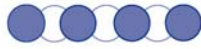


CLES Bulletin is a topical summary of an issue which has recently emerged. Its aim is to provide a pithy précis of the issue, thus creating a quick and easy to read document which directs to more detailed material, if required.

CLES Bulletin No. 31
*Connecting Regeneration: Linking local people,
place and policy*

CLES BULLETIN





Introduction

Successful regeneration and creating sustainable communities is about effective governance, and bringing together people, place and policy.

The Centre for Local Economic Strategies Annual conference in its 19th year explored themes of governance in regeneration, both in terms of the horizontal connections - between European, regional, local and neighbourhood level - and the vertical connection which takes local strategy, through policy, to effective project delivery.

This bulletin is adapted from a conference paper presented at the annual conference and summarises the key themes, challenges and opportunities presented by the governance of regeneration today.

Governance in Regeneration

Governance surrounding regeneration activity today is constantly evolving both in the UK and across Europe. In this we have a range of new structures and processes that are changing, adapting and taking on new shapes and new ways of working. New structures in the UK such as Local Strategic Partnerships, new processes such as Local Area Agreements and new centres of power are emerging in UK and beyond as we devolve more to the local community and develop more citizen centred services. For many of us working in regeneration, this evolving era, is an intoxicating and sometimes disorientating brew of people and policy, which varies and changes over place. In this mix, without good connections, facets of governance in regeneration can start to drift apart.

However, it has been noted by CLES elsewhere that Regeneration is necessarily complex¹. Whilst not denying the need for simple solutions to simple problems where appropriate, we also need to appreciate that the problems some of our most

deprived communities face are complex and contain an array of inter-related issues and problems which change rapidly. In all of this we appreciate that connections are of vital importance in two main ways.

Firstly, the connections between policies, agencies, people and places is the only way in which we can create a totality out of this changing nature of issues and satisfy the changing demand and expectation of citizens. We as workers in regeneration should in this sense be seen as seamstresses or tapestry makers, stitching together, services, responses, skills and details to existing and changing issues and problems. It is only by working in this way that an effective weave of policy with regeneration elements can be achieved and in turn support those most in need.

Secondly, to provide effective policy we need to become clever at spotting connections and see where things overlap and join. Part of this is not only joining things up in a mechanistic way, but being alert to how and the ways that things are being joined up and being alert to the added value elements that the connections create.

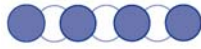
The governance of regeneration: Challenges and opportunities

As indicated above regeneration requires effective governance and the connecting up of people, place and policy. In this, regeneration shares many of the issues common to governance more generally. Thus, this section will briefly outline a number of challenges and the attendant opportunities for many working in regeneration.

Accountability: a question of transparency

Quite clearly, there are questions over accountability as formal modes of representative local government gives way and begins to enable more partnership and new participative forms of democracy. In many instances around the UK and Europe, we at CLES have witnessed some tension and frisson between formal representative modes of governance and the new emerging participative forms. For many in local, regional and central government there is sometimes an uncertainty and

¹Working with complexity, by Neil McInroy, Director & Stuart MacDonald, Policy and Information Researcher Centre for Local Economic Strategies, September 2004. www.cles.org.uk



unease over how far they need to go as regard partnership and what is the end game: are they working to put themselves out of business for instance! This can manifest itself in poor partnership and a focus on process rather than on the issues, which can lead to, in some instances, many non-governmental partners questioning the utility and worth of participating.

However, for us it is evident that new forms of partnership whilst creating different lines of accountability, should not ultimately erode the legitimate place for democratic accountability in the delivery of services. For instance in the UK, the new community leadership role for local members and in the wider enabling role of Local Authorities, accountability should not be seen as being eroded, but merely operating in different ways. Hitherto we have had a local government delivering a service to the public. Now the situation is altered and we have local government service departments considering, negotiating involvement of local people and other service providers and then delivering the service - perhaps in partnership. The basic route back to democratic accountability remains, albeit it is not as direct.

However, it needs to be recognised that this is an attempt to create real public service value in that it is hoped that service providers will bend and follow the problems surrounding the need for regeneration. In short close the gap around the problem. In this perspective, elected members and officials within Local government should take responsibility to address the problem, through using connections and their work in partnership.

Many of the issues we have in connecting up service provision as regards accountability is in part due to the way we view partnership. For us, partnerships, are best when they are legitimised as an activity, not as a structure for structures sake. They should be about added value. Some of the problems with LSP's in the UK, for instance, are that they are structure heavy. Whereas they should be there to identify problems, ensure an effective weave of activity and do things through being connected. In this it should be accountable in many different ways to the partners involved.

All the above, is assisted by having a better understanding as to how things are connected and the ways in which the connections are made. This is important because an understanding of the connections between agency, policies, a particular place and local people, serves to create significant levels of transparency, which in turn provide windows and clarity into who is doing what, why and how the connection can be made accountable.

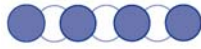
An adaptive weave of policy or a confusing mess?

The ability of mechanisms to create different processes, structures and styles should be recognised and supported. It is only through this structural and procedural adaption that measures to address issues can be identified.

The complex problems we face in regeneration, may require complex solutions as already mentioned. The desire for institutional neatness and the blind application of best practice or a agency specific way of doing things, can serve to constrain adaption, local knowledge and thus the abilities to address the issue. This should be a feature of sound regeneration policy and is the key to a proactive and progressive agenda, which allows for complexity and difference between various places and people.

Whilst the governance surrounding regeneration may appear to be a bit of a mess, a consideration of the connection between agencies may instead indicate a supportive weave. Furthermore, an adaptive policy making perspective which gets partnership to focus on the problem and thus explain the 'mess' in terms of what problem is going to be solved, how things are going to change and why these connections matter is a lot easier than talking loosely about the usefulness of partnership in general terms.

Furthermore, in creating fluidity in service provision and in making it responsive and adaptive, it is evident that there is a possibility that there could develop a situation in which there are many competing priorities and objectives. As a result, a splintered and fractured array of structures and processes emerge. In this instance, it is evident that there needs to be a common story, glue or



coagulant that connects these different perspectives creating a whole or unified focus on regeneration. In this the focus on a 'public service ethos' is often mentioned. However, for us this is a little unsubstantial and not a strong enough glue. For us it may be better to view regeneration as a means by which money within the public service follows particular problems, be it a people focussed service delivery issue or a place based issue or a combination of both. In this the bond is about addressing a problem or issues.

In some occasions we at CLES have come across localities in the UK, having a debate over the distribution of resources, with some local and more affluent areas who are not in receipt of regeneration monies such as Neighbourhood Renewal Fund or New Deal for Communities, questioning how those areas should be getting this money. In this instance, the clear connection between the problem/issues and the monies needs to be made – money should follow problems. This requires, in many instances bolder political leadership to explain and take responsibility for the bending of service and money to the problem area, making connections with other service providers in doing so and getting them to clarify the connection between place and policy.

Top down/bottom up or somewhere in between

Sometimes, policy is predominantly made and delivered by formal agencies from the top, whereas on other occasions, policy is constructed from the needs and wants of local people. Clearly a community, neighbourhood or area of a city, is composed of thousands of individual needs. Thus if we want to change the city for the better, to address the real life problems, good governance tells us that top down intervention, or implementing an a-priori rigid plan, will either not make much of a difference or have an unpredicted or even counterproductive effect. It is too clumsy.

As regards knowing what the problem is, aside from everyday monitoring, it is evident that the community, local practitioners and managers who know the local area the best, are the most valuable, as it is these local people and organisations which are most adaptive and most capable of dealing with the issues. The people involved in running the

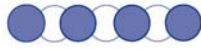
system are the people best placed to improve it, since they often are best placed to see the problem, and have the greatest amount of direct information relating to that problem. Thus we need to involve local people and get connected where appropriate and ensure that local knowledge from Managers and other people working with local communities is captured.

However, the connection between the local place, policy and local people informs us that some local people do not always want to be empowered to a great extent, but that they merely want an excellent service which they can comment on easily and are listened to if there is a problem. In some situations involvement, whilst it can be an end in itself as regards building capacity and self-esteem, can serve to merely elongate a process and postpone decision-making. It would appear that in some instances a balance needs to be struck between top down and bottom up and there needs, perhaps in some places, be a recognition that top down policy makers or bottom up local people know best.

In attempting to unpick the difference in certain areas it is evident that there may be geography or a spatial component to social/community involvement and/or trust in local authorities/service deliverers more generally. With some areas having a successful tradition of limited bottom up involvement, beyond that indicated through local representative democracy. In other areas, an assertive bottom up partnership approach, with a deep tradition of participative democracy may be more dominant. In our view there may be no hard and fast rules to what is best for any particular place. In this, it is clear that the decision on what is best for any area, needs to fit with local tradition, identity and characteristics and a locally tempered consideration of local place, people and policy. In this instance the connection between these facets will vary over place, and policy makers and practitioners will need to be sensitive to it.

Creating the connections

Clearly in the UK we have become sophisticated in creating an array of connections between local people, places and policy. In attempting to sift



through the types of connection we have sought to look at the connections from both a horizontal and vertical perspective.

As regards horizontal connections we are talking here about the ability of individual agencies to start shifting independent working cultures to a situation in which they make greater cohesion and unity as regards co-ordination, co-operation and collaboration. This requires them to think more creatively about how they could work with others. In vertical connections we are talking here about moving from an effective horizontal partnership to effective decision-making responsibilities and resource allocation. Whilst crude and a bastardisation of horizontal and vertical integration, it does begin to tease out the types of connections which need to be made, so that we can move from a situation associated with making the connections, to using these connections to deliver real and meaningful change.

Proposals and principles for connecting up regeneration

1. Old problems/new connections

The policy context requires consistent creativity in working solutions to problems. As such we need to be consistently open to new accommodations and partnerships between different actors. The problems we face require sets of perhaps hitherto un-thought of structures and ways of working, creating new connections between local people, policy and the place. Clearly drivers such as Local Area agreements and the work within Local Strategic Partnerships in the UK are very important in this.

2. Connections between place and people matter

In recent drives to encourage social mobility, and the drive to regenerate place, we either focus on the individual, including skills etc or we focus on the physical fabric of the place. Whilst this is an appropriate set of policies, we also need to recognise that there are clear cultural and community connections between local people and place. In this, we need to recognise that area regeneration needs to remain and that more energy

needs to be put into regenerating both place and people and the connections that retain people to a place as regards familial connections etc.

This requires mixed housing and a focus on local economic and other factors that make local places sustainable. Clearly initiatives such as New Deal for Communities, with its long term (10 year) and neighbourhood management initiatives are an important way of sustaining and creating enduring regeneration.

3. Connection between regeneration and citizenship

It is vital that regeneration is seen and continues to be seen as a key mechanism by which citizens can become active in local decision-making and make a contribution to civil renewal more generally. The active citizenship agenda needs to remain focused on regeneration activities. In this perhaps the regeneration legacy can not only be seen as addressing the problems but also serves to ensure a new cadre of active local people who play a central role in the local political activity. Of particular importance in this is the Civic Pioneers Initiative linking local people with local government to improve quality of life.

4. New connections to embrace risk

Risk is part of our world. However, in regeneration terms we tend to be averse to doing things which are new or which may fail. Either through outcome and output culture or a stifling managerialism, we tend to assess things on crude value for money and are scared of taking risks. In regeneration we must look collectively at issues and see how partners can connect to share in developing creative responses that may take more risks, particularly as regards failure than has hitherto been the case. In this the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund has been an important source and trigger for more innovation and risk.

5. Connecting service departments to regeneration issues

The mainstreaming agenda demands that projects funded through regeneration or issues that had previously been delivered by mainstream service



departments funded by regeneration monies are accommodated within mainstream budgets. For this to occur there needs to be a deeper and sharper connection between mainstream service departments and regeneration issues. Clearly the move of some local authorities to place regeneration at the corporate centre is of particular value, in this instance.

6. Connecting up the scales of governance

Governance operates on a variety of scales, be it a local neighbourhood, ward, area, district/city/borough, sub region/city region, region, national, international. It is important that not only that there is horizontal connections between the various scales, ensuring that there is greater level of collaboration between similar scales, but also vertical connection between the different scales ensuring that policy is focussed on the appropriate geographical manifestation of that issue. The work of Strategic Partnerships and their use of area governance structures and the involvement of community empowerment networks has begun to show how these connections can work in practice.

7. Creating connecting skills

The ability to connect up regeneration, requires not only sophisticated skills as regards mediation, but skills relating to understanding different perspectives and knowledge about different disciplines involved in regeneration. Clearly this was identified in the Egan review and is starting to be successfully carried forward by the Centres of Excellence and the Academy for Sustainable Communities

8. Maintain a connection between strategy and delivery

The effective implementation of regeneration is founded on the successful connections between strategy and delivery. It is important that the ability to do, and sort things out at the delivery end is consistently connected and related to strategy. Also the connections should not be one in which strategy is fixed and then delivery flows from it. Alternatively there needs to be a situation in which there is clear and ongoing feedback and feed-forward.

Conclusion

It is evident to us that regeneration is most successful when the right connections are made. Within our currently evolving governance arrangements, those working in the field need to ensure that new connections are made to reflect the new structures and arrangements that are appearing in the institutional landscape. Furthermore, connections need to be made in this growing agenda so that we devolve more power to citizens whilst being sensitive and aware of questions surrounding democratic accountability. Overall being better aware of the connections will help regeneration professionals to be more effective for the good of the sector as a whole.

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