

Book review: Urban regeneration in the UK

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Urban Regeneration in the UK

Andrew Tallon, 2020 (3rd ed.)

London, Routledge

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Urban regeneration takes many forms, both in a national and international context, and is a fundamental way of understanding the ways in which cities are devised, maintained, and how we, as a society, navigate them. It could be said that in the third edition of *Urban Regeneration in the UK*, which provides the first update of this text since 2013, Andrew Tallon has a lot of ground to cover from the past seven years of Coalition and subsequent Conservative government urban regeneration, which provides a key distinction from previous editions. However, there seems to be few better qualified than Tallon to write such a substantial and well-informed textbook, which is aimed towards and accessible for individuals at different stages of understanding of this multi-layered concept.

As part of its 15 comprehensive chapters and guided further reading, this textbook explores the history of urban regeneration in its many forms and throughout different political and societal contexts. At the outset, this textbook establishes the scope of each chapter, be that exploring a period of urban regeneration policy in history, such as the entrepreneurialism in the 1980s as part of Thatcherism, or a theoretical exploration of a concept inherently linked to urban regeneration, such as the increasingly competitive nature of cities in a neoliberal society, the development of 'cities of culture' and housing-led regeneration initiatives. To anyone reading the book who is new to the concept of urban regeneration, it is welcomed that the book delineates and devotes whole chapters to each topic, providing a clear and distinctive tone for each. Similarly, the clearly structured nature of its chapters allows for effective navigation in subsequent reading and referencing.

The earlier sections of the text begin by exploring the timeline of urban regeneration policy

following the Second World War, ending with the austerity measures that began in 2010; including all different forms of urban regeneration in between, such as the Urban Renaissance found at the turn of the 21st century. Within these sections, Tallon takes time to explain the societal and political context of that period, to understand why particular choices were made and presents the merits and limitations of each policy adopted. For example, Tallon makes a point of clearly distinguishing between early forms of urban regeneration, such as the Green Belt and New Towns, and the changes resulting from the governments of Thatcher, which promoted urban regeneration in the context of entrepreneurialism. Highlighting the differences between governments clearly demonstrates the differential approach to urban regeneration based on the political standpoint at that time and helps present a narrative for readers to understand throughout. However, Tallon does make a point of highlighting that whilst each period has its own policies for urban regeneration, these are not intended to be mutually exclusive, suggesting that the evolution of urban regeneration may not be as clear and consistent as sometimes presented.

Throughout, Tallon makes use of several examples of urban regeneration in UK cities as case study sites for a deeper exploration, something that was strongly welcomed by this reviewer. Beyond providing further analysis of the concept of urban regeneration, the use of case studies situates the reader with further context as to the policies and practices used in regenerating urban spaces. For example, after explaining the history of the Urban Development Corporations in Chapter 3, Tallon goes on to specifically use the failure of Bristol's Urban Development Corporation as a case study to further explore the concept in a historical and contextual manner; to highlight the limitations that this form of urban regeneration presented for Bristol. The use of case studies such as this allows the reader to take their understanding and see it applied in a practical and prevalent example to further their understanding. Providing a mixture of positive and negative case study examples, based out the results of the urban regeneration when compared to the intended effect, also demonstrates the differential outcomes for urban regeneration that cities encounter.

Maintaining an analytical perspective throughout, Tallon cleverly synthesises the critical issues present in each chapter and suggests how the future of urban regeneration could be affected as a result, reflecting both a retrospective and prospective approach to the text. The use of visual mediums, such as diagrams, tables and example photos from across the UK (the latter of which are largely taken by the author) help provide further context for the reader and have been effectively used to synthesise large amounts of information into an understandable and clear format. An example of this is Table 2.3., which covers 11 years' worth of major events and effects within its scope. From the perspective of this reviewer, this textbook could benefit from the inclusion of more visual examples to ground the analysis being conducted by Tallon for the benefit of the reader, particularly those who are new to the concept. However, it is hard to envisage an example of a portion of this tightly drafted textbook that could be removed for the inclusion of further visual explorations, representing the detailed scope and depth of analysis provided by Tallon.

It is stated that this textbook is to be 'aimed primarily at under-graduate and postgraduate students involved in the study of urban regeneration and cities more generally' (p. 24), alongside various types of practitioner for whom urban regeneration may intersect with their profession. By prompting 'study questions', at the conclusion of each chapter, Tallon seeks to question the reader's knowledge and understanding of the information that has preceded it, reflecting the intended audience of the textbook and promoting the idea of developing an evolving level of knowledge throughout. To aid those who wish to extend their knowledge further following this text, and perhaps recognising the limitations of the textbook of this size, even across its approaching 300 pages, Tallon guides readers at the close of each chapter to further reading that can be conducted if so desired. Thus, it is argued that this textbook can be used as a comprehensive foundation of knowledge; this reviewer recommends that it should be the starting point for students at all levels interested in the concept of urban regeneration.

For those outside of academia but with an interest in urban regeneration, this textbook is

equally accessible through its well-defined structure. Tallon manages to explain complicated issues of urban regeneration without being too simplified in its exploration and dedicates sections of chapters to clearly explain potentially new and complicated concepts to readers, such as social exclusion. This allows the reader to continue throughout the text with little confusion and hesitancy. In sum, Tallon has managed to effectively write a text that appeals and engages with readers of every possible level of prior understanding, and which should benefit those interested at any stage of learning.

Overall, this textbook provides a clear and comprehensive exploration of urban regeneration within the UK. For anyone wishing to expand their knowledge of the different processes, contexts and historical underpinnings of urban regeneration, this textbook should be used as the starting point. As mentioned throughout this review, Tallon does a superb job in consolidating several decades of policy and theory in this most recent edition, and this reviewer does not envy the responsibility of Tallon for writing a 4th edition following the next few years' worth of urban regeneration.