



Crime, order and social control

Urban crime and regeneration in Scotland

Lady:

We're familiar with the kind of broad themes that are going on, in the changes in the cities. We're familiar with the decline of manufacturing. The decline of other traditional industries. And other changes such as the rise of the service section. And the way in which populations have been moving out to the urban fringes and suburbanisation. The way in which housing has been located there. As well as shopping centres, and new industrial units.

But at the same time there have been active attempts to regenerate the inner areas. And to regenerate city centres and dockland areas and so on.

How have these processes been reflected in the Leith area?

Lady 2:

There has been a clear effort to redevelop Leith. To transform the area into a sort of very interesting place to visit. Because property developers rather than civic groups have played a major role in this. In fact, I would say that a particular feature of the Waterside Development is that it is not just higher status groups, replacing groups in areas of decline. But also which is more important, all the communities are being displaced. New office jobs for instance have been created. But the majority of people who live in Leith don't have the qualifications necessarily to apply for those jobs. And also very interestingly, I think the housing being developed is so expensive for the local community.

Lady:

It's interesting that you mentioned about the construction of Leith as an interesting place to visit. Because one of the themes of regeneration in cities in the contemporary period is through the leisure and tourism industry. And cities have been trying to compete with each other to attract new visitors and to attract new customers, and new residents. Can you tell me how that's been reflected in the Leith area?

Lady 2:

Yes. Well new residents and new property developers were promoting Leith as the Gateway to Scotland. Especially a new shopping centre, the new Ocean Terminal. Which is a very trendy upmarket shopping centre. This interestingly was portrayed as a great place to shop and a great place to work. But many local residents could not afford to shop there. And none of the 712 jobs which were created were given to local residents.

Lady:

In the cities that I am familiar with, it's very clear that businesses, local authorities, others feel that potential investors or new residents or customers, will be discouraged by perceptions of crime and disorder. And quite often high profile policing responses have been introduced, and have often received quite widespread support from local authorities and from regeneration partnerships. And indeed from sections of the population. Did you see any of those general trends in Leith?

Lady 2:

Yes. I would say that those general trends can be observed. But in Leith and in particular in the Coburg Streets area, where the main area of streets working prostitutes used to be. And the tolerance zone was. The main pressure to remove prostitute women came from local residents and businesses. The regeneration of Coburg Street and the Leith area generated for high amenity housing. Followed by huge demographic changes resulted in the termination of the non-Harassment Zone by the police in August 2001.

Lady:

We've often seen that it's the most marginal sections of the community who bear the brunt of those efforts to control crime and anti social behaviour. And indeed bear the brunt of the demonising rhetoric that often goes along with those initiatives. Now of course some residents and other interests express concern about those who are targeted for police attention. But arguably this regeneration agenda helps to create a sense of consent. Or create more consent, for tougher action in order to reassure the public, or to reassure customers and those new residents, in the interests of regeneration. Perhaps you could then tell me a little bit more about this toleration zone? Did it mean for example that prostitution was legal in the Coburg Street?

Lady 2:

No. No. The none harassment zone was essentially an area where the police had discretionary power over prosecution. It was more commonly known as the tolerance zone. It operated in the Coburg Street area of Leith from 1985 until 2001. And basically it was an informal unofficial, if you like pragmatic response to the complex issues associated with say prostitution and drug misuse in Leith.

Lady:

So you're saying there were very specific conditions then that led to it being established in the first place then?

Lady 2:

Yes. Indeed. But broader processes were also going on. Because Edinburgh's approach evolved from the mid 1980's. It was originally based on a harm reduction model. And pioneered by a multi agency partnership. Involving Local Authorities. The Lothian Health Board. The police, and also the voluntary sector. The main objectives were to minimise the spread and the impact of HIV and Aids. And also other blood borne viruses. Especially Hepatitis 'C' and injecting drug use in the city. For this reason, a needle exchange scheme was set up in Leith, where most of the drug using population was gathered. And to cut a long story short. The police had to deal with the consequences of an ever increasing drug using population. So containment of criminal activities related to drug misuse in unofficial designated areas seem most obvious sensible if you like, approach. And one of these activities was prostitution.

Lady:

Hence the non harassment zone.

Lady 2:

Yes. That is correct. A clear prosecution policy for the Coburg Street zone was enforced by the Police. In this particular zone, no action would be taken against prostitution. Providing that there were not many women working there. Usually the limit was around 20. On the understanding that they didn't attract complaints from members of the public, or otherwise cause offence. Also the presence of pimps, drugs or other criminal activities was not tolerated.

Lady:

So how effective was it?

Lady 2:

Well, the containment of activity within the zone had important benefits. A range of support and rehabilitation services were delivered to street prostitutes without particular effort if you like. There was a steady increase in the uptake of the services. Promotion of harm reduction activities was also beneficial for the entire community. I have already mentioned the needle exchange scheme. But because most of the drug using population in Edinburgh was concentrated in Leith. And this is important to remember, ceased to exist after the closure of the zone.

I should also add that there was a short leave attempt to move the zone to a section of a nearby commercial area, in Salamander Street. This proved unsuccessful. Because of the

pressure from local residents and businesses. And on November 30th 2001, the new zone ceased to exist.

Lady:

So what kind of pressures were going on? And have those pressures continued?

Lady 2:

One of the main pressures was the perceived negative effect on local property prices. It's interesting to stress that prices that many local residents couldn't afford anyway. And yes, these pressures have continued. So in response to frustration about street prostitution, and related activities. And the perceived lack of response to complaints made to the police and the local council. The local Residents Association introduced residents patrols in March 2003. They continued to operate nightly between eight pm and one am. And there is also evidence of growing tension between the members of the patrol, the prostitutes and pimps. With a growing potential for violence. There have been complaints to the police about threats from both the residents patrols and prostitutes. What's interesting I think is that since the non-harassment zone ended. Some prostitutes have dispersed across mainly north Leith. And most of them are now working more discreetly. Or in isolation. Many on residential side streets.

I think what is important to stress is that dispersal effect created new problems for residents. But also for agencies. And for the women themselves.

Lady:

I think we need to explore the implications for prostitute women, and indeed the support agencies. And perhaps the community as a whole, later in the programme. But I think perhaps we need to acknowledge as well that there are variations in different cities, and over time and space.

Lady 2:

It's really interesting that for instance, Aberdeen is the only location in Scotland where sex workers are allowed to work in a designated area. But what is interesting is that the rationale behind the tolerance zone in Aberdeen, is not the safety of the women involved in say prostitution. Rather I would say is a pragmatic response to contain the problem of drug misuse, especially crack cocaine and levels of crime in the area.