

# Neighbourhood mechanisms

## \_initial, sustaining and transforming

### **Abstract:**

The neighbourhood is not only where we live, but also who we become over time spent there. To understand this we have to know the mechanisms behind the neighbourhood. How it comes to be, what sustains it and how it can be changed.

This essay will look more closely into social outcomes, how the reputation of an area is sometimes sustaining the challenges within the area and leading to badly informed political decisions. And what makes people stay or move on to other less deprived areas.

What often happens in derelict areas is some kind of gentrification. Either it can be students and artists who move in because of the low real estate prizes or it is housing/commercial developers who see some potential in the area and profit to be gained. The end result is generally the same. The first gentrifiers are pushed out as prizes keep getting higher.

Jane Jacobs suggests that we give the housing projects of ill repute a clean slate. And try to work with the residents so that they stay and build up the neighbourhood because they want to do so for themselves.

**Keywords:** neighbourhood, social outcome, social mobility, gentrification, reputation, consumerism

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Social Anthropology Essay

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## **Introduction**

The neighbourhood is no longer necessarily the centre of daily life for its residents.<sup>1</sup> But even so, the neighbourhood context plays an important role in social outcome. Who we become as grown-ups has to do with where we grow up. We see this in individual labour outcome, educational achievements, deviant behaviour, social exclusion and social mobility. These phenomena are highly visible in segregated American neighbourhoods, but more modest in European studies of neighbourhoods.

What are the mechanisms that shape urban neighbourhoods? Why do people choose to move there? And why do they choose to move

away from them later?

## **Urban history**

In North America during 1880 – 1920 public spaces were formed around department stores, restaurants, theatres, hotels, public parks, professional ballparks or amusement parks.<sup>2</sup> These spaces later became fairly “popular”, and also democratic. Examples of this are Central Park, Coney Island and Brighton. These were all made for the upper class. As these spaces became more accessible and frequented by the lower class, but as this happened they started losing their upper class patrons.

For real estate entry prizes were low enough to attract the working class. Another phenomenon of that

time was norms changing. Women could appear in public alongside men. People were mingling openly in bars, at the racetrack or in Vaudeville houses.

During late modernity consumer society shifted to suburbia. Shopping centres were established, and people had to rely on the car to get there. The shopping centres were meant to be a supplement to the stores in the city centre, but instead downtown areas were drained. Since the shopping malls were only accessible by car, some exclusivity was associated with malls.

Postmodernity brought with it the Yuppies. Later blamed for raising prizes of goods and housing,

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1. Jargowsky, Paul A. 1997. *Poverty and Place: Ghettos, Barrios, and the American City*. Edition. Russell Sage Foundation.

2. Zukin, S. May 1998. *Urban lifestyles: Diversity and standardisation in spaces of consumption*. *Urban Studies* (Routledge); May98, Vol. 35 Issue 5/6

in turn displacing older, poorer and urban residents. During the 1950s and the 1970s educated middle-class men and women, also artists, began to renovate and occupy dilapidated housing in commercial, industrial and working-class neighbourhoods. There was a generational move “back to the city”. And it was seen as an endorsement of the city’s social diversity.

A cultural movement away from the suburb lifestyle, seen as alienated and private. And the desire for authenticity.

The newspapers of that time wrote about the aesthetic values of historic homes and lofts. They glamourized the lifestyle of people living in brownstone factory lofts.

Teachers, lawyers, artists and writers were the first gentrifiers. The cultural consumption grew, a desire for good food and art. By establishing an ensemble of urban consumption activities related to housing, shopping, restaurants and art galleries, they laid the groundwork for yuppies to enter the stage, and urban renewal led by the private sector. The first gentrifiers had the ability to mobilise politically. This enabled them to protect and expand their urban base.

In turn they helped strengthen the symbolic economy. This had its pros and cons. On the plus side historic buildings were preserved, and new household structures became more natural / normal. On the down side privatisation

led to an abandonment of public institutions. Children were sent to private schools and only people with family money could afford the new lifestyle. As a consequence of this they saw a displacement of lower income urban residents.

With more attention given to urban lifestyles other changes are also reflected. Such as alternative lifestyles coming from immigration, racial and ethnic minorities bring with them new “urban cultures”. In some communities we also find gays and lesbian to be more visible. Shaking up the norms of family structures as they have been.

The urban lifestyle could be related to gender dynamics, family and

household structures and sexual policies. Or they could also be related to modernity, strategies of urban redevelopment and urban politics and cultures.

Some structural changes have helped the development of urban lifestyles: The rise of post-modernism, as an art form, a post-industrial mode of production and a concern with identity markers. Also the growth of service industries, the maturing of the baby boom generation and thereafter the demands for distinctive high-quality goods.

Politically there has been a desire to aestheticize the city. A visual consumption of public space that has led to a privatisation of public

space by certain groups.

If we look at cities as landscapes of consumption, traditionally they would be meant to satisfy the residents' everyday needs. Later they also satisfied new patterns of leisure, travel and culture. Cities, or politicians, developed new cultural strategies of economic redevelopment in order to satisfy these needs, and profit from them. New museums and tourists zones were placed strategically.

### **Gentrification**

The process of renewal and rebuilding accompanying the influx of middle-class or affluent people into deteriorating areas that often displaces poorer residents.

### **Hyper gentrification**

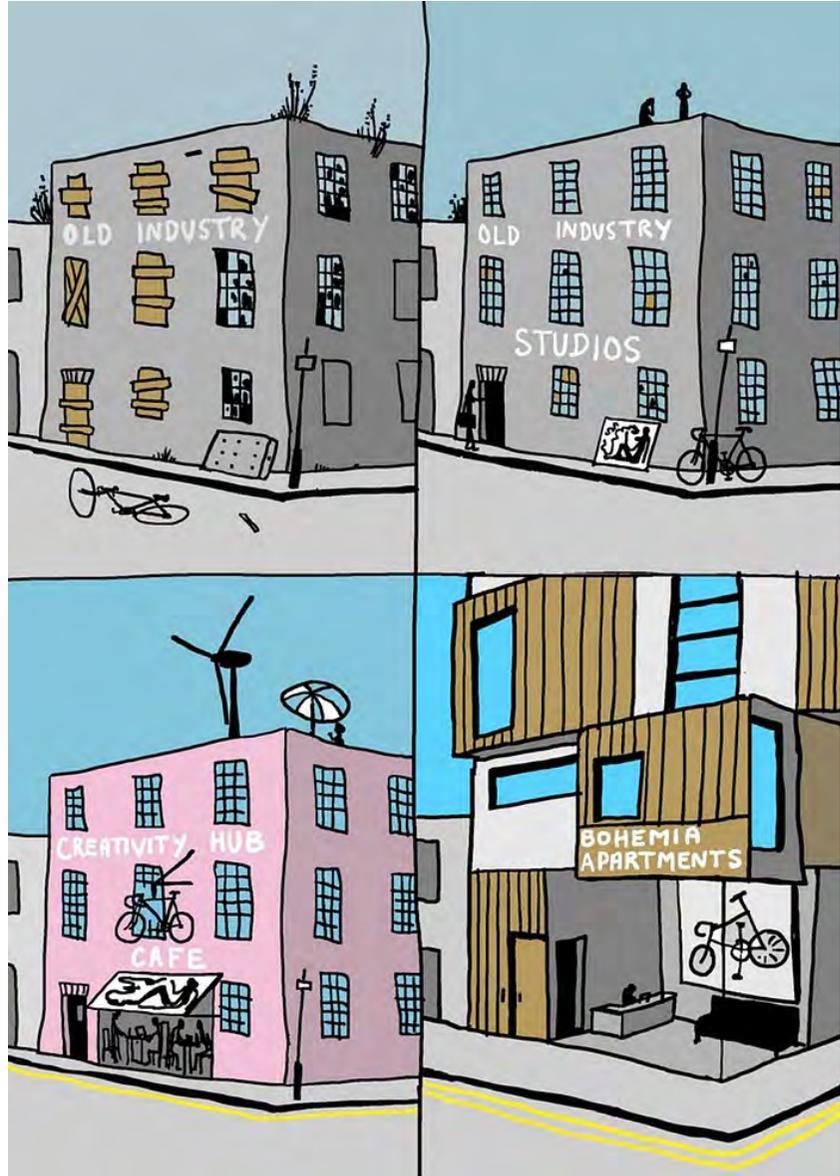
Extreme, excessive gentrification.

### **Top-down gentrification**

Government sanctioned gentrification, whereby public funding appears to displace low-income families in coveted spaces near central business districts.

### **Looking at the neighbourhood**

In the US today most people try to steer clear of the more challenged areas, but then again many do not have a choice. Leaving them to cope, not only with their own problems, but also coping with the social isolation and economic deprivation of the hundreds and thousands. This causes an impact on the social outcomes. Whatever the reasons for it, there seems



to be a consensus that spatial concentration of poor people acts to magnify poverty and exacerbate its effects.<sup>3</sup>

These troubled neighbourhoods go under a variety of names. Depending on race and ethnicity of the neighbourhood's residents, they could be called slums, ghettos or barrios. Or other even more disrespectful names.

In 1968, the Kerner Commission stated that "it is time now to end the destruction and violence, not only in the streets of the ghetto but in the lives of people." In the years after their report, the US found itself in war with Vietnam. That, as well as other political issues kept the nation from dealing with the issues named in the report. The problems,

and the poverty has persisted and often grown worse in certain areas. Therefor the report is still valid.

Some areas seem to be immune to any interventions, private and public. Poor areas grow and the population grows within them. The result is deteriorating social conditions. And the consequences? People are abandoning the area in a cycle of decay.

Maybe the real problem is poverty itself. Changes in the labour market and in family structures lead to unfortunate situations for the less privileged part of the population. And poor people also have to live somewhere. Some neighbourhoods are overrepresented by a certain group of people, often minority groups. This happens when they

are discriminated against in other areas, leaving them with no other choice than to go live where there are others from the same group.

According to Jargowsky there are three subjects that are relevant to look at more closely when researching urban poverty. The first one is the economic, institutional, and social processes that lead to some level of poverty within an urban area and later determines the differences between several urban areas. The second one is to which extent poverty is concentrated in certain neighbourhoods, how this changes over time and their driving forces. The third, and last one, is the way in which geographic or spatial concentration of poverty will cause certain behavioural

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3. Jargowsky, Paul A. 1997. Poverty and Place: Ghettos, Barrios, and the American City. Edition. Russell Sage Foundation.

responses. Jargowsky calls this the study of the underclass.

### **Neighbourhoods**

The area of a town that surrounds someone's home, or the people who live in this area

### **Underclass**

A group of people who have trouble entering and remaining in the labour force, who derive a large share of their income from sources other than legal employment, and who exist in a social context that prevents labour force attachment.

*Mincy and Wiener (1993)*

*Jargowsky.*

### **Social outcomes**

Residents of neighbourhoods with bad reputations are often victims

of stigmatisation. They will not be offered jobs, loans will not be granted and they often suffer from low self-esteem.

It has been argued that when the poor are isolated from the non-poor, living somewhere else, they are cut off from the resources available to those with stronger economy. Also they would be cut off from opportunities and role models. This, in turn, leads to a "social milieu" that fosters and sustains a lower labour force attachment, drug and alcohol abuse and other challenging social outcomes. The "culture of poverty" becomes a self-sustaining phenomenon not really susceptible to changes. Often it is also passed on from one generation to the next.

However, it has also been argued that the situation will change eventually, even though it will take time. This means that underclass culture, here, is more so an effect of economic transformation and social isolation, than it is a sustaining force of neighbourhood poverty.

In Oslo, Heidi Marie Kriznik is talking about the "divided city" (Den delte byen).

There has been a separation between classes since the 17th century. From 1930-1970 this gap got smaller, due to increased economic governmental support to those inhabitants that needed more.

The number of council housing increased, due to a higher number

of people entering the “service-class”. The quality of these housing projects improved. In general there was a tendency of prosperity and more people got themselves higher education. The political goal of this time was to get everybody into the labour market. This meant more money in the municipalities’ accounts and a reduction of poverty.

Today we have taken a turn into what she calls “new-poverty”. The gap is growing again, more so in Oslo than in any other Norwegian city as well as other European cities.

However the politicians claim that the city is not divided.

In her book she describes how the lives of two girls will turn out. One

lives on the east side, and the other on the west side. The facts are that the girl growing up on the west side will live longer, she will earn more and have a bigger house. On the way she will get a higher education and be presentment with a different set of opportunities.

This is why people raising children on the east side consider moving to a better neighbourhood, if possible, when their children reach school age. More and more people are also sending their kids to private schools, both on the east and west side of the city.

She also speaks about how Oslo is a city without a clear housing policy. Instead the city is making deals with developers to do projects like Barcode. To the

outside world this is changing the neighbourhood to the better. A way to aestheticize the city. But it is not really helping the existing neighbourhoods.

### **\_\_Social mobility**

The movement of individuals, families, households, or other categories of people within or between social strata in a society. It is a change in social status relative to others’ social location within a given society. *Wikipedia.*

### **\_\_Geographic mobility**

How the population move over time, and migration within a population. Can also be how a population move within a city. *Wikipedia.*

### **Neighbourhood reputation as a sustaining factor**

A dutch study done on the reputation of neighbourhoods explains how policy makers need to understand which neighbourhoods are popular, and which are not.<sup>4</sup> More importantly which are more likely to attract a bad reputation. The reason for this need to understand comes from the dutch political intention to create good neighbourhoods for all. A bad reputation may have a negative impact on the social outcome. The reputation one neighbourhood has impacts the pshychological wellbeing, but also has material consequences.

However the study also shows how some people dismiss the

stigma that the reputation gives, by emphasising the positive sides of the neighbourhood or community.

When looking at the behaviour responces to reputation, they found that other city residents (people not living in the neighbourhood of ill reiute) tend to avoid visiting or moving to the area.

The local residents that hold a negative perception of their own neighbourhood are more likely to move. The status of where you live speaks about your personal identity, and some people seaks to disassociate themselves with the group that stays, and the place itself.

In their research they use the terms

exit, voice and loyalty (Hirschman). Exit has to do with leaving the neighbourhood, voice is when people express their concerns as a kind of participation and loyalty is the emotional attachment to the neighbourhood, and the social networks. When using their voice, they are less likely to exit. same goes for loyalty.

The results of this study are important because they give insight to the mechanisms responsible for changes in the socio-spatial structure of the urban landscape, as well as the stability of the urban neighbourhoods.

### **Changing the neighbourhood while resisting gentrification**

Jane Jacobs talks about



Banksy on Gentrification and the end of graffiti.

unslumming in her book “ The death and life..”.<sup>5</sup> She says slums operate in vicious circles, and the spreading slums require a great deal of public money. Furthermore she explains how shifting slums only leads to a replacement of the slum. Instead she suggests looking more closely into what is actually happening in the specific areas. Some of the neighbourhoods are actually functioning quite well despite their bad reputation. The destruction of these neighbourhoods is therefore not the way to go. Shifting slums is only dealing with the symptoms, not the actual cause of slumming. Jacobs believes that people are able to understand and act upon their own self-interest. If they are only treated with respect and

dignity. Building upon the forces of regeneration will break the vicious circle and the slum will disappear. To break the circle the work has to focus on keeping people from moving too fast out of the area, and also keep them from dreaming of moving.

In order to change the status of a housing project it is important that it is rewoven into the city fabric. And at the same time strengthen the surrounding fabric. Again, the unslumming and hold on the population through their own choice. (Make them not want to leave..) But another way to do this, according to Jacobs, is to treat the ground floor of these projects as if they had a clean slate. To work with the civic space of the building.

They should have as she says, “casual public characters”, public spaces that are well watched and used continuously, and easy and natural supervision of children. She also suggests bringing people from the outside into the buildings “territory”.

High turnover of population is not necessarily a problem for a neighbourhood.<sup>6</sup> For deprived areas, however, it is usually seen as such. This is primarily because high turnover is associated with disruption of social ties or community networks, and hence with the risk of a loss of informal social control. Some people have come to see population turnover as almost a defining feature of deprived areas. The

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5. Jacobs, J. 2000. The Death and Life of Great American Cities. New Ed Edition. Pimlico.

6. <https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/population-turnover-and-area-deprivation>

reasoning is that the nature of the neighbourhoods – the neighbourhood context – makes people more likely to leave. In turn, this is seen as fuelling the cycle of decline.

### **The Norwegian way**

After WW2 Norway developed suburbs and satellite towns, and functions were spread out over the country.<sup>9</sup> In the beginning of the 90s, however, this trend seemed to take a turn. There is a decrease in the number of inhabitants in the suburbs, and an increase in the same numbers in the inner cities. One could say that instead of suburbanisation, there is now a re-urbanisation going on.

### **Gentrification in Norway.**

In the article "Gentrifisering på norsk", the authors ask why central areas in Norwegian cities have become more popular in recent years. As the demand for inner city dwellings rise, the composition of inhabitants will change. People with more money move in, and the residents with lower income are being pushed out. Normally, gentrification has been explained by its relation to economy and production, consumption and lifestyle, or a feminisation of the labour market. In this article they point out how practical advantages also plays an important role when people choose to move to the inner city.

A gentrification explained by production and economy would

mean that investors of real estate and property initiated it. Investors are basically putting their money where the return is highest. This is possible when industries close down and leave a "void waiting to be closed up." This cannot be done without the support of local politicians. Making this explanation a top-down example. However. Investors will only start developing an area after they are certain that there will be a demand for inner city housing.

Looking at gentrification through consumption and lifestyle suggests that the new middle-class with its white collar workers and service trades, gives us a way of life more individual, more in search of status and consumption. This, in turn,

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9. Bjørnskau, T., Hjorthol, R. 2003. Gentrifisering på norsk – urban livsstil eller praktisk organisering av hverdagslivet? Tidsskrift for samfunnsforskning. Årgang 44.

creates other demands related to where we choose to live. The increasing interest for culture and aesthetics makes people look for the non-standardised and the non-conformist. Therefore neighbourhoods with historic and cultural elements may increase their value a possible place to reside. This explanation lacks a good answer to why the new middle-class changes its preferences of where to live.

The feminisation of labour perspective tells us that the city is a liberating place for women. The increasing amount of women in the last 40-50 years to work fulltime gives larger wages, less time and more households with single people or single parents.

Middle-class households with two fulltime workers can more easily enter the housing market. This too helps increase the differences between classes.

Another important thing to remember is the increasing number of students in the bigger cities. As the number of students was rising, so was their political involvement. Students were not just protesting against war but also to save old wooden housing. They were against redevelopment, they occupied houses and they favoured collective living. This has been looked upon as early signs of gentrification. Maybe these political and cultural inclinations could explain some of the middle-class' preferences as to

where they wanted to live.

Most of them actually just didn't have the money to live elsewhere, and were forced to choose the un-hip and un-popular.

When gentrification has already begun, what makes others follow? Studies and literature often explain this with the desire for the cultural values that the city possesses, and the urban lifestyle of people. Their desire for good coffee and culture. Then there are the practical advantages. Shorter distances to work, childcare, coffee and leisure activities.

Due to the heightened living conditions in the inner cities suburbs are losing inhabitants to these urban areas. At the same

time there has been a decline in the same living conditions in the suburbs. More and more people decide to send their kids to private schools, and the amount of such schools are higher in the city. Another group of residents moving from the suburbs are the elderly. As old age catches up with them, they see the need for other types of housing. Rather a practical apartment than I house with a garden. Also more neighbours.

As mentioned earlier, private schools are becoming more popular both on the west and the east side. The quality of the schools are becoming one of the more important factors to consider when families choose to stay or move. Could private schools be

act as an alternative to geographic segregation?

On a political level the goal is a more sustainable city. Also referred to as the compact city. A political re-urbanisation requires densification. In order to achieve this, the developers need to see some potential in the areas they are to develop. An “area boost” (områdeløft) initiated by the State Housing Bank and the municipality would maybe bring out such a potential. Furthering gentrification.

In London they have now reached phase 3 of gentrification. The extremely wealthy are moving in, their kids go to private schools and they contribute little or nothing to the social life of the neighbourhood.

The first gentrifiers no longer feel at home in the neighbourhood.

Today. What comes first? Investments or demand. It is not a lack of resources that make people reside in inner city areas anymore. Even though some inner city areas, as Tøyen, still offer cheaper apartments than other inner city areas. There is a desire of urban lifestyle, art and culture. Also the practical issues of infrastructure. Close proximity to work, day care etc.

A study of Norwegian cities from 1995 states that the creation of the city's inner structure depends on two processes.<sup>10</sup> Social mobility and geographic mobility. Moving patterns and social mobility

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10. Vogt, Pernille. Prosesser bak levekårsforskjellene i Oslo. Hovedoppgave, University of Oslo, 1995

can be explained in different ways, and this study provides us with two of them. First is the “moving explanation”, which claims that high levels of social mobility combined with a selective moving pattern crossing the segregation lines is maintaining the differences in living standards.

Secondly there is the “class explanation” which claims that low levels of social mobility combined with little moving across the segregation lines is maintaining the differences in living standards.

### **3.2 International example**

In Belgrade people are looking at plans for a waterfront development with contempt. The newspaper the Guardian calls what is happening a top-down gentrification.<sup>11</sup> Although

the development is going to happen on state owned land, the urban plan is redrawn to suit the demands of the developers. The people of Belgrade have been excluded from the process from the very beginning; there has been no public consultation or transparency.

If built, the only ones able to afford the new apartments will be foreigners and rich people with (most likely) money from criminal activity.

The reason why people are protesting is not because the waterfront is being developed, but rather that it won't be accessible for the public. Its not a class battle, but a struggle for justice, they say.

The revival of Belgrade as a whole was ultimately a grass root venture. Fuelled by art and the exchange of new ideas. People were starving for culture in a city where the for instance the museum of modern art has ben closed for 8 years due to renovation.

The author of the article points out that you can hate the hipster cafes popping up, but they are still just a result of a few people's dreams. Instead we should be aware of the mega conglomerates and property owners cause incomparable greater damage.

The Belgrade waterfront will presents a consumerist vision, and will represent the people not just ignored but also trampled on by their own politicians.

#### **4.0 Reflection**

From the decades now, urbanism has been closely connected to consumerism and capitalism. Public spaces were built around commercial activities, and the cities have been aesthetized to satisfy a visual consumption. Earlier the city was to satisfy people's everyday needs, but now they also have to satisfy the new need related to a symbolic economy, based on cultural production and consumption (Zukin).

Lately there has been a trend that people are leaving the suburbs to live in the inner city. Both because the suburbs are not that attractive anymore, and because the inner city has more to offer. For instance more private schools for children.

So why would some areas not be attractive anymore? Some neighbourhoods end up with a particularly bad reputation. And when this happens, people start thinking about moving. The fear of a neighbourhood having a negative impact on you or your children is so strong, that measures are taken. Only rarely do we see that residents try to fight the reputation or stigma.

The area of Tøyen and the nearby neighbourhoods have always been working-class areas. And today it is also a transit-area. Young people move there as first time buyers. The prizes of apartments have made this possible for some time. Now this is changing. But for different reasons these people, often with

higher education and good jobs, move on to less deprived areas as their family grows, and their kids reach school age. A friend of mine living in the area tells me that the schools are really bad. They will move before their kid starts school. Reputation or fact? I don't know.

Right now the State Housing Bank in cooperation with Oslo Kommune are giving Tøyen an "area boost". This is probably the most important factor of why the housing prizes are going up. Hip cafes and restaurants are popping up. Developers are given permission to build. Some families with lower income will be pushed out.

But surely, something has to be done. The apartments in the area

are too small. Both social housing and housing on the private market. There is a higher concentration of psychiatric and drug related institutions in the area, than the rest of the city. They claim that they have to be there since they are serving the many residents in the nearby area. And this group of residents are being blamed for much of the negative reputation that the area has gained over the years.

In my referances, working with migration/moving patterns seems to be a common denominator. Increase the loyalty and maybe the volume of peoples voice? Emphasize the positive over the negative is certainly important. In the end I think it is crucial that we

try to think differntly, both politically and as city planners. It may just be taht thinking new is in fact thinking old school. Jane Jacobs said that to deal with bad hoousing projects they need to be "unslummed" and the civic space must be given a clean slate. I believe in clean slates when dealing with people and places and their bad reputations.



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