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Article

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Metropolitan planning and the phenomenon of reurbanisation: the example of Liverpool.

1. Introduction.

The aim of this paper is to add to urban planners' understanding of the dynamics and consequences of reurbanisation and their implications for metropolitan planning, particularly in the fields of demographic change and housing investment.

Cities across the United Kingdom are experiencing rates of population growth that are in contrast with those predicted in the 1960s when commentators including Erwin Gutkind (1962) and Lewis Mumford (1968) predicted the inevitable decline of the city due to increasing urban squalor and growing personal mobility. The experience of many UK and European cities through subsequent decades seemed to confirm this view (Champion, 1992, 2001). But by the 1980s some commentators were postulating that cities evolved through a cyclical process that included at least the theoretical possibility of reurbanisation or re-growth, as exemplified by the emergence of the urban life cycle model (Van den Berg et al,1982; and Van den Berg & Klassen,1987) that identified four distinct phases comprising initial growth via urbanisation and suburbanisation, then disurbanisation characterised by economic and population decline, with reurbanisation predicted to occur as a fourth phase after a period of decline.

In a subsequent study Cheshire and Hay (1989) came to similar conclusions but envisioned a situation where regrowth of population across the whole conurbation was possible. Furthermore, Lever (1993) suggested that the combination of restructuring of urban economies, demographic change and more proactive urban policy meant that post-industrial cities, at least in the UK, were in position to move from the disurbanisation phase of the model to relative, if not absolute, reurbanisation. Within a couple of years empirical evidence confirmed a significant rate of reurbanisation was emerging in some countries of Northern Europe (Cheshire, 1995). More recently, evidence has accumulated to show that reurbanisation has become a major trend in many cities, particularly in the UK (e.g. Couch, 1999; Champion, 2001; Seo, 2002; Boddy and Lambert, 2002; Bromley et al., 2005; Couch et al, 2009).

But what precisely is reurbanisation? Writing in 1996, Bourne defined reurbanisation to include all of the following dimensions:

- the repopulation of older urban areas;
- intensification of development (higher densities and occupancy rates);
- replacement of underused land and buildings through new investment;
- conversion and adaptive reuse of previously non-residential structures to residential use;
- economic renewal and restructuring to meet contemporary competitive requirements, and; revitalisation - increasing public and private investment in the urban environment, infrastructure and amenities (Bourne, 1996a).

Interpreting a more recent contribution by Rérat, a slightly different but by no means contradictory set of parameters can be identified:

- urban population regrowth after a period, typically decades, of population decline;
- a specific stage in the urban life-cycle model, as mentioned above;
- qualitative change in the population or economic structure of the city, perhaps associated with gentrification, although these could happen without population growth;
- a process of reinvestment in the city, either through market-led or policy-led urban regeneration, after a period of disinvestment (Rérat, 2012).

What explains this change in the fortunes of cities? Referring back to the life-cycle theory, Champion (2001) wondered whether any single model could adequately encapsulate trends in urban development since the late 1970s (op cit, p144). Although urban resurgence was “happening in some urban contexts, it was both far from universal, even uncommon, and - more significantly - its causes were not clearly understood” (Cheshire, 2006, p1231). Buzar et al (2007) questioned whether reurbanisation was a 'natural' or inevitable phase in a cycle of urban development. Similarly Rérat (2012) argued that reurbanisation was not adequately explained by 'stages of development' models that tended to consider urban regions as closed systems.

As more and more cities appear to be experiencing a degree of population regrowth so this discussion has intensified. As a market-led process reurbanisation is generally considered to be supported on the demand side by changes in demography housing location preferences supported by changing household structures (including an increase in smaller and non-traditional households). On the supply side it is argued to be supported by the latent agglomeration economies that existed in many formerly declining industrial cities, by the rise of post-industrial forms of employment that sought urban locations, the improving residential environment offered by central cities and the rent-gap that had become apparent in many cities (Bourne, 1996a; Cheshire, 2006; Musterd, 2006; Markusen and Schrock, 2006; Couch et al, 2009; Rérat, 2012).

Reinvesting in outworn central and inner city areas has been part of the planning strategy of many cities in Europe and North America since the 1970s, often supported by growth boundries or green belts to restrict peripheral development, particulartly in the UK. But most of these strategies were predicated on the idea of slowing the rate and ameliorating the consequences of suburbanisation and disurbanisation. Reurbanisation, as a feasible and desirable policy aim, has only come about since the emergence of ideas about 'new urbanism' in North America (Katz, 1994; Bourne, 1996b) and the 'compact city' movement in Europe (CEC, 1990 and 1999). In the UK, the UTF report 'Towards an Urban Renaissance' was strongly influential in policy through the noughties (UTF, 1999). Today many cities in the UK are actively planning for reurbanisation.

Then there are questions about the consequences of reurbanisation. Will population regrowth be evenly distributed across the urban area, or concentrated in the central city or in certain favoured neighbourhoods? Will urban population structures change with certain age-groups or social groups more prominently represented amongst the expanded populations? What is the relationship between population regrowth and housing investment? Is population regrowth led by increases in housing supply or does it shape new housing supply, and what are the impacts on occupancy rates and dwelling prices? Will reurbanisation lead to gentrification? Although reurbanisation is frequently discussed alongside issues of gentrification, it should be noted that the process of reurbanisation - regrowth of urban populations - is different from that of gentrification - displacement of existing populations - although they can, in part, be driven by similar dynamics, such as the existence of a rent-gap (Haase, A. et al 2009; Bunce, 2016). It has been suggested by some that reurbanisation of the inner city results in a more splintered or fragmented urban form and that it is leading to increases in spatial-social segregation (Buzar et al, 2007) and at the sub-regional scale questions have been raised about the impact of reurbanisation on the urban periphery where it has been argued that some negative consequences are emerging for less favoured settlements (Dembski et al, 2017). Others have argued that reurbanisation may be associated with an era of suburban decline (Lucy and Phillips, 2000; Lee and Leigh, 2007). Similarly, in a UK study, Hunter (2016) has argued that the renaissance of central and inner cities has left the suburbs behind and that if trends continue suburban decline could become entrenched. Thus the assumption in many city planning strategies that reurbanisation necessarily leads to greater social and spatial equity must be questioned.

Although our paper throws some light on all aspects of this discussion, the primary aim of the paper is to examine and explain the spatial and socio-demographic characteristics and consequences of reurbanisation. This is to be done through case study analysis and evaluation of the experience of one city, Liverpool, a regional city in North-West England, using a mixed methods approach that combines secondary data analysis, documentary analysis and primary data collection through expert interviews.

Specifically, the objectives of this paper are to:

- examine the spatial and socio-demographic characteristics of reurbanisation;
- consider the relationships between reurbanisation and housing investment;
- explore the role of students and young adults in these processes, and;
- consider the relationships with and implications for strategic planning.

After some brief consideration of reurbanisation trends in the United Kingdom, through the detailed case-study, the rest of this paper considers how these recent trends of population regrowth and changing housing production (including purpose-built student accommodation) have affected the social structure of the city of Liverpool, and what the implications are for urban planning policy?

2. Reurbanisation in the United Kingdom.

After many years of population decline some UK cities began to experience a return to population growth from about the mid-1990s; a decade later this had become an established trend across most cities (Rae, 2013; Parkinson, 2016). Table 1 highlights recent trends in UK cities that form the Core Cities Group, an advocacy group of ten large regional city councils outside Greater London. This accords with the concept of 'second tier cities' identified by Parkinson et al (2013) that deliberately excludes London from analysis due to its dominant position with regard to national political, administrative and economic power.

Table 1. here.

From the late 1990s, the New Labour government promoted an 'urban renaissance' agenda, supporting the revitalisation of English cities (Urban Task Force, 1999), with a similar approach adopted by devolved administrations in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland (Tallon 2013, p98). During this period reurbanisation emerged as a national phenomenon. Between 2002 and 2015 the country as a whole reurbanised as the total population living in the 'core cities'[1] grew by 11.8% compared with a national growth rate of 9.8% (see table 1). However, there were considerable variations in performance: whilst the population of Manchester grew by over 23%, Liverpool grew by just under 8%. Whilst part of the variation can be put down to the nature of city administrative boundaries (around Leeds and Sheffield, for example, the city boundaries are loosely drawn and include settlements and rural land beyond the urban periphery, whereas in Manchester and Liverpool the urban area extends well beyond those cities' boundaries), historic and geographic contexts also explain a degree of variation: for example, Glasgow and Bristol have each traditionally accommodated substantial middle-class residential districts close to their central areas whereas this is less the case is some other core cities.

All of the core cities, with the exception of Cardiff, are surrounded by Green Belts, most of which have been designated for several decades with relatively unchanged boundaries around the cities. Green Belt policy has remained a constant feature across the UK with the primary aim of preventing unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas. Data for England suggests that the policy has been successful with relatively small proportions of green belt land lost to development. Whilst there have been many calls for a review of green belt policy (e.g. Sturzaker and Mell, 2016) current national policy reiterates their purposes and government support for a strong and consistent green belt policy.

Within this trend towards reurbanisation, many of these cities have also experienced the re-population of central areas that had been mainly given over to commercial activity and little used as residential space though much of the 20th century. The happy coincidence of rising demand for city centre living, especially from young childless adult households, and a growing supply of unwanted central area commercial and industrial floorspace has led to a boom in the development of residential accommodation. However, in many UK cities, a lack of adequate planning control has resulted in too many small apartments, few of which are well provided with the amenities necessary for anything other than short-term occupation by one and two-person households (Couch et al, 2009).

By the millennium, especially in the midlands and north of England, it seemed at first as if housing demand was concentrating in central cities and at the urban periphery whilst some older inner suburbs were suffering from a catastrophic fall in housing demand that was leading to a relative decline in dwelling prices, high levels of vacancy and even housing abandonment in extreme cases. The response of central government was, in 2003, to establish a series of 'Housing Renewal Pathfinder' areas with the intention, in such areas, of bringing housing supply and demand into better balance through a mixture of housing clearance and improvement (Ferrari and Lee, 2010; Leather and Nevin, 2012). This fifteen year programme was always controversial, particularly for its inclusion of housing clearance areas and was brought to a halt by the incoming Coalition government in 2010.

[1] The 'core cities' include Birmingham, Bristol, Cardiff, Glasgow, Leeds, Liverpool, Manchester, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, Nottingham and Sheffield.

With hindsight, the programme, whilst well intentioned, looks like a panic response to a problem that seemed to melt away during the noughties as national housing demand increased.

Nationally, during the noughties, at least until the financial crisis in 2008, housing production was rising to meet growing urban housing demand and urban populations were increasing, although even during this boom the increase in housing supply was insufficient to keep pace with demand. After the crisis, with credit harder to obtain, private housebuilders reduced their rate of output. The government's Comprehensive Spending Review of 2010 proposed severe cuts in the housing budget which only exacerbated the situation (Mulliner and Maliene, 2013). In consequence, although urban populations continued to grow after 2008, the financial crisis had a very detrimental impact on housing production and caused a worsening of the relationship between housing supply and demand in many cities.

3. Reurbanisation in Liverpool

Serving the industrial heartlands of northern England, the port of Liverpool developed from the mid-18th century as colonial trade expanded. Rapid growth came in the 19th and early 20th centuries with population peaking at 855,000 in 1931. But by the mid-20th century the city was in decline as changing patterns of trade, changing technologies, de-industrialisation and economic concentration took their toll on employment. Disurbanisation occurred as population migrated away from the conurbation in search of work. Furthermore, suburbanisation pushed a growing proportion of the remaining population beyond the core city to the periphery. This decline was most acute in the 1970s and 1980s. However, as early as 1979, the Merseyside Structure Plan was proposing a strategy of 'urban regeneration' that would "concentrate investment in existing urban areas, especially those with the most acute problems....but restrict housebuilding on the edges of the built-up area" (Merseyside County Council, 1979, p7).

By the end of the 1980s, much of the city's older (pre-1919) housing stock had been refurbished with Government subsidy and was benefitting from local environmental improvements while further planning policies were encouraging and subsidising brownfield redevelopment and the conversion of many former industrial and commercial premises to residential use (Couch, 2003; Sykes et al, 2013). Figure 4. illustrates some of this housing investment. The creation of the Merseyside 'green belt' in 1984 prohibited development on rural land at the periphery of the city and was strongly enforced. In 1980 the Central Government funded Merseyside Development Corporation was established with a specific remit to redevelop former dockland areas including warehouse conversions and some of the earliest new city centre residential investments. The effect of these layers of policy was to drastically reduce out-migration from the core city over the subsequent decade.

By the 1990s the economy had begun to recover. National economic growth improved and over the period from 1993 to 2007, regeneration was assisted by around £1.6 billion from Objective One of the European Regional Development Fund (Sykes et al, 2013). In this period Liverpool witnessed the expansion of employment in many sectors including higher education, health, financial services, IT and biosciences. The city was designated European Capital of Culture in 2008 and in subsequent years has pursued a strong policy of cultural and tourism-led regeneration. In consequence of these changes, employment began to rise, especially in the central city. Between 2002 and 2014 the Merseyside conurbation was stagnant: at first growing, then badly hit by the impact of the post-2008 financial crisis and then recovering to 2002 employment levels. In contrast Liverpool (the urban core) experienced employment growth throughout the period so that the proportion of jobs in the conurbation located within the urban core increased from 40.0% in 2002 to 43.0% in 2014. A more urban economy was returning to the conurbation (see figure 1.).

Figure 1. here.

As shown in figure 2, population regrowth in the Merseyside conurbation followed a similar trend to that for employment growth. Having declined substantially in the latter half of the 20th century the conurbation began to growth again after 2001. Significantly, since the millennium, the city of Liverpool has been regrowing faster than the conurbation as a whole, so that the proportion of conurbation population accommodated within the urban core increased (from 32.3% in 2001 to 34.2 % in 2015) back to a level not seen since the nineteen seventies. Thus, since 2001, the city has been reurbanising according to the definitions of the urban life-cycle model.

Figure 2. here.

The next section presents an analysis of population change within Liverpool. Data for 2002[2] (when reurbanisation was just emerging) is compared with data for 2015 (when it had become an established and significant phenomenon). The city is divided into 30 wards for political-administrative purposes. In this paper, in order to simplify the analysis and to make clearer the spatial variations in population change, wards have been grouped into three zones: i. Central City; ii. Inner City; iii. Middle and Outer City. The Central City is defined as comprising Central and Riverside wards; the Inner City as comprising Everton, Kensington & Fairfield, Kirkdale, Picton and Princes Park wards; while the Middle and Outer City comprises all other wards in the city. Figure 3. provides a map of these wards.

Figure 3. here.

Regrowth has been unevenly distributed across the city. As shown in table 2, between 2002 and 2015, the city grew by 34,912 people. Some 66.7% of this growth occurred in the Central City, 27% in the Inner City and only 6.0% in the Middle and Outer City. The effect has been that over these thirteen years the Central City population almost doubled and that of the Inner City has grown by around 12%, while Middle and Outer City only saw a growth rate of 0.6%. Indeed eleven of the city's 30 wards, particularly in the northern half of the Middle and Outer City actually lost population over this period. Most severely affected were Anfield, Belle Vale, County, Norris Green wards which each declined by more than 5%. Thus, so far, reurbanisation across Liverpool has been both partial and fragmented.

Table 2. here.

Table 3. shows population change by age-group and zone between 2002 and 2015. It can be seen the number of children aged 0-17 declined in all zones of the city, except for a marginal increase in the Inner City. Population in the 18-24 age-group, which includes students, increased by 21% across the city but this was heavily skewed towards the Central City which showed an increase of over 220%. In contrast representation of this age-group in the Middle and Outer City saw a slight decline. Population in the 25-59 age-group increased by 10% across the city but this too was skewed towards the Central City where this working-age population nearly doubled. There was also a city-wide increase in the over 60s age-group, again, perhaps surprisingly, somewhat skewed towards the Central City.

Table 3. here.

Table 4. shows the changes in the proportion of each age-group living in each zone over the period. It is clear that there has been a dramatic shift in the distribution of the 18-24 age group. The proportion of this age-group living in the Middle and Outer City has declined from 68.1% to only 51.4% while the proportion living in the Central City has risen from 10.9% to 29.1%. There has been a similar but less pronounced trend in the re-distribution of 25-59 year-olds away from the Middle and Outer City. In contrast, there has been little change in the distribution of the 60+ age-group except for a marginal increase in representation in the Central City. Thus the population of the city is becoming increasingly spatially segregated by age-group.

Table 4. here.

Localised data on household size is only available from the Census of Population. However, as might be expected it appears that the proportion of Liverpool's single-person households accommodated in the Central and Inner City increased from 25% to 33% between 2001 and 2011, whereas the proportion contained in the Middle and Outer City declined from 75% to 67% (authors' calculation). It seems clear that the increase in Central and Inner City population has been driven in large measure by the growth of single-person households in those zones, which has been much more rapid than in the city as a whole. In consequence the distribution of household types across the city is becoming more fragmented. This concentration of single-person households in the Central and Inner City is both a driver of and a consequence of the type and location of housing investment that has taken place in the city over the study period.

[2] 2002 is the earliest date for which data relating to current ward boundaries is available.

4. Housing investment in Liverpool

Looking at the city of Liverpool in 2009, Couch, Fowles & Karecha commented that one important dimension of this reurbanisation was the increasing amount of housing provision within the city centre. Much of this took the form of one and two-bedroomed apartments in new purpose-built blocks on land formerly occupied by industrial or commercial activities, or in the conversion of buildings formerly used for warehousing or offices. Much of this housing was developed piecemeal on individual plots as they became available, with little attempt to produce coherent residential neighbourhoods in terms of the local amenities and environments normally associated with such areas (See figure 4.). In consequence this emerging housing sector appeared to be catering only for a niche population of small childless households and was making a relatively inefficient contribution to broader housing supply. At that time the city centre housing market, with the exception of student housing, appeared to be segmented from and not adversely impacting upon the inner-city housing market.

Table 5. shows housing completions in Liverpool and table 6 shows the dwelling stock and population in the city. Taken together these tables show that despite reurbanisation and population growth, housing completions in Liverpool have been declining as a proportion of national housing completions, such that the number of dwellings in the city has not kept pace with population growth so that the occupancy rate has deteriorated marginally; i.e. one consequence of reurbanisation is that the housing stock is being used more intensively. This is supported by the fact that housing vacancy in the city declined from 7.54% of the dwelling stock in 2004, to 5.59% in 2012 and 4.32% in 2016 (DCLG, Live Tables 125 and 615, accessed 29.8.2017). This improvement in the vacancy rate seems to be a significant outcome of reurbanisation in the city.

Table 5. here.

Table 6. here.

Recent housing investment has been unevenly distributed across the city with the largest proportion of net housing completions occurring in the Central City (see table 7.). Here the level of completions has been high with very few demolitions, resulting in a sharp increase in gross housing density. Almost all of this new housing has been developed on parcels of land, or in buildings, that were previously in some commercial or industrial use. In the Inner City, a zone affected by the Housing Market Renewal programme in the period 2003-2010, many older dwellings have been refurbished for a second time (having been first improved in the 1970s/80s) or demolished and replaced, resulting in a younger housing stock and a slight increase in gross housing density (See figure 4.). However, there are variations between wards. In Kirkdale and Princes Park this process has resulted in a significant increase in the dwelling stock, while in Kensington & Fairfield demolitions and completions have kept almost in balance, but in Everton and Picton demolitions have outweighed completions. In the Middle and Outer City the level of completions has outweighed demolitions by approximately two to one, resulting in a modest net increase in the housing stock. However, in a few wards, notably Anfield, Norris Green and Croxteth, ongoing regeneration programmes have resulted in a diminution of the stock.

Table 7. here.

In the Central City population growth has been around twice the net increase in dwellings yet there has been only a marginal increase in the occupancy rate. This is probably because most of these additional households comprise 1 or 2 person childless households, a household type that matches well with the additional housing stock which comprises mainly one and two-bedroomed apartments. In the Inner City the increase in population has not been matched by the net increase in dwellings and the occupancy rate has deteriorated. Nevertheless, given the nature of much of the dwelling stock in this zone, two and three-bedroomed houses, the zone remains relatively under occupied and has the potential to absorb more population in the future without causing overcrowding. The opposite trend has been taking place in the Middle and Outer City where net dwelling completions have exceeded population growth leading to a looser fit between population and dwellings than hitherto. Thus, this zone too shows potential for population growth within the existing dwelling stock without causing overcrowding.

Figure 4. here.

5. The role of students

Nationally the number of students increased significantly through the noughties as a result of government policy and demographic change. More recently expansion has stalled for economic reasons and as a result of a declining cohort of people in the age group from which higher education students are traditionally derived. As shown in table 8. the local situation mirrors these changes.

Table 8. here.

In terms of spatial distribution across the city, the 2011 census shows 9,747 (27.3%) of students living in the Central City, 7,310 (20.4%) in the Inner City, and 18,698 (52.3%) in the Middle and Outer City [of which 4652 (13.0%) lived in Greenbank ward - a Middle City ward where several university halls are located].

It is not possible to identify students as a group in the Mid-Year-Estimates but it seems reasonable to suggest that approximately half the 18-24 age-group in the city comprises students - more in the Central City, less in the Middle and Outer City. Nevertheless, there is some evidence that the young adult (18-24) population, whilst concentrating in the Central City, has been withdrawing from other neighbourhoods across the city. Four wards in the Middle City where students have historically sought shared accommodation in 'houses in multiple occupation' (HMOs) within the mainstream housing stock are St Michaels, Mossley Hill, Church and Wavertree. Between 2002 and 2015 in these wards the 18-24 age group declined by -33.5%, -30%, -24.5% and -17.5% respectively. This suggests that there is a significant process of de-studentification going on in some Middle City neighbourhoods at the same time as student numbers in the Central City are increasing.

Recently, in addition to be rash of city centre apartment building that occurred in the 1990s and early 2000s, many UK cities have seen heavy private investment in purpose-built student accommodation (PBSA), particularly in central areas (See Figure 4.). In their most recent report on UK Student Accommodation trends, Cushman and Wakefield (2017) highlight national trends underpinning the continued development of purpose built student accommodation noting that cities (such as Liverpool) are particularly attractive to the growing international student market, and that the majority of home (UK) students continue to study away from their home regions. They also note that at a national level, the market remains “structurally undersupplied” and predict further PBSA development activity across the UK but particularly in major university cities. This has led to a situation in which "student populations became more spatially concentrated during mid-2000s... predominantly in the form of gated ‘student-enclaves’" (Smith and Hubbard, 2014). It has been suggested that the building of large amounts of purpose-built student housing in areas, such as city centres, away from traditional student neighbourhoods, leads to the depopulation of some former studentified neighbourhoods and that this may lead to their physical downgrading and decline (Kinton, Smith and Harrison, 2016).

This possible scenario has been recognised by the City Council in the draft Liverpool Local Plan (2016; p125) and Student Accommodation Review (Liverpool Mayoral Review, 2015; p2) which recommended that a proactive approach to managing the impact of ‘destudentification’ and similar changes in the evolving HMO sector should be developed. According to Liverpool City Council there were, in 2015, 14,015 students in purpose built bedspaces, 6,309 in halls of residence and 8,000 in homes registered as council-tax student occupation. In addition there are 2,650 purpose built student bedspaces on-site under construction, 2,483 with planning permission but not yet started and a further 4,409 at various stages in the planning process. The City Council conclude "should all the applications in the system be approved and built this would create circa 30,000 purpose built (non-HMO) bedspaces in the city to meet a student demand of circa 34,000)" (Liverpool Mayoral Review, 2015, p9). This means that if they are all taken up some 4,000 HMO bedspaces would become redundant.

The first question is whether de-studentification has led to population loss in wards associated with shared housing for students. Of the four wards that lost substantial numbers of population aged 18-24 between 2002 and 2015, the population of Wavertree increased by 6.0% over the same period, St Michaels increased by 4.7%, and Mossley Hill by 1.91%; only Church ward lost 0.2% of its population. So the evidence from Liverpool does not support the notion of any significant depopulation of neighbourhoods following departure of students. Indeed, it would seem that so far the de-studentified HMO housing is being satisfactorily transferred back into the mainstream housing stock. Anecdotal evidence from local estate agents confirms that where possible private landlords are refurbishing property by, for example, removing desks from bedrooms and reinstating a downstairs bedroom as a living room to make it more attractive for a family household to rent (Local Estate Agent, interviewed 10/8/2017).

In general it seems that the student lettings market is declining but only slowly and at a consistent rate over recent years, with no sudden downturn. There also seems to have been a spatial shift in student demand away from the Middle City towards the Inner and Central City. But there is some variation in the fortunes of different neighbourhoods depending upon 'micro-geographic' differences. For instance Kensington Fields, an Inner City neighbourhood adjoining the Central City, has seen significant recent investment. This appears to be due to the relatively low cost of purchasing a large property with HMO potential ten years ago combined with a high level of students demand for a location proximate to the universities and city centre. As a consequence there continue to be potential investors seeking similar properties in adjoining locations (Interview with Manager from Liverpool Student Housing, 12/8/2017). On the other hand, in some inner parts of Picton Ward, similarly close to the city centre but with smaller than average terraced houses and a less attractive local environment, demand both from students and non-student households is lower and potential investors fewer (Local Estate Agent, interviewed 10/8/2017).

The second question concerns the impact of de-studentification on 'physical downgrading and decline'. One measure of the quality and attractiveness of a neighbourhood is the price obtainable for housing stock and how that has changed over time and in relation to other neighbourhoods. House price data is not easily available at ward level but it is possible to obtain a picture of trends for postcode districts. St Michaels, Mossley Hill, Church and Wavertree wards are substantially contained within the L15 and L17 postcode district. As explained above although these neighbourhoods may have lost some of their student populations they remain attractive to housing demand within the mainstream housing market. Table 9. compares dwelling price trends in these two districts with those in the Central City (postcode districts L1 and L3), with declining neighbourhoods in the north of the city (postcode districts L4 and L6, approximating to Anfield, County and Tuebrook & Stoneycroft wards), and the Liverpool city average.

Table 9. here.

In the Central City it would appear that the very high volume of development combined with the large number and similarity of second-hand properties on the market at any one time (predominantly one and two-bedroomed flats) has kept price increases well below the average for price increases across the city. This in turn, goes some way to explain the popularity of the Central City as a residential location. Even in the depopulating neighbourhoods of L4 (Anfield), whilst prices have historically been well below the city average, their rate of increase has kept pace with the city average.

On the one hand this data may suggest that, at least in the relatively attractive southern inner suburbs of Liverpool, de-studentification has had no discernible impact on dwelling prices and therefore, by implication, no impact on 'physical downgrading or decline'. On the other hand it could equally be the case that reurbanisation and rising housing demand is causing a process of gentrification whereby students are being pushed out of these southern neighbourhoods by rising property prices that make it financially more attractive for landlords to sell their properties rather than re-let them to students. Referring again to anecdotal evidence from local estate agents, there appears to have been a geographic shift along these lines with some decline in the number of 'student' properties in areas of south Liverpool where property prices have increased significantly but offset by an increase in the number of properties in and around the Kensington Fields neighbourhood as mentioned above: a location much closer to the universities and the city centre, which is thought to be a factor of increasing significance in students' housing location choices.
Whilst there may be very limited evidence of gentrification affecting student choices in a small number of instances, for the most part there is a surplus of housing available to students, especially new secure premises in or near the city centre. Thus is seems to be the case that students are generally being drawn towards better housing options rather than being chased out or priced out of traditional student neighbourhoods.

6. Strategic Planning

So how has urban planning responded to the challenges of reurbanisation? The Liverpool Unitary Development Plan was published in 1996, in the era of continuing population decline. The new draft Liverpool Local Plan was published in 2016. Comparison between the two documents gives some idea of policy responses to reurbanisation.

Strategic planning in 1996 was based upon the premis that:

"outward migration of the younger and more skilled residents has been the main cause of the decline, which has resulted in a residual population heavily dependent upon local authority and other support services, and an urban infrastructure more appropriate in scale (and maintenance costs) to a much larger population.......Whatever the overall level of population change during the Plan period, some demographic trends are clearly marked: a general ageing of the population of working age, a sizeable fall in the number of pre-school children, and a substantial increase in the number of residents aged 85 years and over" (Liverpool City Council, 1996, p25).

The major themes of the plan included economic regeneration, environmental improvement and reduction of inequality (ibid, p31).

In complete contrast to the spatial portrait outlined in 1996, the (draft) Local Plan published 21 years later was able to say:

"Liverpool's population is a young one, reflecting the popularity of the City among students and young professionals" and "only 1 in 7 Liverpool residents are pensioners which is lower than the England and Wales average" (Liverpool City Council, 2016, p22). From an economic perspective "Liverpool today is a diverse and dynamic city which has undergone a physical transformation in recent years with clear signs of economic recovery" (*ibid*, 2016, p19). With hindsight it is probably reasonable that the 1996 Plan was unable to predict the huge expansion of Higher Education and the role of the sector and students in the economic, social and cultural regeneration of cities.

Current strategic priorities contained within the draft Local Plan continue to focus on the city centre, "to enhance its role as the economic hub for the City Region with world class educational and business uses" (ibid, 2016 p29). With particular regard to the role of the Universities, a 'knowledge quarter' has been designated in and around the London Road area to facilitate and provide spatial concentration for projects associated with knowledge-based industries such as bio-sciences and health-related research, and new student accommodation. Several large development schemes have been granted planning permission during the last year or so which, if implemented would see over 3,000 new student bedrooms in this part of the city centre (Liverpool City council, 2016, p17).

The City Council is embracing reurbanisation with a clear policy aim to promote and attract further investment in the city centre that will enhance the status of Liverpool vis-a-vis the wider conurbation. Other strategic policies are also significant such as the promotion of the Liverpool city region, for which Liverpool, as the economically dominant partner is likely to be the main driver (Parkinson et al 2016). Indeed the overall strategic vision for the Local Plan cross references the city region at the outset with the aim that "by 2033 Liverpool will be a sustainable, vibrant and distinctive global city at the heart of the City Region". Liverpool, more so than other authorities within the Liverpool city region, has been well placed to capitalise on the growth of the knowledge and creative industries, culture and tourism, aided in part by the positive impact of being European Capital of Culture in 2008, and the emphasis on Liverpool city centre as the economic hub for the region. Thus it is reasonable to suggest that the trends identified in figures 1 and 2 earlier in this paper will continue with Liverpool set to gain an increasing share of population and employment compared with other parts of Merseyside. Whilst benefitting the core city, this may, as Dembski et al (2016) have suggested, be to the detriment of some less competitive settlements within the urban periphery.

7. Discussion and conclusions

Following decades of disurbanisation the city of Liverpool returned to population growth after 2002. Furthermore, between 2002 and 2015, the urban core (Liverpool) grew faster than the conurbation (Merseyside). Whilst the rate of population growth for Liverpool over this period was slightly less than the overall rate of increase for England as a whole and for other major cities, this still constitutes clear evidence of reurbanisation, according to the urban life-cycle model discussed in the introduction. However, most of this regrowth has been concentrated in the Central City and its adjacent wards.

Much of the rest of the city has stagnated in terms of population growth, indeed a number of wards, particularly in the northern half of the city continue to experience population decline. Regrowth has also been concentrated in the 18-24 age-group. This combination of trends has led to a change in the age distribution of the population across the city with a sharp increase in the proportion of young childless adult households living in the Central City and a significant increase in the proportion of population aged 60+ living in the Middle and Outer City. Thus the population of the city is becoming increasingly spatially segregated by age-group.

Since 2002, the largest proportion of net housing completions has been in the Central City and on land, or in buildings, that were previously in commercial or industrial use. This is therefore not gentrification but a change of land-use and the creation of new residential areas. Much of this new housing stock has taken the form of small (1 or 2-bedroom) apartments or purpose-built student accommodation with few amenities, in an area that historically has lacked the infrastructure to support normal community life: local social, health, educational and recreational facilities.

Different types of central city inhabitants can be identified, in particular: young people in search of a short-term 'experience' of city centre life and 'authentic' city centre dwellers that would be likely to stay for the longer term (Allen and Blandy, 2004; Tallon and Bromley, 2004). It has been suggested that this new form of housing supply has tended to spread into the inner urban areas as the supply of potential sites begins to dry up in city centres, which appears to be what has happened in Liverpool. It has also been argued that such developments are *conceptually* disconnected from the inner areas in which they are located and therefore unlikely to have a major regenerating effect on the inner urban areas (Couch, Fowles and Karecha, 2009). It seems as if these city centre and adjacent developments are catering adequately for those who wish for a short-term 'experience' of city centre life but they have yet to provide adequately for those who might wish to become part of a fully functioning community of 'authentic' city centre dwellers.

In the Inner City, despite the impact of the Housing Market Renewal programme (2003-10), there has been a slight increase in gross housing density. Overall the Middle and Outer City has seen a modest net increase in the housing stock but in a few wards, notably Anfield, Norris Green and Croxteth, ongoing regeneration programmes have resulted in a diminution of the stock, although this may be temporary. Thus reurbanisation is unevenly distributed across Liverpool. The city is fragmenting into different zones: growth in the Central City, spilling over into some parts of the Inner City; relative stability in much of the Middle and Outer City; but continuing decline in a small number of wards in the Middle City. This concurs with the findings of Buzar et al (2007) who concluded that reurbanisation is resulting in a 'splintered urban form'. Some commentators have expressed concern about the impact of reurbanisation on the outer city (Lucy and Phillips, 2000; Lee and Leigh, 2007; Hunter, 2016). Although there is little evidence of suburban decline in Liverpool, it is clear that the Outer City is not yet experiencing the level of new housing investment currently occurring in the central city. This may be for locational reasons or simply because fewer sites are available. However, there is no evidence of any decline in investment in the maintenance and refurbishment of existing property, or in property prices in this zone.

A key question for metropolitan planners is whether this growth in the Central City will continue and whether it will spill-over, or trickle-down, to the rest of the city. In addition to the effects of national population growth, smaller household size and the rise in the student population, important reasons for reurbanisation in Liverpool include urban agglomeration economies and the gap between contemporary and potential rent levels. Despite the decades of economic restructuring experienced by the city, with its devastating impact of employment and population, Liverpool remained a large city with all the institutions, amenities, and connectivity that one would expect in a regional city. That is to say, despite its decline it retained massive urban agglomeration economies which over time and supported by central and local government policies gradually began to attract a return of investment to the city. As the city declined so rent levels (and capital values) of property fell relative to those in other competing locations. Over time there emerged a sufficient gap between actual and potential rent levels (property prices) that investors were attracted back to the city. Much of this investment took the form of converting low-value commercial and industrial land or buildings to high-value residential accommodation. There has been some similar investment to turn low-value housing into higher-value housing, either by redevelopment or refurbishment. However, in the context of the Liverpool housing market, few of these investments have transformed housing rents or capital values sufficiently to merit the term gentrification: there is little evidence of social displacement (Nevin, 2010).

The UK national government acknowledges the importance of urban agglomeration economies in supporting economic growth and those of Liverpool remain substantial, with heavy recent investment in connectivity, research, technology and higher-education. Whilst both commercial and residential values have risen, they remain competitive in relation to other core cities, thus it seems likely that the local economy and population will continue to grow. The City Council project a population increase of at least 50,000 people over the next twenty years (Liverpool City Council, Population Projections, Table P2. accessed 29.9.2017). Whether future population growth will have similar characteristics to that of the recent past is unclear. However, it seems likely that student numbers may now be somewhere near their peak and if more students choose to live at home they may well have less impact on reurbanisation than hitherto. Population growth may shift away from the Central City. There remains something of a rent-gap in parts of the Inner City, especially in those wards that have continued to decline, and it is in those wards, supported by public policy and subsidy, where future population growth in most likely to occur. Whilst household size may continue to fall generally, a significant proportion of the housing stock in the Outer City is currently under-occupied and may, as existing occupiers move on, come to be re-occupied by larger households. Furthermore, some larger properties on larger plots of land in the Outer City may have the potential to be redeveloped at higher densities. Thus a continuation of reurbanisation and population regrowth seems assured but is likely to be more evenly spread across the city than hitherto.

Although the contextual trends underpinning metropolitan planning have changed in recent years, despite the change from disurbanisation and suburbanisation to reurbanisation, it is unlikely that the broad brush of urban planning policy will change a great deal. Just as the 1990s required investment in the Central and Inner Cities to encourage urban regeneration, so future decades are likely to require continuing investment in these zones, and also in the Outer City, in order to accommodate the regrowing population.

Regarding the urban life-cycle model a number of comments can be made. Although early versions of the model were reluctant to embrace the possibility of reurbanisation, later version included this possibility - which has since become a reality in many northern European cities. Despite the views of Buzat et al (2007) and Rérat (2017) that reurbanisation is not adequately explained by the model, it nevertheless does provide a useful description of the 'direction of travel' likely to be followed by cities such as Liverpool. Clearly the Liverpool experience, where the urban core is now growing faster than the urban periphery, aligns with the model. However it has to be acknowledged that its predictive value remains limited since its says little about the length of phases nor when or why cities will move from one phase to another. In Liverpool for example, disurbanisation lasted around 50 years, whereas in Leipzig this phase appears to have been no more than 15-20 years in length (Kabisch et al (2010). In Liverpool reurbanisation came about only after prolonged and substantial public investment in urban regeneration, a period of national economic growth and unprecedented population increase. The predictive capabilities of the model could be increased if it could be made more sensitive to the national and regional socio-economic, institutional and policy context and to factors such as the nature of the local economy, demography and environment.

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