Neighbourhood Policymaking and Political Discourses of Exclusion, Risk and Effect:  
An Interpretive Policy Analysis of the Evolution of Place-Based Programs in the UK and Canada

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Abstract

The impact of various forms of neighbourhood change on the social fabric of metropolitan areas is a major concern throughout affluent Western nations. In addressing spatially-concentrated problems, urban policy-making and development patterns have become increasingly similar across the advanced capitalist countries. There is a transnational movement among policy-makers toward the application of geographically targeted, neighbourhood-based interventions referred to as area-based, or place-based policies. In cities across Western Europe, Australia, the United States, and Canada, we see the emergence of a new policy language: new policy frames, or storylines, which function to discursively construct the individuals and communities that reside in technocratically-defined ‘disadvantaged’, ‘priority’ or ‘at-risk’ neighbourhoods.

Asking the question ‘why do certain ideas catch hold in public policy?’, this dissertation utilizes interpretive policy analysis (IPA) to understand how policy actors go about adopting transnational policy language, ideas and concepts – and how they enact them in their local contexts. This dissertation is focused on place-based policies and programs in the United Kingdom (UK) and Canada. Divided into three stand-alone papers, the
dissertation explores three different but conceptually analogous topics. In doing so, it outlines the geographical and ideological origins of a place-based approach to local governance, and the means through which it has been established in local systems of governance.

In the absence of scholarly research on ‘how, why, where and with what effects’ place-based policies have been circulated, learned, reformulated, and mobilized, this dissertation seeks to develop an understanding of the adaptations in the modalities and rhetoric of political actors, institutions and policy regimes which have accompanied the enactment of place-based policies at various scales of governance. IPA links ‘high’ politics (i.e., elite political institutions and multinational organizations) with ‘low’ politics (i.e., local and community-level governance). It orders and relates discursive elements (subjects, objects, tropes, narratives) to processes of meaning-making, representation and action.

Combining empirical and meaning-focused analysis, IPA has only recently gained increased recognition as a research methodology in part due to the 2006 publication of Dvora Yanow and Peregrine Schwartz-Sha’s *Interpretation and Method* textbook. The approach has emerged in response to the increasing cross- or interdisciplinarity of policy studies, bringing empirical rigour to the analysis of problems of meaning (and meaning-making) that “bear on action as well as understanding (Yanow & Schwartz-Sha, 2006: xii).” Rooted in the deliberative democratic tradition, the method emphasizes the construction of ideas and interests in processes of institutional design and change. This approach is used here to help account for the assemblage of policies, political discourses and regulatory tools that have produced new, place-based logics of *social exclusion, risk* and *neighbourhood effects* that are now widely understood as universal aspects of cities.

*The first paper.* Focusing on the political logic of ‘social exclusion’, the first paper in the series explores the role of Great Britain’s ‘strong neighbourhoods’ policies and area-based initiatives (ABIs) in shaping both the language and the application the City of Toronto’s 2005 Strong Neighbourhoods Strategy (SNS). In addition to identifying
transfer agents (i.e., the actors and institutions involved), attention is paid to the structural and institutional contexts which influence the agency of policy actors in both Britain and Canada.

The second paper. Extending the analysis to the programmatic level, the second paper focuses on Toronto’s ‘hot spot’ community-based policing programs which target ‘high-risk’ neighbourhoods and their residents (particularly young Black males deemed to be ‘at-risk’). Developed alongside the city’s Strong Neighbourhood Strategy, the Toronto Anti-Violence Intervention Strategy (TAVIS) draws from similar discretionary proactive models from the US and UK. Following widespread public disapproval of TAVIS’ stop-and-search practices, the newest iteration of the city’s community policing program, called Furthering Our Community by Uniting Services (FOCUS) (2015), borrows directly from Glasgow, Scotland’s community-based ‘hub’ model.

The third paper. The third paper is focused on the scholarly assumptions that underlie place-based policies in the UK and Canada. Beginning with William Julius Wilson’s 1987 The Truly Disadvantaged, a widespread ‘spatial turn’ has occurred across urban planning, public policy, sociology and social work disciplines involving an ideational understanding of the ‘neighbourhood effects’ of city ills (e.g., poverty, inequality, and crime). Since the 1990s there have been numerous studies seeking to account for neighbourhood-level variations of phenomena such as delinquency, violence and crime, routine activity patterns, and mutual trust on residents’ life chances – beyond the effects of structural and individual characteristics. The empirical validity of the neighbourhood effects research is called into question because it tends to ignore the structural drivers and selection processes that sort people into neighbourhoods. Also, neighbourhood boundaries are much more dynamic and permeable than the census tract (CT) boundaries that usually define priority neighbourhoods.