No Mean City’ (1935), ‘the classic novel of the Glasgow slum underworld’. The book represents the zenith of that curious admixture of ‘authenticity’ (provided by McArthur, an unemployed baker from the Gorbals) and sensationalist pseudo-scientific journalism (provided by Long, a London journalist) which has dogged descriptions of the urban poor ever since the bourgeoisie first perceived the poor as threat to health and economy in the early to mid 19th century.²¹ The recent by-election in Glasgow East provoked what was merely the latest bout of stereotyping, demonisation and class hatred.

AA Gill of the *Sunday Times* declared Glasgow East “the hardest, poorest place in Britain”, while Shettleston, he argues, “makes the rough margins of Liverpool look like the Chelsea Flower Show.” Prior to the Glasgow East by-election, the noxious Gill visited the area to register his distaste for the local population: “The people do not look good here. Often it is difficult to tell men from women, old men from older men [...] the locals have the blotchy pallor of cave-dwelling consumptives.”²² For Melanie Reid of *The Times*, Glasgow East “wears the weary, pinched look of someone who has nothing in life and expects even less.”²³ Meanwhile, Ben Macintyre, her colleague from *The Times*, described Easterhouse as “a ghetto”, ringed by some of “the saddest statistics in Britain”²⁴. Simon Heffer of *The Daily Telegraph* called Glasgow East a “hell-hole” of a constituency, unable to even ensure “the normal social structures of the civilised world”, while Reid again, called Glasgow East a “social disaster” where the “law of the jungle” rules.²⁵

Propping up these hateful tirades is an assumed link between the poverty and dereliction of the area and ‘welfare dependency’. Ian Duncan Smith’s influential right-wing think tank, The Centre for Social Justice, was birthed after a previous Smith visit to Glasgow East, and David Cameron has acknowledged the pivotal role the Center has played in shaping Tory policy on social justice.²⁶ Obfuscating the well established link between poverty, de-industrialisation and privatization, Smith instead lays the blame firmly on the welfare system: “For too long, people have been allowed to languish, trapped in a dependency culture that held low expectations of those living there and made no demands of them either.” For Smith, the solution is simple: “The system must help people

[...] to get the ‘work habit’.”²⁷

In this context, the press diatribes take on a familiar welfare-baiting pattern.

According to Simon Heffer, Glasgow East is supposedly serviced by “epic amounts of public money”: poverty in the area merely proves “how utterly poisonous that sort of thing is.”²⁸ For Fraser Nelson of *The Spectator*, the “welfare ghettos” of Glasgow East – a supposed “no-go-zone” in an “invisible” country that cost “billions to achieve” – are Gordon Brown’s dirty little secret, “a hideous, costly social experiment gone wrong.”²⁹

No one is suggesting that Glasgow East is a picture of social harmony, or that it’s setting is ideal. There are no official figures for life expectancy in Glasgow, but Fraser Nelson’s figures, in research compiled for the *Scotsman* newspaper, are generally accepted, even if his right wing views are not.³⁰ According to Nelson’s figures, the male life expectancy rate in Calton is a barely believable 53.9, in Dalmarnock 58, and in Bridgeton 61.4.³¹ Meanwhile, government figures for 2006, claim the percentage of people living within 0-500 meters of any derelict site in Shettleston was a staggering 79.1% – in nearby Calton, the figure rises to 99.4%.³² The concern here, however, is how a discourse of decline is mobilized to create a discursive regime that ignores the deeper economic and structural problems in the area, while providing a neo-liberal alibi for gentrification, ‘sugar-coated’ through the necessarily more circumspect discourse of ‘regeneration’.

The Clyde Gateway Initiative

“We’re doing all of this to improve opportunities for local people.”

*Keith Pender*³³

“This initiative is all about people – it’s about getting people in this part of the country back into the workforce and enhancing their confidence and ambition.”

*Steven Purcell*³⁴

The Clyde Gateway Initiative can be seen as part of Glasgow’s wider Clyde Corridor regeneration strategy, but stands alone with its own Urban Regeneration Company (URC). The project, which describes its task as tackling “the physical and economic decline of a large part of the East End of Glasgow and South Lanarkshire,”³⁵ is a partnership between Glasgow City Council, South Lanarkshire Council, Scottish Enterprise National, Scottish Enterprise Glasgow, Scottish Enterprise Lanarkshire, and Communities Scotland. The URC claims that over the next twenty years it will help create 21,000 new jobs; 10,000 new housing units; and a population increase of 20,000 in the designated area. The project also includes the construction of infrastructure and buildings for the Commonwealth Games, due to arrive in 2014. The main areas affected will be Shawfield, Rutherglen, Bridgeton, Dalmarnock, and Parkhead.

Urban regeneration in the Clyde Gateway area is typically cast as a self-evident response to dereliction and decay: “The need for such an initiative is evident from the concentration of economic, social and physical deprivation found in the area. It suffers from high levels of unemployment and low levels of economic activity; from social deprivation and poor health; and, from a concentration of derelict and contaminated land that blights the physical environment.”³⁶ Here, urban decline is presented as an inevitable process of impersonal, quasi-natural forces “as if the social has been removed from an entirely technical matter.”³⁷ Yet, as Neil Smith has pointed out, the



physical deterioration and economic devalorisation of inner-city areas are “a strictly logical, ‘rational’ outcome of the operation of the land and housing markets”³⁸. The deterioration and abandonment of the built environment are the result of identifiable private and public investment decisions, and are therefore far from neutral or natural. Buildings are abandoned or left to blight not because they are unusable but “...because they cannot be used profitably”³⁹. By promoting a narrow convergence of thinking around the causes of blight, businesses and governments are free to absolve themselves of collective responsibility for previous failures. With history duly disavowed, government is once again free to present business as an urban saviour. For Ian Manson, head of the Clyde Gateway URC, the market has all the solutions to the Clyde Gateway area: “Business is central to us. We want to attract developers and businesses to think about setting up here, though the market, not us, will decide what is appropriate.”⁴⁰

Back To The Workhouse

“What we want to do is give people the chance to get back into the labour market, that’s my understanding of a successful growing economy.”

*Ian Manson, Clyde Gateway URC*⁴¹

“We have got to find ways of getting more people into the labour force and if we are spending money it should be on getting people back to work. There is no way we can prosper where you have this number of people sitting around.”

*Richard Cairns, Glasgow Chamber of Commerce*⁴²

“There is no nonsense so gross that it cannot be justified by the creation of jobs.”

*George Monbiot*⁴³

What the market wants of course is profit. As such, the most persistent problem faced by capital and state has always been the production and management of the population in the most profitable way. Much of the legitimacy for the Clyde Gateway project rests on its promise to create 21,000 new jobs in the development area. Ian Manson, the head of the Clyde Gateway URC, says he wants to bring the “wow” factor into the Clyde Gateway regeneration plans and make it “the first regeneration project to truly deliver opportunities for local people”⁴⁴[my italics]. While it is somewhat refreshing to hear a major developer being so forthright about previous regeneration failures, it still begs the question: what is so different about this project?

The Clyde Gateway website offers some extremely speculative language in terms of job opportunities for local people. While “no one is promising” a return to manufacturing, the URC will “work hard to try and attract” a new manufacturing plant, and “efforts will be made” to achieve the target of 21,000 jobs. Meanwhile, “Every effort is going to be made” to equip and train local residents to “grab” emerging job opportunities, and “many of them” will be targeted at local residents. However, they state, employment positions for local people are “impossible to quantify.” Regarding the new business and sports organisations to be located alongside the new sports venues, Clyde Gateway

has said it will be playing its part in “trying to ensure” that many of these new jobs will go to local people.⁴⁵

Many locals, however, would have good reason to be deeply sceptical of job claims for the area. The much vaunted Glasgow East Area Renewal (GEAR) promised a comprehensive regeneration in 1976 but failed to make any significant inroad into local unemployment.⁴⁶ Apart from temporary construction work, the target for job creation is primarily in the service industries: offices, leisure and recreation activities, hotels and tourism, retail, financial services.⁴⁷ The nature of these jobs (assuming they transpire) for those without the ‘cultural capital’ to exploit the higher end of the industry is well documented. In 1990, Sean Damer could already state without contention “it hardly needs repeating that in the 1990’s these jobs are the worst paid, least unionised, most seasonal jobs, with the longest hours and poorest conditions of health and safety.”⁴⁸ Employment conditions have only become more precarious as neo-liberalism has tightened its grip.

While regeneration projects are marshaled as panaceas to fight social polarization, they typically tend to increase social polarisation through price rises, the workings of the property market, the restructuring of the labour market, the displacement of low-income housing, and the re-allocation of public budgets to satisfy the perceived needs of capital.⁴⁹ Moreover, while inflated job claims are routinely used to justify major regeneration and investment projects, the reliability of these ‘promises’ are rarely evaluated. In 2002, a survey by engineering consultants Ove Arup calculated that the 2012 London Olympic Games would lead to 3,000 new jobs. Yet, by 2007 – under enormous pressure to justify massive over-expenditure on the Games – London’s Employment and Skills Taskforce and the London Development Agency (LDA) boldly claimed the Olympics would create 50,000 new jobs.⁵⁰ Meanwhile, the London Citizen’s group persuaded the mayor of London and Seb Coe to publicly sign an ‘ethical contract’ which would give Games workers a ‘living wage’. To date, no living wage has been included in any of the contracts allocated.⁵¹

The not so hidden discourse behind the ‘regeneration’ of the Clyde Gateway is a punitive ‘welfare to workfare’ strategy. The Scottish Government index for multiple deprivation in the Shettleston Constituency gives figures for 2005 which claim that 34.9% percent of the population are ‘income deprived’, with 30.1% ‘employment deprived.’⁵² The publication in July of the welfare reform green paper by Labour’s Work and Pensions secretary James Purnell potentially signals “the most radical shake-up of the welfare system since the second world war.”⁵³ The right wing tenor of Purnell’s paper can be gauged by the comments of the Tory shadow work and pensions secretary, Chris Grayling, who claimed that the plans were a “straight lift” from those put forward by his party. However, he said, “Since these are Conservative proposals we will certainly support them.”⁵⁴ Given

this cross-party consensus on the matter, we can expect to see the Green Paper, or a similar version, sanctioned by Westminster before too long.

The proposals may require lone parents to take part in training for a return to work, even before their children are of school age. Also included is a target of getting one million people off incapacity benefit by 2015 (by 2013 incapacity benefit will be replaced by a new benefit, employment support allowance, which will be harder to qualify for). Those unemployed for more than a year would have to do four weeks’ community work – after two years they would be compelled to do ‘community work’ full time. Meanwhile, ‘drug addicts’ will have to ‘declare their addiction’ and embark on treatment to become eligible for benefits.⁵⁵

The Commonwealth Games

“The Games offer our country a chance to advertise to a global audience of over 1 billion people. Glasgow is an incredible city and Scotland is an unforgettable country. The more people who get the chance to see this the more we can grow in the future.”

*Glasgow 2014, Ltd*⁵⁶

“All of the city, the surrounding region and across Scotland stands to benefit from the Games – but none more so than the Clyde Gateway communities.”

*Clyde Gateway URC*⁵⁷

There’s nothing like a mega-event to divert attention from deeper structural issues. The Clyde Gateway Initiative was given a major boost when, on Friday 9th November 2007, the General Assembly of the Commonwealth Games Federation voted for Glasgow as the host city for the 2014 Games. The Games – to be held within the Clyde Gateway project area – will take place over 12 days from 23 July to 3 August, with an estimated £350 million of public money going towards the construction of a new indoor sports arena and a velodrome. Glasgow 2014 Ltd, which is comprised of the Scottish Government, Glasgow City Council, and the Commonwealth Games Council for Scotland, will oversee the management of the event.

The Games promoters have been keen to impress the importance of a Games ‘Legacy’ in the Clyde Gateway area. Sports organisations and other businesses will be housed in new office developments alongside the new sports venues, with boosters emphasising that the Commonwealth Games Village – constructed as a ‘global showcase’ for athletes’ quarters – will be ‘retro-fitted’ after the event to provide 1,500 houses for sale and for rent. The Glasgow 2014 website declares that “the village will be a lasting legacy for Glasgow [...] The power of sport to enhance lives will never be better demonstrated,”⁵⁸ while City Council Leader, Stephen Purcell, claims that the village will be one of “the greatest providers of opportunities” before and after 2014: “...a flagship for the regeneration of Glasgow’s East End and a visible reminder of the legacy of the Games.”⁵⁹ Glasgow City Council will subsidise the Village site for developers by making the site available at

nil cost in order to reduce the developers initial borrowing requirements – the appointed development partner will enter into a profit sharing arrangement with the Council at the end of the project.⁶⁰ Yet, of the 1,500 houses, 1,200 will be for sale, with only 300 houses (or 20%) available for affordable socially rented housing.⁶¹

Given the extent of the poverty in the area, it is highly unlikely that the 54% of the local population which already lives in socially rented housing will be able to afford to buy a home at the Village. More likely, the ‘showcase’ homes will be targeted at some of the 20,000 people that the Clyde Gateway URC hopes to attract

to the area over the next 25 years. Swyngedou *et al* have shown that an “explicit goal” of large-scale regeneration projects is to “revalue prime urban land”; increase profitable rent extraction; and *increase the local tax base* through a “socio-spatial and economic reorganisation of space.”⁶² Scottish Government statistics for Shettleston in 2007 show that the percentage of dwellings in the low council tax bands A to C is 87.06%, with only 1.19% in the higher bands F to H. As Rachel Weber and others have noted, “space is more malleable and potentially more profitable to investors when it is empty,”⁶³ with local government readying enormous amounts of ‘derelict’ land for developers (through publicly subsidized remediation) profit levels are potentially robust for developers aiming at the ‘higher’ end of the market. Gentrification, we should not forget, is the leading edge of a much larger endeavour: “the class remake of the central urban landscape.”⁶⁴

Public Pain Private Gain

“As far as I am concerned, business is Santa Claus, but there is still a passive attitude that sees it as a necessary evil rather than something that is fundamentally good.”

*Richard Cairns, Glasgow Chamber of Commerce*⁶⁵

“We are aware the Government wants to grow Scotland’s economy and to do that, it needs to bring all the land back into economic use.”

*Ian Manson*⁶⁶

Large-scale urban development projects are without exception state-led and state-financed. The well-documented pattern of socialization of cost and risk by the state, and privatization of possible benefits for developers and capital is typical of the formula.⁶⁷ This summer, the Scottish Government approved £62 million to the Clyde Gateway URC for the period between 2008 and 2011. Other local government partners have provided land holdings and staff resources to the project, meaning that over £100 million of public money has so far been committed. Typically, the URC has responsibility for expensive and unprofitable physical development such as land acquisition, land remediation, and infrastructure provision.⁶⁸ Assuming the burden of financial risk, the development strategy is based upon ‘pump-priming’ investment from the public sector to facilitate private finance initiative.⁶⁹

It is argued that public investment over the first ten years will pave the way for up to £1.5 billion in private development over the next twenty five years,⁷⁰ yet the speculative and risky nature of urban regeneration ventures is easily exposed to market volatility. The current economic climate does not bode well for either short or long-term forecasting. A recent report for *Scotland on Sunday* shows that concerns are already growing over Glasgow City Council’s ability to raise their portion of the costs for the Commonwealth Games through the disposal of public assets. The full cost of the Games will be met by the public purse. Around 80% of the total cost will be met by the Scottish Government, with Glasgow City Council due to provide the rest. City Council leader, Stephen Purcell, as recorded in the *Evening Times*, has previously maintained that the council would sell ‘surplus property and land’ to meet the costs of hosting the event, while a council spokesman said that land and property worth “hundreds of millions of pounds” was available for sale.⁷¹ Meanwhile, according to *Scotland on Sunday*, the council wants to ‘transfer’ “56 ‘surplus sites’” to a new joint venture by the end of the current financial year.⁷²

Yet, ‘commercial property experts’ warn that it is unlikely the properties, which include several former schools, will achieve anywhere near the expected sum in the current climate. One source said, “Companies that tend to get involved with these joint venture projects rely on banks and debt financing, and that’s incredibly hard to get your hands on these days.”⁷³ Meanwhile, David Bell, director of the public sector group at CB Richard Ellis, warned that regeneration projects are the first to be discarded during economic



downturns due to the higher risks involved: “They are now really quite peripheral in this market.”⁷⁴ Meanwhile, Glasgow City Council’s previous willingness to subject its property portfolio to the market has cost the public dear. In Dalmarnock – the site chosen for the Commonwealth Games village – land was sold for a combined total of £45,000 in 1988-89. Yet, earlier this year, the council was forced – under pressure to complete the Games infrastructure – to buy back the land with £5.5 million of public money.⁷⁵ Moreover, as part of the Vacant and Derelict Land Fund Programme, the Scottish Government recently provided the Council with funding for remedial treatment of the Dalmarnock site, to “make it more attractive to developers.”⁷⁶

Glasgow City Council’s investment programme is weighted heavily towards development and regeneration services, with 35% of the total budget going towards the Clyde Gateway project, the regeneration of the River Clyde, the M74 completion project, and sports infrastructure including the National Indoor Sports Arena for the Commonwealth Games. The local state, employers and developers routinely claim inflated multiplier effects for these schemes, yet consistently fail to account for negative effects such as major disposals of public assets. Crucially, 42.3% of funding for regeneration investment in 2007-8 came from *asset sales* such as council land and buildings. This represents a major privatization of space. A closer evaluation of the hidden public costs, creative accounting, and lack of transparency associated with regeneration projects in Glasgow, is critical if we don’t want to drown in the bombast of city boosters.

The M74: Heading In The Wrong Direction

The M74 northern extension, a five-mile, six-lane motorway on the southside of the Clyde river provides a cautionary tale of likely outcomes for the Clyde Gateway project. The road’s link to the initiative has been emphasised repeatedly by key catalyst agencies. In the Glasgow and Clyde Valley Structure Plan, the motorway is described as a “key component”⁷⁷ of infrastructure for the Clyde Gateway Initiative. Meanwhile, Scottish Enterprise claimed that the M74 was a “vital prerequisite”⁷⁸ of the Clyde Gateway Initiative, and that their funding for the initiative would not be forthcoming if the road did not proceed. Moreover, the Clyde Gateway business plan clearly states the importance of the M74 to their infrastructure plans, including the East End Regeneration Route which is dependent on the M74 completion: “The extension to the M74 and the East End Regeneration Route will make Clyde Gateway one of the most accessible urban centres in Scotland.”⁷⁹

In opposition to the plans, Jam74 (a coalition of community, environmental and sustainable transport groups) successfully called for an independent public enquiry to determine whether the road would go ahead. During the 2003-04 enquiry the developers mobilized typical discourses of blight and massively inflated jobs claims to argue for the road’s approval. They claimed that the M74 extension would lead to the “reduction of [...] vacant, derelict and contaminated land” and “unlock the potential for economic development and regeneration of vacant and under-used sites” by making the key sites “more attractive to the private sector.”⁸⁰ Meanwhile, increasingly exaggerated claims regarding job growth have been banded about since a figure of between 2,900 and 4,000 jobs was first mooted in 1994. By 1998, Scottish Enterprise quoted a figure of between 6,000-6,700. In 2001, Glasgow City Council claimed 12,000 new jobs. By September 2001, Glasgow Chamber of Commerce claimed there was the opportunity to secure and safeguard 44,000 jobs as a result of the new road.⁸¹ By the time of the enquiry, the job claims were largely based on the Simmonds report, commissioned by the Trunks Road Authority (TRA); and the EKOS report, commissioned by Scottish Enterprise. The Simmonds report claimed that job gains could be as much as 20,000 by

2030, while the EKOS report estimated 25,000 new jobs by 2030.

Disputing these hyperbolic claims, the public enquiry reporters, after taking evidence from the Jam74 case, found that the reclamation of derelict and contaminated land along the proposed route “could be undertaken at any time.” In their view, the M74 was “not a prerequisite” for such activity. Moreover, the jobs claims were described as “aspirational and uncertain.” The “most optimistic conclusion” that could be taken from the “highly suspect” Simmonds and EKOS reports was that 20,000 jobs might be drawn to the area – but that this would entail a “redistribution” of jobs “at the expense of other parts of Scotland.” At the most, 5,000 jobs might be genuinely new jobs, but even this figure should be treated with “considerable caution.” The report concluded by advising against “an unreasonable degree of confidence in employment forecasts which have not been shown to be robust.”⁸²

Finally, the summary of the report unequivocally stated that the M74 extension would have “very serious undesirable results.” The road would cause “community severance; would be of little use to the local population who have low levels of car ownership; and would have an adverse effect on the environment of the local communities without providing local benefits.” On this basis, taking all the evidence into account, the reporters recommended that the M74 extension proposal “should not be authorized, and that the various orders should not be confirmed.” Despite these recommendations, Jack McConnell, then First Minister of the Scottish Executive, made a sham of transparent democratic procedure by stating that the road would be authorized – regardless of the public enquiry’s findings. To add insult to injury, the M74 northern extension is now “Britain’s most expensive road” according to a report by the *Evening Times*. In the same report Audit Scotland revealed that the cost of the motorway had spiraled to £692m from £245m in 2001.⁸³ While boosters for the Clyde Gateway Initiative routinely claim that the M74 extension, alongside the £69 million East End Regeneration route, are the infrastructural backbone of the initiative, the enormous public costs of these roads fails to appear on the Clyde Gateway balance sheet.

The Entrepreneurial City

“The tradition of the oppressed teaches us that the ‘state of emergency’ in which we live is not the exception but the rule. We must attain to a conception of history that is in keeping with this insight.”
*Walter Benjamin*⁸⁴

“The Labour Party is presiding over a policy that has effectively abandoned the city to speculators and hustlers.”

*Sean Damer, 1990*⁸⁵

As Walter Benjamin once pointed out, we do not exist in homogenous, empty time. By the 1990s, gentrification had already become, “a crucial urban strategy for city governments in consort with private capital in cities around the world.”⁸⁶ Glasgow’s ‘regeneration’ plans take place within a global neo-liberal context, a context that has been subject to a good deal of critical analysis. In 1989, the most renowned exponent of critical urban geography, David Harvey, seminally charted the paradigmatic shift from a ‘managerial’ Keynesian mode of urban government – associated with redistribution, and the provision of services and amenities to local populations – to an ‘entrepreneurial’ market-led mode of governance, firmly pre-occupied with facilitating economic growth for capital.⁸⁷

The context for this shift was the transition to what Harvey cautiously characterized as



a ‘post-fordist’ economy (this transition was hegemonic rather than absolute), manifested by de-industrialisation, the declining power of the nation-state, and accelerated international capital flows. Inter-city competition for fleet-footed global capital has increased commensurately, with city governments ever more *coerced* into the role of *active state partners* to facilitate capitalist accumulation in the city. The entrepreneurial city, according to Harvey, is typified by three broad assertions. First, the privileging of public-private partnerships, in which local government powers, and funds, are mobilized primarily to attract private capital. Second, and perhaps most importantly, this public-private partnership is characterized by a *socialization of risk and costs by the public sector*, and a *privatization of potential benefits for the private sector*. Third, the local state tends to concentrate on the image-based construction of place – in the form of city branding, place marketing, and the production of urban spectacle – rather than the amelioration of structural conditions in the territory where that place is located.⁸⁸

The key issue for the entrepreneurial city is the provision of a “good business climate”. In an accelerating race to the bottom, cities, subject to the “external coercive power” of inter-city competition, offer increasingly benevolent measures, including substantial packages of financial aid and assistance, as lures for investment capital. Unsurprisingly, these activities have only accentuated the geographical mobility and flexibility of multinational capital, forcing urban governments more than ever into the logic and discipline of uneven capitalist development. The consequence of all this is a dull, corporate uniformity to all cities, and the increased use of the spectacular production of ‘bread and circuses’ to mask the often brutal social polarizations of the city under neo-liberal hegemony.⁸⁹

While official dogma represents regeneration as a legitimate instrument to assuage social polarization, this can never hold true in a neo-liberal context typified by an absence of regulatory standards and income redistribution levels at the national level. Even at the level of a vastly diminished social democracy, without genuine socially targeted mechanisms of redistribution, regeneration amounts to little more than “a flow of capital from the public sector to the private sector via the built environment.”⁹⁰ At this early stage of development in the Clyde Gateway project, the minimum task of critical enquiry must be, at least, to expose the contradictions between the surface sheen of regeneration plans and the cruel realities of those excluded, silenced, and stigmatized in order to pursue them. As Neil Smith has pointed out, the forces of *productive capital* embrace gentrification, which serves up inner city land and property on a platter. A more fundamental challenge to gentrification, one which is not just limited to what Hardt and Negri called the “disjunctive synthesis”⁹¹ of representative democracy, will have to question the tacit consensus behind the ownership and management of productive forces, not merely its distribution in the form of banal service jobs, useless commodities, and sub-standard housing.

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