

Respect and renewal: a study of neighbourhood social regeneration

Between 1998 and 2004, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation funded a programme of work to investigate the nature of social exclusion in deprived council estates and neighbourhoods and to explore the use of people-based 'soft' regeneration strategies to revitalise them. This study by David Page sets the outcomes from that programme against the progress of wider national policies and programmes to help poor people and poor places. The study found that:

- Professionals underestimated the importance of social issues and were more focused on physical regeneration. Residents perceived social factors – crime and fear of crime, poor life chances for their children, and the consequences of poverty – as the main ones affecting their quality of life, not physical degeneration.
- Some new ideas trialled on the estates were both popular and successful. Reassurance policing reduced the fear of crime; neighbourhood wardens brought anti-social behaviour under control; neighbourhood managers and one-stop centres improved service delivery; and architectural treatments eliminated 'dangerous places'. These measures inspired confidence that social problems could be tackled.
- 'Soft regeneration' projects succeeded within their own terms but none successfully transformed neighbourhoods. Individuals benefited, but some used their enhanced skills and employment prospects to enable them to move elsewhere.
- 'Youth' was a key group in each area. Young people who underachieved academically found the blue-collar jobs of their parents' time no longer available. On some estates, one quarter of young men aged 16 to 21 were neither in work nor education.
- Neighbourhoods with strong concentrations of worklessness in 1998 had the same problems in 2004. Although much had been done to tackle social exclusion in each place, the strong link with worklessness remained.
- The estates and neighbourhoods were all areas of long-term worklessness but were not homogeneous. The research found communities within communities and discovered similar tensions in each area between longstanding residents – many with large extended families living nearby – and 'incomers'; and between those who were comfortable living on their estate and others who wanted the improved life chances offered elsewhere. This suggests a need for new ways of consulting and dealing with the different populations within each neighbourhood in a more sensitive way.
- The persistence of worklessness in the study areas reflected the national picture in deprived neighbourhoods. Although many more jobs have been created, they have not been taken by people furthest from the labour market. This suggests that creating work opportunities is not enough: workless people need more tailored support back into work.



Background

The last two decades of the twentieth century saw a period of profound economic and social change in the UK. Many traditional industries like coal, iron and steel, shipbuilding and the ports, as well as manufacturing, restructured and downsized in response to technological advancement, growing international competition, and the globalisation of labour markets. In the wake of these changes, many neighbourhoods that had depended on these industries began to decline as jobs were lost and not replaced. At the same time changes in society, including increasing family breakdown, weakened the support systems that helped people cope. Over the same period, in the UK child poverty trebled; crime doubled; and exclusions from school quadrupled. By the late 1990s, a new expression – *social exclusion* – emerged to describe the multiple problems and negative social outcomes associated with living in a seriously disadvantaged area.

In 1997, the Labour Government set up a Social Exclusion Unit to research social exclusion and devise ways of dealing with it at a personal and neighbourhood level. At the same time, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) initiated a programme – the Partnership Initiative for Communities (PICs) – which aimed to examine the nature of neighbourhood social exclusion and explore the effectiveness of ‘soft regeneration’ approaches to neighbourhood renewal (people-based, rather than bricks and mortar). To find out whether the consequences of social exclusion varied in different locations and circumstances, JRF invited the local authorities of three very different districts to join PICs. They were: Wakefield, an example of a district hit hard by industrial decline; York, a typical provincial town; and Lewisham, a fairly typical inner London borough. Each council was asked to select two ‘hard to live on’ council estates to participate in the research and a programme of social renewal; JRF agreed to put up £100,000 for each of the three areas to fund a chosen project for three years.

The PICs programme

The PICs programme was planned as a sandwich, with local action projects contained within two rounds of qualitative research. In addition, a longitudinal research project tracked the responses of fixed groups of residents to regeneration in each area as it was taking place. The initial research had two purposes:

- to search out the realities of social exclusion; and
- to establish the specific needs and problems in each area so that interventions could be tailored to suit local requirements.

A strong feature of the research was the innovative use of market research methods to identify and consult demographic sub-groups within the communities.

The initial research found that neighbourhood concentrations of poverty and worklessness were strongly associated with low academic achievement; poor health, particularly in the form of high rates of depression and alcohol and drug abuse; high rates of crime victimisation and perpetration; low self esteem, limited ambitions and expectations; and high rates of family breakdown and reformation. Although on each estate those with ‘no money and no work’ were in a minority, the effect of deprivation on the estates was profound. The consistency of these results suggests that similar effects will be found elsewhere in Britain where similar proportions of people with ‘no money and no work’ exist.

The action projects on estates were different in each area.

- **York** developed a pioneering holistic scheme which used soft regeneration techniques and partnership working to tackle the complex problems of a troubled estate. A prototype neighbourhood manager co-ordinated multiple projects from a base at the centre of the community.

- In a former mining community in **Wakefield**, where the initial research had spotlighted the disaffection of children and young people as the issue of most concern to residents, a participatory arts project engaged more than a thousand young people – including those hardest to reach – in creative activity and introduced them to a range of new experiences, raising aspirations and building bridges to new employment opportunities.
- In **Lewisham**, residents of a (then) unpopular estate were empowered to organise their community to tackle the difficult problems of its relationship with the police and race relations on their estate, as well as devising ways to improve the interface between public service providers and the community through an innovative process of deliberative consultation.

The concluding research asked residents what had changed on their estates over the previous six years, and what had remained the same. While recognising that a great deal had been done, residents said that the big problems identified in 1998 were still the big problems in 2004. Crime, drugs, unemployment, youth nuisance and low educational attainment remained major issues on estates in the three areas, showing their intractability. However, also evident was a new belief that these problems could be tackled and managed, if not overcome. Residents were also asked to identify which regeneration initiatives had made a difference. Among the new ideas trialled on the estates that were thought to be successful were:

- reassurance policing, which reduced the fear of crime;
- neighbourhood wardens, who were effective at bringing anti-social behaviour under control;
- neighbourhood managers and one-stop centres, which improved the interface between residents and public service providers; and
- architectural treatments that eliminated ‘dangerous places’ and used physical means to make it harder for crime and nuisance to occur.

The local impact of national policies to help poor people and poor places

The study went on to consider the objective data about the local impact in the three districts of national policies to tackle social exclusion put in place since PICs began. Using data on jobs from the Labour Force Survey and the Annual Business Inquiry, and Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) data on claimants of out-of-work welfare benefits as an indicator of worklessness over the period 1999 to 2005, the study found:

- strong job growth of at least 10 per cent in all three districts;
- substantial reductions in claimants of income-based Jobseeker’s Allowance; but
- only a small reduction (averaging 1 per cent per year) in the total numbers of claimants of out-of-work welfare benefits from the PICs estates.

This data confirmed research results from the study estates that, although many more local jobs had been created, they had not been taken by the estate residents furthest from the labour market. This suggests that creating work opportunities is not enough: more needs to be done to provide tailored support to help workless people back into work. Further detailed analysis showed that the small reductions in worklessness found on the PICs estates were consistent with the average performance in the 10 per cent of ‘worst wards’ which receive extra government help to combat neighbourhood social exclusion.

Connections between poverty and place

Using the same datasets, the analysis went on to trace the spatial distribution of working-age claimants of out-of-work welfare benefits (as a proxy for social exclusion) at ward level. It found that:

- The spatial distribution of working-age recipients of out-of-work benefits is heavily skewed and changed little between 1999 and 2005. More than half of all claimants live in just one sixth of wards, while half of all wards share between them less than one sixth of claimants.
- Despite the efforts of regeneration programmes, there was little change in the ranking of wards on worklessness: 92 per cent of wards in the tenth with most working age claimants in 1999 were still in the highest tenth in 2005.
- The rate of worklessness at ward level varied considerably in 2005, from less than one person in twenty in the least deprived tenth of wards, to more than one in four in the most deprived tenth.
- Most English wards showed low rates of worklessness in 2005: 70 per cent had below-average working-age claimant rates, while a small number had rates that were much higher, up to 45 per cent.

Conclusions

The author concludes that 'soft regeneration' can greatly improve the quality of life of residents in disadvantaged areas but is unlikely to transform it. Reducing concentrations of worklessness is likely to be more effective, but it is proving hard to achieve. Although many more jobs have been created, they have not been taken by people furthest from the labour market living in deprived estates and neighbourhoods. Creating work opportunities is not enough in itself to reduce embedded worklessness: more needs to be done to provide tailored support to help workless people back into work in order to make a real difference in the most excluded neighbourhoods.

About the project

The study by David Page described the PICs programme which was funded by JRF and ran from 1998 to 2004. The author was co-ordinator of the programme. The study included analysis by the author of data from DWP, Labour Force Survey, ONS and other acknowledged sources.

For more information

The full report, **Respect and renewal: A study of neighbourhood social regeneration** by David Page, is published by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

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