Social Advantage and Disadvantage

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CHAPTER

15 Social Disadvantage and Place

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Abstract

Social disadvantage and advantage are highly spatially uneven. Social policy often focuses on particular places and there has been a growing trend of devolution of powers to the local level. Studies have also argued that 'place' may actually have a causal role in perpetuating disadvantage. Yet others argue the link between place and social disadvantage has been overstated and that individual characteristics are more important than location. This chapter provides an introduction to the geography of social disadvantage. It first considers how the geography of social disadvantage has changed over the past twenty years. Next, it considers key debates about the causality of these relationships. Finally, it develops some of the key implications of the changing geography of poverty for policy and practice.

Keywords: cities, geography, neighbourhood effects, place, poverty

Subject: Political Economy

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Social disadvantage is highly uneven across space. Disparities are evident at all scales and for most indicators of disadvantage. For example, a male in the Scottish city of Glasgow can expect to live to the age of 73, while one in the affluent London suburb of Harrow to live to 82 (ONS, 2014). In the US, a young person born to parents with incomes in the bottom quintile in San Jose has a 13 per cent chance of reaching the top quintile of incomes; a young person born in Charlotte has only a 4 per cent chance (Chetty et al., 2014). In Spain in 2013, the unemployment rate in Andalusia was over 36 per cent, but only 16 per cent in the Basque country (OECD, 2014). These disparities are not only wide but they are also, generally, increasing. Between 1995 and 2010, regional disparities in economic output (GDP per capita) increased in twenty out of thirty-three OECD economies (OECD, 2013). In the UK, geographical inequalities in mortality have been increasing since the early 1970s (Thomas et al., 2010).

Geographical disparities in social disadvantage matter for a number of reasons. First, the geography of social disadvantage influences the policy response to it. When patterns of social disadvantage change so should the support offered to the disadvantaged. Moreover, many policies are explicitly 'area based'—such

as the neighbourhood focus of much of the UK's urban renewal polices of the late 1990s and 2000s (Lupton et al., 2013). A second, related reason is that local policymakers are often being given increased funding, powers, and flexibilities to address social disadvantage locally. The past twenty years has seen a growing, albeit far from universal, trend to devolve power to the local level (Rodríguez-Pose and Gill, 2003). One aim of devolution is to help policy reflect local specificities and so address the problems of the most disadvantaged places.

A third reason why place may matter is the concern that it can be a causal factor in disadvantage. If this is
p. 305 so, then concentrations of disadvantage can ↳ actually perpetuate that disadvantage. For example, if disadvantaged groups live in areas with unfavourable neighbourhood characteristics such as poor quality schools or transport links, they may find it harder to gain employment and progress in employment (Glennerster et al., 1999). The relationship between disadvantage and place may be dynamic. For example, access to the best state schools is often allocated on the basis of proximity. Yet proximity is determined by the housing market which is itself influenced by incomes, meaning that spatial factors can reinforce inequality (Hamnett and Butler, 2011). Some have also argued, controversially, that the simple concentration of disadvantaged residents may result in further disadvantage—'neighbourhood effects'. These effects may arise if a lack of role models or restricted social networks worsen outcomes for people living in disadvantaged areas, irrespective of the other characteristics of those areas.

Yet, despite very visible spatial disparities, others argue the link between place and social disadvantage has been overstated (Gibbons et al., 2010). According to this view, who you are is more important than where you live and an individual's chances of social disadvantage or advantage are determined more by characteristics such as their education or personal background than their location. If this is correct, spatial disparities are simply reflections of the geography of socially disadvantaged people. Policy may then be better addressed at helping people with characteristics likely to lead to social disadvantage, regardless of the location of the disadvantaged.

This chapter considers the relationship between social disadvantage and advantage and place. It considers two principal spatial scales: cities and neighbourhoods. This is not to deny the importance of rural poverty, which remains a significant problem, but simply to reflect recent policy agendas in much of the world. The chapter is structured as follows. First, it considers the geography of social disadvantage and how this has changed using examples from both the global north and south. It focuses on urban areas and considers how economic change and changing housing markets have led to changes in the geography of poverty. Next, it outlines the key debates about the linkages between 'place' and social disadvantage and, in particular, the key causal question—is spatial variation in social disadvantage a cause or a consequence of inequality and poverty? Finally, it develops some of the key implications of the changing geography of poverty for policy and practice.

15.1 The Geography of Social Disadvantage

There is a long tradition of researching social disadvantage using geographical methods. Charles Booth, in his study of poverty in London, mapped poverty at a street level and categorized blocks of houses according
p. 306 to the social status ↳ of their inhabitants: red for the 'well-to-do'; black for 'semi-criminal'. Other seminal works have focused on 'place', such as Frederick Engels considering the slums of Manchester or George Orwell on the problems faced in Northern England in the depression. Much recent research in geography, social policy, and economics has focused on two spatial scales: the city, which is seen as economically important and the context for much disadvantage, and the neighbourhood, with researchers following Booth in the tradition of small area analysis of the nature of poverty. This section will consider both.

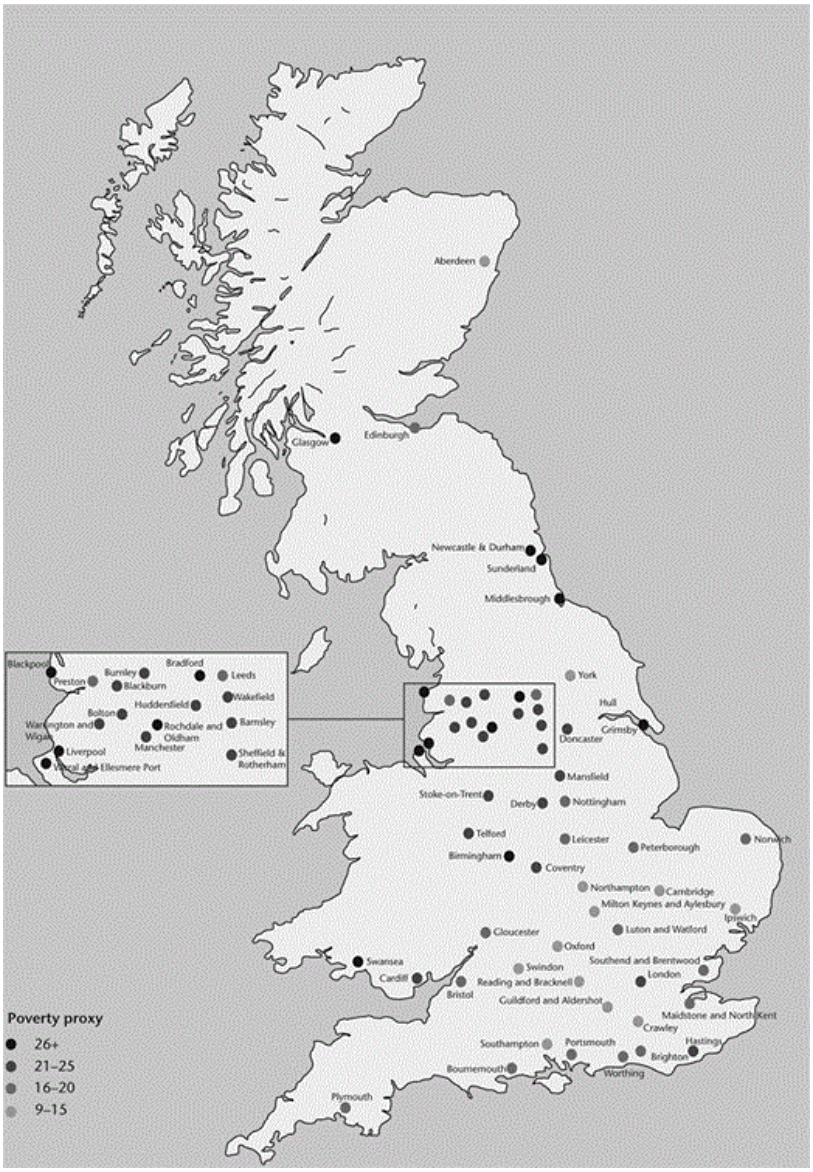
15.1.1 Urban Poverty in Developed and Developing Countries

Cities are increasingly seen as important units of economic analysis (World Bank, 2009). Policymakers in both the developed world and global south have highlighted the economic benefits of urban agglomeration, which allows the sharing of costly infrastructure, helps match workers into the appropriate employment and allows specialized economic actors to benefit from exchanges of knowledge and information (Duranton and Puga, 2004). Many countries have seen a resurgence of the city (at least rhetorically) and some central cities have experienced an influx of population and growing economic importance (Champion and Townsend, 2010; Turok and Mykhnenko, 2007). In the global south, this economic role was highlighted in the seminal 2009 World Development Report: *Reshaping Economic Geography*. The report was one of the most important attempts to highlight the links between 'place' and economic growth. It argued that cities were one of the three 'main catalysts of progress in the developed world over the past two centuries' (World Bank, 2009: xx) and highlighted the important role strong urban economies could play in reducing poverty.

This new narrative for cities focuses on their economic importance and potential for growth. Yet, while cities are important for economic growth, they also remain significant locations of social disadvantage (Lee et al., 2014). In many countries of the global north, long-term economic restructuring from the 1970s and 1980s worsened city economies and resulted in significant concentrations of urban poverty. Declining manufacturing employment and, in some smaller cities, extractive industries, left some cities in a state of economic deterioration (Lupton et al., 2013; Power et al., 2010; Turok and Edge, 1999). Local economies built on manufacturing often lacked the capacity to adapt to economic change: workforce skills were not suited to new industries, central cities contained dated industrial buildings and infrastructure, and a legacy of large employers meant there were too few growth-focused small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Cities such as Bradford in the UK or Wuppertal in Germany became exemplars of these trends as a
p. 307 declining textile industry led to long-term economic problems, reduced employment ↳ and eventually population loss (Turok and Mykhnenko, 2007). The most famous case of urban decline is Detroit, where declining employment in automobile manufacturing resulted in a vicious cycle of population decline, reduced local demand, falling tax revenues and the physical deterioration of the city. But cases of such stark decline are rare.

There is no single measure of the geography of disadvantage, but poverty is one potential indicator. Indicators of poverty at a city level are notoriously poor in the UK, but Fenton (2013) proposes an indicator based on benefits claiming. This is a good proxy for income poverty and one which is reliable at a local level and, unlike the more complex and recently introduced English Index of Multiple Deprivation (mentioned in Chapter 1, this volume), is comparable across time (Lee et al., 2014). Figure 15.1 maps this measure of poverty in the largest British cities—those defined in the government's State of the English Cities Database plus the major cities of Scotland and Wales (data is not available for Northern Ireland). The results show something of a core-periphery pattern, with cities nearer London and in the South of the UK tending to have the lowest rates of poverty. Reflecting the long-term legacy of industrial decline, poverty rates tend to be higher in cities in the north east of the country and in the cluster of cities in the North West and Yorkshire. Yet the results are far more complicated than a simple North-South divide. London itself has relatively high rates of poverty amongst the population as does Hastings on the south coast, while cities like York and even Leeds in the north perform better on this measure.

Figure 15.1.



Poverty rates in British cities, 2008

Note: Measure of poverty is the unadjusted means-tested benefits rate (UMBR) developed by Fenton (2013)—the share of households in a city claiming the most important means tested benefits, a close proxy with other measures of income poverty. 'Cities' are travel-to-work areas.

Source: Lee et al., 2014

Some argue that disparities between cities with strong economies and the ex-industrial cities will continue to grow: a process of divergence of incomes between regions within countries which has occurred even as incomes have converged between countries (Storper, 2013). The main reasons for this are the increased premium placed on skills and the tendency of skilled workers to cluster in cities with already highly qualified populations (Duranton and Monastiriotis, 2002). Interlinked processes of globalization, technological change, and industrial change have raised the wage premium on skills as skilled workers have been particularly important for the economy. For low-skilled workers, faced with low-wage competition from abroad, it has proven difficult to secure employment. Employment opportunities for low-skilled workers have been increasingly in service work such as working as security guards, cleaning, or personal services—all jobs reliant on proximity to high-skilled workers) (Autor and Dorn, 2013; and see Chapter 9, this volume). Yet at the same time, skilled workers have been moving to cities and regions which have

already high skill levels—with these cities and regions have been those which have experienced economic growth. The result has been a Catch-22 for cities with high concentrations of social disadvantage: cities
p. 308 need skilled workers for employment and economic growth, yet skilled workers are ↳

p. 309 ↳
increasingly moving to cities with other skilled workers. One outcome has been rising economic disparities between places.

These patterns of urban change have led to a disconnect between the cities experiencing growth and those with the highest rates of poverty, in the UK at least (Lee et al., 2014). Over the 2000s, the cities with the greatest population in poverty experienced the lowest growth levels over the subsequent period. Output growth (measured in terms of Gross Value Added per capita) was concentrated in the relatively affluent cities near to London or cities with financial services (Edinburgh) or extractive economies (Aberdeen). There was a reduction in poverty in the most deprived cities over this period, but this was unrelated to the strength of the local economy—local economic conditions are less important than national changes to the benefits system.

Patterns in the global south have differed. While there has been significant variation between countries, the growth of cities in countries such as China and India has resulted in higher average incomes in core agglomerations than in rural areas (World Bank, 2009). This income differential has encouraged the socially disadvantaged to move to cities (UN Habitat, 2008). The result has often been slums, unpleasant places to be, and visible sites of disadvantage. Yet the association between urbanization and economic growth has not been uniform, and while it has been apparent in Asia many African countries have experienced urbanization without the same progress in development (Turok, 2013). Concern about the growth of disadvantaged slums were obvious in the UN Habitat (2003) report *The Challenge of Slums*, which highlighted the issues faced by 924 million urban slum dwellers worldwide—a figure the report predicted will increase significantly. Social policy has often reflected this changing geography of poverty. In some cases, social policy has had to be reconfigured to meet the needs of the urban poor. Appleton et al. (2010) document how anti-poverty programmes were traditionally focused on rural areas, before the rise of a 'new urban poverty' in the late 1990s led to growing concerns among policymakers about the urban poor, although they argue that increases in absolute numbers of the urban poor were overstated, in China at least.

Yet the counter argument is that for many people living conditions in the slums are better than they would otherwise expect living in rural poverty. So while there are now more poor people living in cities than before, this is because of the potential of urban areas to reduce social disadvantage rather than because they increase disadvantage (UN Habitat, 2008). Urban areas increasingly present a contrast between highly visible poverty and affluence at close quarters, with nearby gated communities often a visible sign of the lack of integration between different parts of the urban economy (Turok, 2013). Cities—and even the slums
p. 310 they often contain—are not simply sites ↳ of social disadvantage but also can play a role in improving the living standards of their residents.

15.1.2 The Suburbanization of Poverty

There have also been important changes in the geography of social disadvantage within cities. One phenomenon in many OECD countries has been the suburbanization of poverty. Poverty has traditionally been viewed as an inner-city problem (Madden, 1996). The inner cities often had the cheapest housing and had born the cost of industrial decline. In his seminal research on poverty, Wilson (1996) famously documented the problems faced by the inner city poor of the US: technological and industrial change was reducing the wages of manual workers, employment was suburbanizing and low-income inner city residents lacked the transport (and skills) needed to get to the new jobs being created in suburbs. At the same time, those residents with the means to do so were leaving—and the predominantly black inner city community was left socially disrupted and in a paradoxically isolated position.

Yet this view of cities as the sites of poverty has also been challenged: both the US and UK have seen increased suburbanization of poverty. This has been due in part to a limited 'resurgence' of many inner cities—improved transport, declining crime and reduced pollution have made it viable to live in or close to city centres. While city centres were once locations of production, they are increasingly seen as sites for consumption with changing preferences for urban living and increased disposable incomes amongst some residents. House prices in inner areas have often risen and the economies of inner areas were doing relatively better (Kneebone and Berube, 2013). Thus, as the central city became more desirable it became more expensive; less well-off residents have often been moved into suburban areas which were, at the same time, seeing their economies decline.

The US has been the exemplar of this trend. Between 2000 and 2010 the number of poor individuals in US suburbs grew by 5.3 million, a rate of increase of 53 per cent—double that of the rate of increase in cities, 23 per cent (Kneebone and Berube, 2013). In 2011, for the first time, there were more poor Americans living in suburbs than living in cities: 16.4 million relative to 13.4 million poor urban dwellers. While they still have many poor residents, the longstanding view of poverty as an inner city concern has been challenged.

These trends have not been apparent in all European cities, where poverty was often already a suburban issue as large housing estates built on the edge of the city containing relatively deprived residents (Power, 2012). In her seminal book on housing estates, Anne Power (1997) sets out how one of the consequences of
p. 311 rebuilding in the long period after the Second World War was the ↳ development of mass housing often in peripheral parts of cities. Surveying twenty estates across five countries, she shows how many estates had experienced long-term physical decline but that decline was neither uniform nor unchallenged by local residents who often acted to address these problems.

Many of the estates Power considered were historically located in the periphery of cities. Yet further suburbanization of disadvantage has been clear more recently in cities like London, patterns had been different and much of London's inner areas were inhabited by disadvantaged residents with relatively affluent suburbs around them, particularly to the West. A changing preference for urban living and changing housing policy led to significant increases in poverty rates in the outer boroughs. Lupton et al. (2013) consider the period 2001–11 and show small declines in one measure of poverty in Inner London but increases across all three areas of outer London.

Shifts in the geography of social disadvantage have some implications for policy. Kneebone and Berube (2013) set out three of these. First, they can lead to greater distance between the socially disadvantaged and potential employment. This 'jobs mismatch' may make it harder for people to access employment. Geographical shifts such as this matter as population dispersion leads to problems such as lack of access to transport and so employment opportunities (Power, 2012). Second, such patterns can distance the socially disadvantaged from potential support. Urban areas of the US are more likely to have charities which will support the socially disadvantaged and public services better targeted to provide help and advice to

disadvantaged groups. This problem is underpinned by a third factor, with an out-dated perception of suburban areas as affluent meaning they receive too little support.

15.1.3 Neighbourhood Dynamics and Spatially Concentrated Disadvantage

Social disadvantage is most noticeable at the neighbourhood level and classic studies have considered poor neighbourhoods and contrasted them with more affluent areas. Charles Booth had considered the relationship between the poverty of the East End of London and the far more affluent West of the city (Briggs, 1968). Some of the research focus has been on the dynamics of neighbourhood change. In her seminal work, Jane Jacobs discussed the dynamics of neighbourhood decline and the potential for 'vicious circles' in the 'slums' of US cities in the 1960s (Jacobs, 1969). She describes how population change and physical decline work as reinforcing processes: less affluent populations move in, areas become neglected, and the remaining population leave.

The seminal approach to categorizing neighbourhoods in this fashion comes from Lupton and Power (2002). They suggest three ways of understanding the characteristics of neighbourhoods. First, there are
p. 312 intrinsic ↳ characteristics—such as location, the housing stock, and transport infrastructure. These characteristics can be hard (or, at least, expensive) for policy to change. Second, these processes will be exacerbated by spatial sorting of residents into particular neighbourhoods. As they have fewer choices about where to live, and sometimes due to allocation of social housing, the 'least advantaged areas become populated by the least advantaged people' (2001: 133). Finally, this concentration of deprivation can exacerbate the area's problems: for example, by developing a negative area reputation, crime, or worse local environment.

But there has been a stronger focus in the literature on processes of gentrification, in some ways the reverse process. Affluent incomers (the ironic term 'gentrification' is based on the notion of the Victorian 'gentry') would improve the housing stock of a particular neighbourhood (Hamnett, 2003). This would result in the opposite type of circle, with owners moving in and house prices rising—eventually pricing out the original occupants. Not the same 'vicious circle' which Jacobs had considered, but certainly one which could be vicious for the existing residents. While some have suggested that gentrification is an aggressive process driven by the middle classes, others have interpreted it as the inevitable result of changing population characteristics and a growing share of well-educated, professional workers (Hamnett, 2003).

If the residents of a place are disadvantaged, this does not mean that they will remain disadvantaged over the long term. Jacobs (1969) also highlighted the transitory nature of place, and the fact that low-income neighbourhoods often operate as transitory neighbourhoods from which people move upwards. Robson et al. (2008) divide deprived neighbourhoods into four categories, on the basis of where residents move to before or after. Places are either: (1) transit areas—where people come from less deprived areas and move to less deprived areas, residents live in these neighbourhoods for temporary periods; (2) escalators—which serve as a stepping stone for residents moving upwards (3) isolated areas—which take residents from other deprived areas, and lose residents to similarly deprived areas, with no upwards progression (4) improver areas—to which people move from less deprived neighbourhoods, in a similar process to gentrification.

Thinking about deprived areas as dynamic places has some implications. First, it is no longer enough to think of neighbourhoods as lying on a simple spectrum between 'deprived' and 'affluent'. Places are more complicated than that and many places may serve as transit points for social advantage over the long term (even Robson et al.'s typology misses significant variation between deprived places). Second and similarly, empirical work which focuses only on 'deprivation' as a measure may be missing significant variation. Finally, this raises significant issues for policy which should focus on the particular characteristics of local
p. 313 areas, rather than simply the level of deprivation of those ↳ residents who live there in one point in time.

Clearly, the most important spatial focus is likely to be places were residents remain poor, not those which simply serve as stepping-stones in the lives of residents.

15.2 The Relationship between Place and Social Disadvantage

Changes in the geography of social disadvantage are interesting in a purely academic sense, but they also have implications for social policy. This section considers two of the most policy-relevant facets of the relationship between place and social disadvantage or advantage, focusing on local service provision and the potential existence of a causal relationship.

15.2.2 Local Public Services

'Place' influences the availability and quality of public services. Some services, such as schools, are often offered on geographically specific terms, such as catchment areas or selection by distance. Other services, such as transport, are inherently geographical and will shape the extent to which individuals can participate in society. Some important studies have considered this relationship and shown that the relationship between access to public services and social disadvantage is two-way: affluent people tend to move to areas with better public services, but also disadvantaged communities can also put a strain on public service provision resulting in worse outcomes. One example is schooling in East London, a case considered by Hamnett and Butler (2011). Distance is used to decide the allocation of school places. Because affluent residents have more choice in the housing market, they are better able to find homes near better schools and fulfil their choice. The structural features of income inequality are replicated, through the housing market, in disadvantage in the allocation of schooling, and so the eventual reinforcing of disadvantage. The result is a situation where 'geography is becoming the basis for rationing access to some forms of welfare' (2011: 479).

A second example of the relationship between place and public services is how transport links—often an 'intrinsic' place characteristic—influence access to work (Lupton and Power, 2002). Those in disadvantaged communities which are some distance from others can face a double disadvantage, as they are both unable to access opportunities through public transport but also less able to afford alternatives such as cars (Power, 2012). For example, access to employment is often dependent on the availability of suitable transport: the routes must be appropriate, timings must be compatible with shift-work, early or late starts, and the cost must not be prohibitive (Owen et al., 2012). Because of this problem, lack of transport is not just seen as a
p. 314 discrete problem, but as ↳ potentially a causal factor in a number of different areas of social policy, including poor health outcomes, low educational attainment, and labour market disadvantage (Lucas, 2012). Yet transport is intrinsically related to place, and changing geographical patterns of poverty will require new policies aiming at addressing this problem.

15.2.3 Limitations of a 'Place-based' Perspective

There are two important limitations to a place-based perspective. The first of these is the tendency to make generalizations about the characteristics of all residents based on the aggregate characteristics of the place: the ecological fallacy. Assuming all residents of a deprived neighbourhood are poor may ignore the affluence of some residents; similarly, there may be many living in poverty in rich neighbourhoods. For example, while London has a very high average income it would be wrong to label all residents as affluent—as Figure 15.1 shows, it has many residents in poverty.

The ecological fallacy has implications for both research on the link between social disadvantage and place and policy. It implies a need to consider not just average measures of local disadvantage in area studies, but also where the disadvantaged may be 'hidden' in averages. Otherwise, place-based policies risk ignoring many socially disadvantaged residents or providing benefits to many who do not need them. One example is the British Sure-Start programme which aimed to improve life chances for children growing up in some of the most deprived neighbourhoods of the UK. Area-based policy was explicitly included in the programme design and, to avoid stigma, all residents of the areas targeted were eligible for their services, regardless of whether they were disadvantaged themselves (Department for Education, 2011). Yet early evaluations suggested that residents with higher levels of human capital were often able to take advantage of this programme, meaning it was often a poorly targeted policy (Department for Education, 2005: 33).

Spatial scale is a second important issue when considering the relationship between place and social advantage or disadvantage. Aggregating at different scales will yield different results. Relationships are normally starkest at the smallest spatial scale, such as the neighbourhood, and will tend to show pronounced differences between places. Measures of social disadvantage will differ according to the boundaries used, making this a significant problem for research (this is sometimes referred to as the Modifiable Areal Unit Problem). In work on the impact of the neighbourhood on local school performance, for example, it has proven a difficult matter to define the 'neighbourhoods' which may be important for local residents, rather than the administrative boundaries on which research is based (Weinhardt, 2013).

p. 315 A further complication is spatial sorting. Individuals move from place to place, and these moves are not random but determined by a range of factors including the nature of the place and the individual characteristics. As discussed above with relation to neighbourhoods, one important implication of this spatial sorting is that neighbourhood social disadvantage does not always mean most residents are disadvantaged in the long term. While the neighbourhood may remain poor, individuals may sort in and out of it according to their life stage and current incomes. A second implication of this spatial sorting is that it has led a number of authors to challenge the importance of area effects as determinants of social disadvantage. If individuals move to neighbourhoods because of particular characteristics—such as access to cheap housing—this complicates any relationships and leads to a challenge to the simple causality which suggests place has a causal role in disadvantage. Instead, the causal factors may be reversed as those at risk of disadvantage are sorted into the worst locations.

An example of this effect is the debate about the causes of the higher poverty rate outside of US metropolitan areas than within them. Two reasons have been suggested for this—a lack of jobs, which represents an area effect, or the tendency for residents with relatively lower incomes to sort into non-metropolitan areas. In research using US panel data, Fisher (2007) shows that both effects are important in explaining poverty rates. In a similar study which investigates wage disparities between UK cities, Gibbons et al. (2010) show that sorting of individuals into different areas explains the lion's share of disparities between places—although they consider wages rather than poverty and their estimation strategy makes a number of assumptions about the nature of individual's movements. In practice, few researchers would claim that area effects are the dominant cause of disparities between places.

15.2.4 Place as a Causal Factor in Social Disadvantage

Given the highly visible concentrations of disadvantage in many cities and neighbourhoods, and the fact that these disparities are widening in many countries, a dominant question has been the extent to which the geography of social disadvantage is a causal factor in perpetuating disadvantage, or more simply a reflection of existing patterns. This has not been a new argument (Glennerster et al., 1999), but it acquired particular salience in the UK when the New Labour government's policy focus on deprived neighbourhoods was based at least partly on the apparent assumption that concentrated disadvantage restricted social mobility. In a famous speech at the start of his period in Office in 1997, Prime Minister Tony Blair declared that: 'no one in future decades should be seriously disadvantaged by where they lived' (Lupton et al., 2013: 4).

p. 316 The focus of research in this area has been on the neighbourhood and the idea of 'neighbourhood effects', where outcomes are worse for individuals living in deprived neighbourhoods beyond what would be expected given their other characteristics. In the UK, while the heyday of neighbourhood-focused policy was under the New Labour government (Lupton et al., 2013), the belief that neighbourhood matters for social advantage has remained entrenched. In the foreword to the UK Social Mobility Strategy of 2011, the Deputy Prime Minister argued that: 'In Britain today, life chances are narrowed for too many by the circumstances of their birth: the home they're born into, the neighbourhood they grow up in or the jobs their parents do.' (HM Government, 2011: 4).

Despite the focus of policymakers on reducing neighbourhood effects, studies considering whether they exist or not have yielded mixed results. Qualitative researchers and those using non-experimental quantitative methods have tended to find that neighbourhood effects exist (Weinhardt, 2013). Yet this interpretation has been challenged by evidence using an experimental research design, famously building on the 'Moving to Opportunity' (MTO) programme which began in the United States in 1994. The programme saw households in some deprived areas randomly allocated into either housing in better neighbourhoods, social housing in a deprived area, or nothing. The random allocation of households into the programme meant MTO is seen by many as the best possible way of demonstrating causal links between neighbourhood status and educational outcomes.

The findings from the MTO study have been the subject of considerable debate. In particular, in the absence of other experimental evidence and given the mixed and often positive evidence which exists for neighbourhood effects elsewhere, some have suggested that rejecting the existence of neighbourhood effects based on results from a single policy, with its own biases and problems, may not be a valid conclusion. Others have highlighted other problems with research using MTO: the relatively small sample size, the challenge of identifying effects which were not large in magnitude, and the often minor changes in neighbourhood which were experienced by participants (Quigley et al., 2008).

Yet the neighbourhood is not the only scale at which 'place' may matter for social disadvantage. More recent work has considered the impact of larger areas on life chances. In an important US study, Chetty et al. (2014) have considered the geography of intergenerational mobility in US cities using data on child and parental income. They show pronounced differences in mobility between cities. A child in Charlotte whose parents are in the bottom 20 per cent of incomes have only a 4.4 per cent chance of reaching the top 20 per cent. Yet the chances of such upward mobility are much higher for children born in Salt Lake City (10.8 per cent) or
p. 317 San Jose (12.9 per cent). More ↳ importantly, these differences seem to be partially explained by the characteristics of the city itself. Relatively unequal cities tend to have lower upward mobility with inequality limiting the extent to which individuals are able to progress up (or down) the income scale relative to their parents. Local community networks, involvement or other measures of 'social capital' (see Chapter 4 in this volume) also seem associated with greater inter-generational mobility, as are a smaller share of single parents. Geographical factors at the city level are also important and, in a result which partially supports the

view that neighbourhood factors matter, they find segregation is negatively associated with upward mobility, although they argue that their analysis cannot be considered causal. Moreover, the local labour market does not seem to matter significantly in determining mobility.

A second point related to these causal analyses is that it is entirely possible that place matters more for some groups than others. Chetty et al. (2014) find that many of the effects they observe about inter-generational mobility are greatest for low-income children, that is, place matters more for those on lowest incomes. Other studies show that 'place' matters more for outcomes for some groups than others. Green and Owen (2006) show that the variations between employment rates across British regions are far higher for low-skilled workers than those educated to degree level or above. Low-skilled workers are less likely to move to economically successful places and their chances of employment are more reliant on local economic strength than skilled workers, who tend to be in employment wherever they live.

15.3 Conclusions: Implications for Policy and Practice

This chapter has considered the relationship between 'place' and social advantage or disadvantage. Both concepts are broad and open to interpretation, and no chapter could be comprehensive about the developments in all neighbourhoods or cities. Instead, it has highlighted some of the key trends in the geography of social disadvantage, the arguments around them and the implications for social policy.

The chapter first considered some of the key geographical scales at which social disadvantage may be evident. At a city level, there has been considerable discussion about the nature of industrial decline in many developed economies and the fact that, while some cities have been resurgent, others have found it harder to cope with economic change. The residents of these cities are more likely to experience social disadvantage than those elsewhere. Most forecasts suggest that the prospects of a significant economic resurgence in these cities are slim, in the short term at least. Analysis at a neighbourhood level also reveals
p. 318 changes in the geography of poverty and related patterns of ↳ gentrification of inner cities and suburbanization of social disadvantage. Disparities between rich and poor neighbourhoods are not new phenomena, but neighbourhood-based measures of social disadvantage are important because many policies to address disadvantage are delivered at a neighbourhood level (Lupton and Power, 2002). Some also argue that living in a deprived neighbourhood can play a causal role in disadvantage, although the existence of these 'neighbourhood effects' has been challenged by other researchers.

The chapter then considered the relationship between social disadvantage and place. It highlighted a number of analytical challenges faced by researchers working in this field—the dynamic nature of cities or neighbourhoods and the problems in adequately demarcating boundaries of areas for study. It suggested that while much recent work suggests neighbourhood effects are unimportant, other evidence suggests that place—in the form of city of birth—matters significantly for life chances over the long-term. Moreover, as policy is often best delivered at a local level, 'place' remains important.

Much of the literature on social disadvantage and place has considered the potential existence of 'neighbourhood effects'. Yet the geography of social disadvantage has important implications for policy, regardless of whether 'neighbourhood effects' exist. There is a distinction between policies focused on area outcomes, such as the UK's neighbourhood renewal policy, which relied to some extent on the existence of neighbourhood effects, and policy focused on particular areas which may be the best form of public services regardless. The changing geography of suburban poverty in the US, for example, highlights the importance of ensuring that provision matches need. Similarly, given concern about the potential for spatial markets, such as housing, to reinforce existing inequalities some form of place-based solution may be the only possible one. Moreover, many policies which address poverty will need to consider local context, regardless of whether 'place' has any causal role in disadvantage (Glasmeier et al., 2008). For example, local labour

market context needs to be considered when planning employment interventions. While ‘place’ is only one factor explaining social advantage or disadvantage, understanding the geography of social disadvantage is an important part of any attempt to reduce it.

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