

Book Review

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Policy Responses to Social Exclusion: Towards Inclusion?

Percy-Smith, J. (ed.) (2000) Buckingham, Open University Press, 244 pages, ISBN 0 335 20473 2.

Cities may be spatially defined by their physical infrastructure, however, for many, it is the interplay of the economic, political and social dimensions within this physical context that provides the focus of their interest in the built environment. And, it is the recognition that the complex interaction between all of these elements is not just confined to the local level but extends through to the global level that has led researchers and policy makers to re-evaluate the terminology and conceptions used to identify those individuals and communities who are living at the margins of urban society.



In *Policy Responses to Social Exclusion, Towards Inclusion?* Janie Percy-Smith has made a very timely addition to this debate by drawing together UK based researchers to focus on the concept of social exclusion.

As Percy-Smith reminds us in the first chapter, the term social exclusion originated from the progressive policies of the socialist governments of France during the 1980s and:

...was used to refer to a disparate group of people living on the margins of society and, in particular, without access to the system of social insurance. (p1).

The chapter goes on to provide a robust introduction to exploring the definitions of social exclusion, what its dimensions are, how it is measured, and how responsive policy making is to its themes and issues.

Each of the following eight chapters then addresses an individual area of UK policy - the labour market; poverty; education and training; health; housing; services; political exclusion; and urban policy - and analyses it within the context of social exclusion. All of the chapters give a good synopsis of the progression of policy making within each different area, and they all have a spatial element to their analysis. However, it is the chapter on urban policy by Hutchinson that actually emphasises how important 'place' is to the reinforcement and intensification of the processes of social exclusion.

The chapter by Burden on poverty is also of interest as he gives a synopsis of the development of the theoretical distinctions between social exclusion and other, more universally acknowledged, concepts such as poverty or disadvantage. Burden's analysis sees poverty as generally confined to the redistribution of resources, especially income, and disadvantage as a slightly more complex concept in that it includes goods and services as well as resources. In comparison, social exclusion can

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be viewed as a consequence of the structural changes surrounding globalisation, albeit consequences that are influenced by the national context. This is a very important distinction as it has major implications for policy making. Typically, policies that are centred on reducing poverty or disadvantage tend to focus on redistribution; material resources in the former, and material resources, goods and services in the latter. However, utilising this analysis, policies aimed at ameliorating social exclusion would have to account for a whole host of other processes such as the global economy, political, cultural and social processes, as well as the different dimensions within these processes such as gender, age, ethnicity, disability and sexual orientation if they are to be successful - a difficult task.

The final three chapters are dedicated to responses to social exclusion and evaluation techniques. Burden and Hamm focus on the policy responses of New Labour and the limitations of that response. However, this chapter is more an examination of the discourses that have influenced New Labour thinking, rather than an in-depth analysis of the impacts of specific policies.

In the penultimate chapter, Chanan focuses on community responses to social exclusion and gives some useful case study examples. The final chapter by Sanderson then examines evaluation techniques and outlines the problems surrounding traditional methods that call for concrete outputs that can be assessed statistically in contrast to the difficulties in assessing intangible outputs such as enhanced community pride or confidence.

Overall, although the book could have incorporated a time-line of relevant policies for those readers who are unfamiliar with the UK, this book presents a solid and accessible contribution to understanding the concept of social exclusion as applied in the UK.