

# Antipode

A Radical Journal of Geography

**Geoffrey DeVerteuil**, *Resilience in the Post-Welfare Inner City: Voluntary Sector Geographies in London, Los Angeles and Sydney*, Bristol: Policy Press, 2015. ISBN: 9781447316558 (cloth); ISBN: 9781447316640 (paper); ISBN: 9781447321286 (ebook)

Published in March 2015, this book has by now gained even greater relevance to the study of voluntary sector organisations (VSO's), specifically for street homelessness in current “post-welfare” contexts. In the UK alone, emergency housing and other outreach services face mounting pressure as a result of declining state subsidy for welfare and cuts to local authority budgets. Coupled with rising levels of homelessness and increasingly unaffordable housing across cities world-wide, the current environment presents a critical conjuncture for the voluntary sector. The central aim of this book is to demonstrate precisely *how* voluntary sector service hubs have managed to exercise “resilience” amidst ongoing welfare state restructuring and gentrification-induced displacement of populations and services. It is within the context of this neoliberal project, or “austerity urbanism” (Peck 2012), that DeVerteuil situates his book, based on research with 100 VSOs in London, Los Angeles and Sydney, and a culmination of work spanning an entire career. The concept of “resilience” is now ubiquitous within policy and public discourse and has gained increasing traction within academic research. However, the concept has been met with significant criticism, not least from critical geographers such as Tom Slater (2014), who have highlighted its vagueness and individualising tendencies (p.33). DeVerteuil therefore positions this book to rescue the concept not only from obscurity but from neoliberal agendas, by demonstrating the value of resilience as an object of study in itself and offering a “critical resilience of the residuals” (p.25).

The book is organised into three parts, starting with conceptual and methodological drivers for the research in Part One. An emphasis on outright resistance to domination and transformation in urban studies is critiqued on the basis that it downplays less overt forms of

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resistance, such as simply “staying put” (p.25). Instead, this book primarily focuses on the ordinary, more everyday forms of resilience that represent agency in varied forms. In Chapter Two, DeVerteuil offers a seven- point working definition of resilience as the foundation for his critical approach, building on the work of Cindi Katz (2014) and others on social resistance, and the work of critical urban geographers on spatial resistance to gentrification and displacement. Chapter Three builds on this conceptual foundation through an analysis of the voluntary sector as residuals of a former welfare state operating in a shifting context, negotiating messy relations between the state and market. In doing so, narratives of “post-welfarism” and neoliberalism are challenged as totalising and deterministic, particularly for the tendency to position VSOs as mere “handmaidens” of neoliberalism (p.9). A more hopeful tone is then set by emphasising the role of care over coercion within VSOs and challenging the overly “punitive tropes” that the author associates with urban studies (see also DeVerteuil 2014). In Chapter Four this critique of grand theory is extended to key proponents of the revanchism thesis such as Neil Smith (1996) and the “pristine and clear cut representations of a messy, muddled reality” that are often sought after by critical urban theorists (p.16). This critique justifies the author’s empirical and grounded approach that seeks to offer a more “nuanced, if alternative portrayal of the sector” (p.55).

Part Two develops this alternative narrative of agency and active resilience through the extensive empirical data collected throughout the case studies, organised into four distinct place types that reflect levels of gentrification, concentration of voluntary sector organisations, population diversity and the existence of punitive welfare policy. These place types include “established gentrified” (Chapter Six), “mixed” (Chapter Seven), “pioneer gentrified” (Chapter Eight) and “immigrant enclaves” (Chapter Nine). Pressures to balance the visibility of homelessness and the image of places with the needs of populations who depend upon access to services is one of the most significant themes highlighted, demonstrated through the example of Westminster and its soup runs, as well as anti-begging

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campaigns and efforts to privatise public space, in Chapter Six. However, DeVerteuil takes this opportunity to assert a central argument, that gentrification and the enclosure of urban space doesn't necessarily contribute to revanchist urban politics. Rather, we see that NIMBYism and entrapment of services within urban centres can, in some instances, actually present a resilience strategy in itself, if indirectly, by maintaining the location of services through containment and wider public concerns for the visibility of poverty.

The roles of the public and residential histories in processes of gentrification and VSO displacement are demonstrated in Chapter Seven, through public activism and acceptance or denial of services and their clients. This resilience factor, albeit transient, is exemplified by Surry Hills' gay community in Sydney where initial resistance to gentrification subsided through the dispersal of the gay population and entry of new gentrifiers to the area. Chapter Eight continues the theme of individual agency as resilience and adds further weight to the book's critique of revanchist urban policy through case studies of service hubs in LA's Downtown and Skid Row. Here, service users are protected by the concentration of service hubs which acts as a barrier to gentrification, and by the work of VSOs who mitigate the negative impacts of urban policy for clients, revealing "the punitive and supportive in co-dependent kinship" (p.171). The importance of VSO concentrations and the temporal nature of resilience is developed further in Chapter Nine in the immigrant enclaves place type, offering a starkly relevant but hitherto understudied analysis of race and immigration patterns in processes of gentrification and displacement. Whilst Hispanic communities of Pico-Union in LA operate as a long-standing barrier resistance to gentrification, Bangladeshi communities in London have been exposed to global economic forces and subsequent gentrification-induced displacement. This chapter bears particular relevance when considering the "post-racial", post-Brexit politics that the UK faces, and the vulnerability of "Black, Asian, and minority ethnic"-specific housing and support services to funding cuts.

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Chapter Ten builds a strategy for resilience based on this comparative study of resilience, offering a typology of institutional strategies based on ownership or leasing of buildings, community resistance, and state support. Whilst establishing differences between national welfare contexts, one of the book's most important overall conclusions is the increasing risk of dislocation between service hub locations and their clients within each city region, as a result of the dispersal or suburbanisation of poverty and entrapment of services. Developing Esping-Andersen's (1990) welfare state regime analysis and its Anglo-Saxon category, this chapter also reveals a distinct difference in the state support experienced by services in the UK and the US, where UK services demonstrated greater dependency on state subsidy than US-based services which were more likely to adopt market-oriented survival strategies. However, it is state subsidy and the role of the market that is perhaps under-represented in this book. As local authorities in the UK increasingly look towards dispersed private rented sector housing and residual "floating support" as a model for local homelessness relief, and VSOs like hostels are decommissioned, the limited discussion of local policy, state subsidy and the market in future commissioning of services consequently renders the analysis of resilience at the level of local actors problematic.

However, as this book has a distinctly urban- rather than policy-oriented focus, these criticisms may be unfair. This level of local detail may also be an unreasonable expectation for such an ambitious book that covers three city regions and national welfare contexts. However, the absence of such important structural factors from discussion may leave readers with question marks hanging over the final part of the book, which proposes the analytic and critical value of the findings. DeVerteuil does indeed argue that to focus on "overturning the system" is perhaps unrealistic and unhelpful for VSOs and that instead we should view "resilience more as a precursor, a prerequisite for eventual transformation" (p.219). This transformative emphasis is then advanced in the final chapter by introducing the "commons", building upon work by critical geographers (Chatterton 2010; Hodkinson 2012; Jeffrey et al.

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2012), and highlighting service hubs as sites for collective action and use by multiple interest groups. Whilst this suggestion of resistance to urban enclosure is tempered through mention of the “conflicted nature” of the voluntary sector and its entanglement with neoliberalism and the market, the reader is still left wondering how VSOs might realistically be able to demonstrate resilience or be transformative under these circumstances. The focus on the agency and resistance of local actors in the book may undermine this very aim, by making assumptions about the capacity of services to effect change within such a challenging political and economic context. The increasing role of private interests in the criminalisation of activities in public spaces also requires further attention, as a particular manifestation of revanchism and a considerable challenge to the transformation or “commoning” that the book ultimately advocates. Nonetheless, DeVerteuil demonstrates well the complex interplay of public, private and voluntary sectors across the three city regions studied and offers real insight around the varied strategies that have enabled VSOs’ survival. Whilst the book is aimed at critical geographers it should also have broader appeal across the social sciences, and to anyone with an active interest in the enduring role of voluntary sector welfare services and the challenges that they face.

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