



URBAN REGENERATION FOR SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES: A CASE STUDY

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Received 7 October 2008; accepted 23 January 2009

Abstract. Over the past few decades, cities have been subjected to severe social and economic pressures, which have had a disproportionate impact on the urban environment. Consequently, this has increased the concentration of the most deprived households in the worst urban neighbourhoods. The UK Governments have attempted to tackle the physical, social and economic consequences of these changes through a variety of mechanisms and policy initiatives with varying degrees of success. The current objective can be interpreted as an attempt to implement regeneration projects or create sustainable communities/places through multi-agency or partnership programmes. The nature and extent of urban problems are now very well documented; there has been a considerable learning process in the development of different urban regeneration programmes. Over the 20th and the beginning of 21st centuries, the nature of urban regeneration policy has changed direction several times and has applied different focuses. Today, a “sustainable community” is a key issue in an ambitious Government programme “umbrella”. As an objective of the present programme, the UK Government introduced the Sustainable Community Plan in 2003, describing a vision of how our communities are to be developed over next 20 years economically, socially and environmentally, while respecting the needs of future generations. The paper assesses how closely the Regeneration Programme is aligned to the Sustainable Communities Plan. The research within several surveys focuses on sustainable communities and urban regeneration, both have certain parallels and functional overlaps.

Keywords: sustainability, community, urban, regeneration, case study, Castlefields, UK.

Reference to this paper should be made as follows: McDonald, S.; Malys, N.; Malienė, V. 2009. Urban regeneration for sustainable communities: A case study, *Technological and Economic Development of Economy* 15(1): 49–59.

1. Introduction

The Government of the United Kingdom has defined a sustainable community in its Sustainable Communities Plan (Office of the Deputy Prime Minister 2003): sustainable communities are places where people want to live and work, now and in the future. They meet the diverse needs of existing and future residents, are sensitive to their environment and contribute to a high quality of life. They are safe and inclusive, well planned, built and run and offer equality of opportunities and good services for all. For communities to be sustainable, they must offer hospitals, schools, shops, good public transport, as well as a clean and safe environment. People also need public open space (Lindgren and Castell 2008), where they can relax and interact and the ability to have a say on the way their neighborhood is run. Most importantly, sustainable communities must offer decent homes at prices people can afford (Pawson and Hayhurst 2003; Malienè *et al.* 2008; Malienè and Malys 2009).

In 2003, the UK government introduced the Sustainable Communities Plan, describing a vision of how the communities are to be developed over the next 20 years. The main attention is drawn to economical, social and environmental issues in respect to the needs of future generations (Office of the Deputy ... 2003, 2004). Along with other policies the Sustainable Communities Plan aim is to regenerate the industrial urban belt in Northern England and provide hundreds of thousands of homes in South East (Office of the Deputy ... 2003; Raco 2005a). Now, the Sustainable Communities Plan programme is part way through delivering change within communities across the UK and demonstrating examples of best practice.

Despite the nature and extent of urban problems, they are very well documented and there has been a considerable learning process in the development of different urban regeneration programmes (Ribeiro 2008). The Castlefields estate in Runcorn is part of a third generation new town and has been in decline for many years. Halton Borough Council formed a partnership with several stakeholders including English Partnerships who took the lead in commissioning the Masterplan and part funded the subsequent regeneration programme (Taylor Young 2004). Since 2004 the Castlefields estate has been undergoing significant transformation, including substantial public and private sector investment of £100 million coordinated by the Castlefields Regeneration Partnership (CRP). The research presented in this article focuses on the regeneration programme and assesses how closely it is aligned to the Sustainable Communities Plan, and examines the current situation in the Castlefields community and its potential to become a sustainable community in the future. Research findings from semi-structured interviews are discussed. The article provides emphasis on urban regeneration as a key factor in delivering healthy and attractive communities.

2. Methodology

The research undertaken in 2006 and 2007 was based on semi-structured interviews conducted with the CRP and other professionals from the sustainable communities academic and policy environment. These interviews were questionnaire-based. The questions were designed to establish the level of understanding the sustainable communities' agenda and to ascertain how efficiently the Castlefields regeneration programme is working towards creating a sustainable

community in Castlefields. The Sustainable Communities Plan set out 8 key components: governance, transport and connectivity, services, environment, equity, economy, housing and built environment, society and culture. The first group of interview questions related to the definition of ‘sustainable community’ and its 8 key components:

- 1) The government defines sustainable communities as places where people want to live and work, now and in the future (Office of the Deputy ... 2003). How can sustainable communities be defined?
- 2) The government refers to 8 key components of sustainable communities: governance, transport and connectivity, services, environment, equity, economy, housing and built environment, society and culture. How can they be ranked in terms of importance?
- 3) What are the key components in making sustainable communities? Are they different to the governments 8, would you add others?
- 4) Is it necessary to have all 8 key components or will some of them be enough?
- 5) Would the good economic situation in the community help making it a sustainable community?
- 6) Do members of the community have to be involved in delivering sustainable communities?

The second group of interview questions related to the Castlefields regeneration programme and sustainable communities:

- 7) Is the Castlefields community engaged in the regeneration programme?
- 8) Does the community feel included in the regeneration programme?
- 9) What can be achieved through the Castlefields regeneration programme?
- 10) Which ‘element’ of the regeneration programme will help make Castlefields a sustainable community?
- 11) What gaps are there in the regeneration programme?
- 12) How effectively is the Castlefields regeneration programme working towards the 8 key components?
- 13) As a consequence of the regeneration programme will Castlefields become a sustainable community in the future?

The Castlefields regeneration programme has been tested against 8 components of sustainable communities and reported in the paper. The qualitative interview data has been analysed and presented.

3. Evolution of urban regeneration

The term “Urban regeneration” evolved after the Second World War in Europe and Britain, mainly due to post-war decline of industries. Since then, government policies have been focusing on urban regeneration to achieve better society.

Over the last 50 years, urban regeneration policy in the UK has had various foci. The nature of regeneration policy has changed direction several times (Roberts 2000). These changes have been implemented to suppress the extent of urban problems and resulted in the development of different urban regeneration programmes (Fig. 1).



Fig. 1. Evolution of urban regeneration policy

itive and enterprise. The focus was on the unblocking of supply-side obstacles to land and property development.

Between early and middle of 1990s, local area-based partnerships were created providing with compensation for public funds. This policy recognised that for successful implementation, regeneration projects needed to harness the strengths, resources, energy and initiative of local communities and a Bottom-up approach intended to build social capital and encourage community self-help.

The late 1990s approach concentrated on the development of strategies, joined-up action improving governance and the institutional arrangements for urban regeneration (Couch *et al.* 2003).

The beginning of the 21st century has brought new holistic and integrated policy epitomised by Urban Task Force's contention that an urban renaissance should be founded on the principles of design excellence, economic strength, environmental responsibility, good governance and social well-being. It has provided an explicit place-making dimension.

During the 1950s and 1960s, the predominant approach of comprehensive redemption has been driven by the determinist assumption that poverty could be built out and that changing the physical landscape would inevitably result in social and economic benefits. The overspill towns of Liverpool and Manchester – Runcorn, Skelmersdale and Warrington – started to be developed at this period.

Later, from the middle of the 1960s to the late 1970s, public welfare was prompted despite the welfare state of poverty and deprivation in inner city areas. This policy provided temporary compensation to the victims of economic and social change.

From the 1970s it has been realised that many urban problems are caused by structural economic change. Therefore, economic development was required to assist the area restoration.

In the 1980s, regeneration policy became closely associated with neo-liberalism, exemplifying that urban problems derive from the 'dead hand' of bureaucratic local government, stifling entrepreneurial initia-

4. Sustainable regeneration – a path to sustainable communities

By definition, sustainable communities are places planned and built to support sustainable living with focus on economic sustainability and environmental sustainability. Sustainable communities expect sustainable urban infrastructure and/or sustainable municipal infrastructure. Sustainable communities are places where people want to live and work, now and in the future (Office of the Deputy ... 2003). UK Government has identified 8 key components of sustainable communities, as shown in Fig. 2.

This emphasized that for communities to be sustainable, they must be offered hospitals, schools, shops, good public transport, and a clean and safe environment. Consequently, inefficient buildings should be refurbished (Mickaitytė *et al.* 2007, 2008) while transport infrastructure fixed. People also need public open space, where they can relax and interact, and the ability to have a say on the way their neighbourhood is run. Finally, sustainable communities must be supported with decent homes at prices people can afford.

Fig. 3 shows the results from semi-structured interviews undertaken in regard to sustainable community policy and its 8 key components. In light of all 8 components being similarly essential, interview responses demonstrated that in some cases the economy was regarded as the more important component in making sustainable communities than others (Fig. 3B, E).

Throughout the history of urban regeneration, communities have been a major concern for all political parties. New sustainable communities can be a driver of urban regeneration, and sustainable communities are the essential ingredients of any regeneration scheme. Sustainable communities enhance physical, economic, environmental and social improvement. The resulting enhancements, in turn, stimulate new investment and new opportunities as the urban environment once again becomes full of life and enterprise (Edger and Taylor 2000). Communities have been at the centre of all new intervention policies. Therefore, it is now recognised that regeneration, especially in deprived urban areas, is necessary to assist in creating sustainable communities.

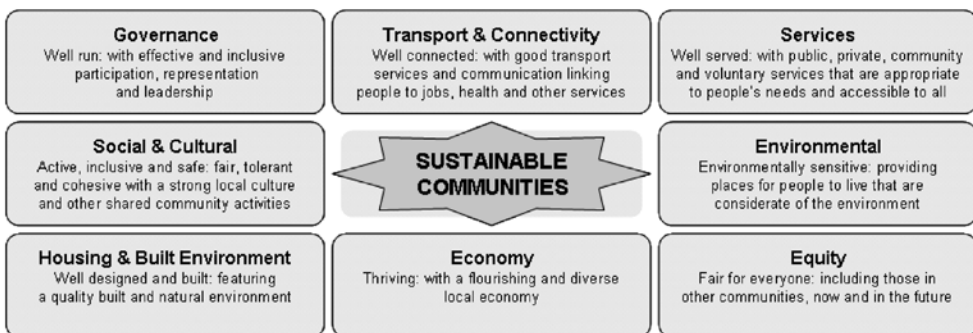


Fig. 2. The 8 components of sustainable communities. Adopted from the Egan review and EU Bristol Accord (Office of the Deputy ... 2003; Roberts and Jeffrey 2006)

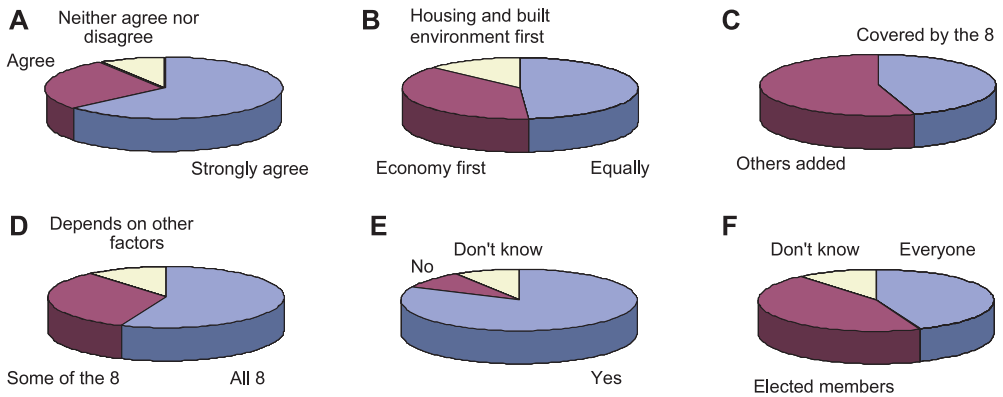


Fig. 3. Sustainable communities and its 8 key components. The pie charts denote the proportion of responses against each interview question. Charts A-F represents responses to the following questions: (A) The government defines sustainable communities as places where people want to live and work, now and in the future (Office of the Deputy ... 2003). How can sustainable communities be defined? (B) The government refers to 8 key components of sustainable communities: governance, transport and connectivity, services, environmental, equity, economy, housing and built environment, social and cultural. How can they be ranked in terms of importance? (C) What are the key components in making sustainable communities? Are they different to the governments 8, would you add others? (D) Is it necessary to have all 8 key components or some of them will be enough? (E) Would the good economic situation in the community help making it a sustainable community? (F) Do members of the community have to be involved in delivering sustainable communities?

Recently, the UK government proposed an ambitious 'umbrella' programme for sustainable communities. In this programme, sustainable regeneration is one of the major issues that is necessary to address in creating sustainable communities. A planned series of initiatives involve the physical regeneration of the urban infrastructure, the demolition of empty properties, and the creation of new towns, all of which is designed to enhance the quality of life and boost urban economy and property development markets (Raco 2005b).

5. Urban regeneration in Castlefields

Castlefields is an interesting case study given it was the largest estate to be built under the Runcorn New Town programme. It was designed to be more than simply a housing estate, for example, provision was made for schools, shops and community facilities and planned in the 1960's as a solution to social housing requirements. In terms of creating a place of quality through spatial urban design, the scheme was a commendable one of its time (Taylor Young 2004).

Recently, 30 years on, doubts have risen over the design of key components of the estate. The architectural design has limited its flexibility to be changed; the deck access flats and the local centre were designed as single entities with no provision for future adaptation. The over use of some materials and construction methods have proven costly. The generous planting of the estate coupled with lack of maintenance has removed the natural surveillance opportunities and created unsafe areas (Taylor Young 2004).

In 2003 the UK government launched the Sustainable Communities Plan (Office of the Deputy ... 2004). This action plan became the government framework for tackling deprivation and the shortage of affordable housing by delivering successful, thriving and inclusive communities in all regions. The regeneration of Castlefields fits squarely in this programme (Taylor Young 2004).

Castlefields is not the first estate in Runcorn New Town to be targeted on such a scale. Southgate, designed by Sir James Stirling on a grid layout of five-storey blocks, was demolished within 20 years of being completed and rebuilt as Hallwood Park in the early 1990's (Morton 1994). However, even after the provision of new, modern, traditional type homes, the estate still suffers from deprivation. This fact emphasizes the importance of investigating how successful the regeneration programme in Castlefields has been so far and assesses how closely it is aligned to the sustainable communities plan.

In order to determine how well the Castlefields regeneration programme is planned and complies with Sustainable Communities Plan and to examine the likelihood of Castlefields becoming a sustainable community, the semi-structured interviews were conducted with members of the CRP and professionals from sustainable communities academic and the policy environment. The interview questions have been set as described in Methodology. The interview results are presented in Fig. 4.

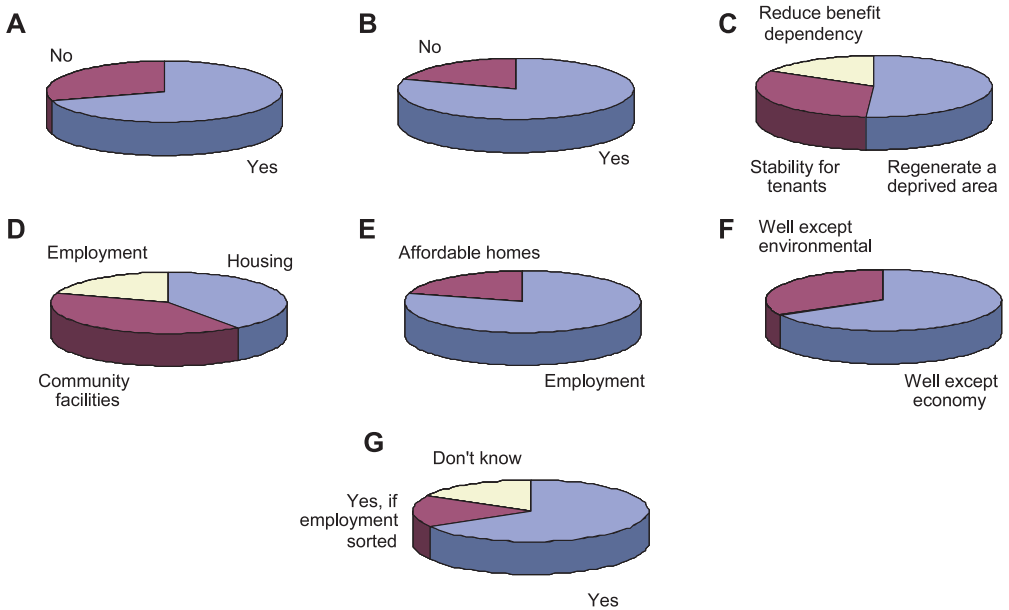


Fig. 4. Castlefields regeneration programme and sustainable communities. Charts denote the proportion of responses against each interview question. A-G represent responses to the following questions: (A) Is the Castlefields community engaged in regeneration programme? (B) Does the community feel included in the regeneration programme? (C) What can be achieved through Castlefields regeneration programme? (D) Which element of the regeneration programme will help make Castlefields a sustainable community? (E) What gaps are in the regeneration programme? (F) How effectively the Castlefields regeneration programme is working towards 8 key components? (G) Will Castlefields as a consequence of regeneration programme become a sustainable community in the future?

Interview results reveal that the community positively accepts the Castlefields regeneration programme. Castlefields is a very strong, cohesive community. People are active in meetings, demonstrating the level of interest in the regeneration programme. The Castlefields community feel they have been involved in the regeneration programme and have influenced and contributed to the programme through many of the schemes (Fig. 4A, B). Most importantly, other interview responses show that the Castlefields regeneration programme addresses at least 7 of the 8 key components identified by the UK government as sustainable regeneration and has full potential to succeed in creating a sustainable community (Fig. 4F, G). However, gaps have also been identified in the regeneration programme. The main issue is being around employment/economy, an area identified in the Masterplan but still requiring funding (Fig. 4E, F).

Fortunately, there is an overwhelming desire by the CRP and the community to tackle the high unemployment which still persists in Castlefields. All interview responses are in agreement that without an appropriate economy component Castlefields will struggle to become a sustainable community.

6. Discussion

The term “sustainable communities” has been around since the 1980s (Frobeen 2006) in a number of countries across the globe and links all the definitions of sustainable communities with the common themes of environmental, economic and social sustainability principals. Recently, the fourth, the political dimension of sustainability has been suggested (Čiegis and Gineitienė 2008). Some countries place a greater emphasis on environmental sustainability, e.g. Scandinavian countries (Office of the Deputy ... 2006a). Others focus on the specific areas of the social sustainability, as sustainable transport (Rohacs and Simongati 2007; Grigonis and Paliulis 2007) or residential environment (Viteikienė and Zavadskas 2007; Juškevičius and Burinskienė 2007). Whereas in Germany, the emphasis is focused on social sustainability and empowering local communities. Besides, the development of sustainability can be greatly affected by the government’s policies on the land and property taxation and supported through the tax relief (Malienė *et al.* 2005). Previously, UK urban regeneration has been based on social and economic improvement, but since the introduction of sustainable community policies, the emphasis has been addressed towards environmental, social and economic coherence. The 8 components have been adopted by European ministers in the Bristol Accord agreement and by the UK government (Office of the Deputy ... 2006b). The UK government has suggested all 8 components of sustainable communities are of equal importance and all are necessary in planning, delivering and maintaining sustainable communities. Our research revealed that this policy is well supported by the CRP and other professionals from the academic and policy environment (Fig. 3). Moreover, it showed that a good economic situation is particularly significant in creating sustainable communities.

Castlefields has been stigmatised by high unemployment, low demand housing and antisocial behaviour since the late 1980s. The figures demonstrated a level of underachievement and deprivation which could not be allowed to continue. The town became an area which demanded socio-economic regeneration (Halton Borough Council 1998). The UK

government launched an ambitious ‘umbrella’ programme for sustainable communities and has emphasised sustainable regeneration as one of the major issues necessary to address in creating sustainable communities. This article offers the overall view on how closely aligned the Castlefields regeneration programme is with the Sustainable Communities Plan. Our research shows that Castlefields has significant attributes that will help it become a sustainable community of the future. The first is the very strong, cohesive and active community connected to Castlefields. The second is the dedication of the CRP to making sustainable urban regeneration. However, Castlefields currently lacks the funding to support one of the essential components, the economy, which would provide employment and wealth to the community. This is a key issue to be addressed in order to accomplish the aims of the Sustainable Communities Plan.

In conclusion, Castlefields has a very real chance of becoming a sustainable community but only if the economic initiatives are provided. The research presented in this article identifies the urban regeneration programme as being one of the effective solutions for dealing with deprived areas. Therefore, as envisaged in the UK government’s Sustainable Community Plan, urban regeneration has tremendous potential in creating sustainable communities in areas like Castlefields and elsewhere.

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MIESTŲ ATGAIVINIMAS DARNIOMS BENDRUOMENĖMS KURTI: ATVEJO TYRIMAS

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Santrauka

Šiuo metu siekiama įdiegti atgaivinimo projektus ir sukurti darniąsias bendruomenes pasitelkiant partnerystės programas. Darniosios bendruomenės kūrimas yra viena svarbiausių problemų, analizuojamų JK vyriausybės programoje. 2003 m. JK vyriausybės sukurtame darniųjų bendruomenių plane pateikiama vizija, kaip mūsų bendruomenės turėtų vystytis ekonomiškai, socialiai ir aplinkos atžvilgiu per ateinančius 20 metų, atsižvelgiant į ateities kartų gerovę ir poreikius. Analizuojama, kaip glaustai miestų atgaivinimo programa yra suderinta su darniųjų bendruomenių kūrimo planu. Tyrimai, pagrįsti tiesioginėmis apklausomis, įvertina darniųjų bendruomenių ir miestų atgaivinimo plėtrą bei sąsajas.

Reikšminiai žodžiai: darnumas, bendruomenė, atgaivinimas, atvejo tyrimas, Castlefields, JK.

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