

# foundations

## Urban regeneration through partnership: A critical appraisal

An enduring need for urban regeneration despite thirty years of regeneration activity raises the question of whether we are organising ourselves as a society sufficiently to achieve regeneration over the next thirty. Although there has been an explosion in the 1990s in the use of partnership as a means to regeneration, not enough is known about why some partnerships are effective and others are not. The conclusions of a study of 27 partnerships in nine city-regions identifies key lessons for better partnership, and critical issues about policy and governance which affect the future of Britain's cities.

### Regeneration includes these challenges:

- The need to achieve long-term, strategic regeneration of cities and neighbourhoods, set against a history of short-term, area-based initiatives.
- The need to derive economic advancement and social inclusion from the necessary but easier task of physical regeneration.
- The need to harness mainstream services to regeneration, given that more than 85 per cent of public expenditure in regeneration areas is through mainstream budgets.

### Some of the study's main conclusions are:

- Local leadership and practical, long-term vision are vital in developing a consensus around a strategic, city-wide and regional approach to regeneration.
- There is a need for active involvement of health trusts, the Employment Service, the Benefits Agency and the police in partnership, and for a concerted effort to involve business - only a minority of partnerships studied had real business involvement.
- Regeneration programmes should: budget for community capacity building from the start; ensure that partners understand the need for community development; enter into formal regeneration and service quality agreements, or community plans; and measure success in terms of community skills and residents' views.
- There is a need for a convergence between the modernisation of local government agendas and regeneration. Important tasks are to develop a clear corporate approach in the local authority, and to promote local democracy and neighbourhood initiatives within a council decentralisation programme.
- There is a need to link national policy, regional governance, city strategy and local action in a coherent whole so that top-down and bottom-up initiatives are mutually supportive.
- There is a need for a national settlement strategy, including new transport infrastructure, which balances the spatial patterns of the country's economic development on a more equitable basis, that is away from the over-heated South East, to support industrialised cities which are losing jobs and population.

This study examined factors which influence the effectiveness of Britain's urban regeneration partnerships, and how they work within the emerging national policy context. Case studies were carried out in 27 partnerships in eight city-regions in England and Scotland and in the Welsh Valleys. In each of these, a 'cluster' of partnerships was examined: a regional or sub-regional, a city-wide and one or more local partnerships. In addition to factors of effectiveness, what are called the 'foundations' of partnership were also examined. These influence the quality of partnership and the outcomes of regeneration, but are outside of the control of partnerships, except by lobbying. These are:

- the modernisation of local government,
- the regional development framework, and
- the need for a co-ordinated, effective national policy.

### Key lessons for more effective partnership operation

#### *Leadership*

Political and executive leadership is critical to the quality of partnership. In sub-regional and city-wide partnerships involving local government, as most do, the commitment of the council leader and council's chief executive to the objectives of the partnership is essential. Executive leadership at this spatial scale takes place either in, or with the support of, a strong chief executive's department in the lead local authority or it resides with motivated, paid staff of the partnership under an able director.

At all levels of partnership, strong, competent leadership by the chair of the partnership board, working closely with the director, heightens the visibility of the partnership, draws in reluctant partners and drives forward the regeneration agenda, thus ensuring the partnership is more than a 'talking shop'.

#### *Vision and consensus building*

Regeneration is a long-term task, requiring a ten to twenty-five year horizon. 'Visioning' processes, by whatever name, provide the opportunity for prospective partners to come together to develop a shared agenda for the future, to position the city/region in the economy, to enthuse residents, businesses and potential inward investors and provide a broad benchmark of progress in the partnership. Visioning is often championed by the council leader.

#### *Translation of vision into workable objectives*

Vision statements must be carried through in a systematic manner to produce consensual, workable medium-term objectives, backed up by commitments to finance, human resources, targets and monitoring, or the vision will be discredited and the quality of partnership eroded.

#### *Building community into partnership*

Good partnerships with communities form around longer term, strategic development plans for the neighbourhood and the city rather than solely to secure regeneration funding. The best approaches integrate short-term participation exercises with improvements in local democracy, such as the advent of area forums in a number of local authorities. Formal agreements can help cement partnership and demonstrate commitment of institutional partners to community groups let down in the past. Modest revenue funding for key community groups could bring real benefits in capacity building.

#### *Drawing business into partnership*

Business leaders are often drawn into partnership by a one-on-one approach from the leader of the council. They can make a valuable contribution to partnership, but have little patience with 'talking shops'. Partnership structures and ways of working that maximise the use of their time - with an emphasis on vision and strategic development issues - are the most effective. Effective, sustained business involvement occurs when business representatives organise themselves before entering into partnership. This can be through an existing organisation, such as a Chamber of Commerce, or a regeneration-focused business partnership.

#### *Inclusiveness versus efficiency*

Partnerships suffer tension between the need to include partner organisations and the need for efficient, streamlined decision and management processes. Partnership boards must be kept to a reasonable number of formal members. Other means of broadening the base of participation include a citizens' forum, a secondary, operational board, and/or a core management team. Larger memberships require additional managerial resources to maintain enthusiasm and commitment. In effective partnerships, TECs/LECs, Chamber, educational organisations, the police and the health authority develop and manage key aspects of the regeneration strategy with other stakeholders including community groups. This is important because the longer the track record of practical mutual activity in the partnership, the easier partnership working becomes.

### *Nurturing partnership*

At the outset, or when partnership is weak, formal or informal attempts to build mutual understanding among partners can be undertaken. Leaders can build bridges with less enthusiastic partners, helping them overcome diffidence about partnership itself and find benefits for their organisation in partnership working.

### *Human resources*

Partnerships represent complex interpersonal and organisational interactions, so they are dependent on the quality of their people. Human aspects of partnership working - communication and diplomacy, building mutual understanding, learning that power sharing can increase agency effectiveness and so on - take time to learn. Confidence-building is also important, particularly for board members - while they may be representatives of their organisations, they need to have the courage and mandate to take decisions and accept responsibilities on behalf of their agency in the partnership. Personal skills ought to be a key criterion in selection of managers, staff and even board members.

For staffing of partnerships, although seconded staff can make a valuable contribution, full-time, paid staff - able to operate with a degree of independence from any one partner - are better able to promote the partnership's strategic programme and make effective use of its human and financial resources. It is also important to assist local councillors in partnership areas - the great majority now outside of local authority 'cabinets' - to develop a productive role in ward representation and partnership, vis-à-vis local residents and the business community.

### *A culture of partnerships*

This is not only about success and failure in achieving regeneration aims - determined by careful, constructive monitoring of outcomes and partnership quality - but about the underlying attitudes and values, reflected in working practices, which partners bring to the table. These are the elements of organisational culture, which can be altered to embrace partnership.

Partnerships can lose direction, or fall apart upon public squabbling between partners who fail to develop a common agenda. Some are wound up, but this is seldom a viable option for visible, city-wide partnerships. Failure is not a crime, but the lessons of experience must be addressed in an honest manner and new, mutually agreeable ways of working set in place before a partnership is relaunched. Hearts and minds can be focused on the necessary steps through a relaunch.

## Enabling partnerships

### *Broadening the base of partnership*

Effective partnerships are built on the involvement of key regional and local organisations. Thus, active involvement is needed from health trusts, the Employment Service, the Benefits Agency and the police. Concerted effort also needs to be made to involve business - only a minority of the partnerships studied had effective business involvement and, in each case, this was the result of ten years of effort.

### *Genuinely empowering the community*

A feature of too many regeneration areas is the feeling of residents that they have no influence over public decisions. They therefore lack confidence in public agencies as well as themselves. There is little recognition that community involvement ought to produce a transfer of power to those currently powerless. To work towards this, regeneration programmes should: budget for community development and capacity building from the start; ensure that partners understand community development processes; enter into formal regeneration and service quality agreements, or community plans; and measure success in terms of community confidence and skills, and residents' views of regeneration achievements.

### *Fostering a chain of sustainable development*

Top-down and bottom-up integration is necessary to enhance regeneration at all levels - meaning positive linkage between neighbourhood, city, sub-regional and regional partnerships. This gives a chain of sustainable development only as strong as its weakest link. Political and funding structures should assist establishment of partnerships at levels where they are needed but don't yet exist: some neighbourhood partnerships in adjacent local authorities; city-wide partnerships (which ought to exist in almost every city and town); and sub-regional and regional partnerships, the former based on logical urban sub-regions or travel-to-work areas. Care should be taken to ensure that efforts are complementary so that, for example, partnerships initiated by the Regional Development Agencies don't undermine valuable, existing sub-regional partnerships.

## Laying the foundations for regeneration

### *Better local governance to aid regeneration*

Many local councils are finding real benefit in supporting partnership with modernisation and new approaches to local democracy. Partners, from business to community, find that councils embracing

modernisation are easier to work with and make better, more committed partners. To encourage innovation and foster transfer of best practice, each of the three countries studied, in their own way, would benefit from establishment of a government-sponsored, but partnership-organised, Modern Local Government Good Practice Unit, to help local authorities re-think and reposition their strategic and management role for the 21st century.

### *Joined-up action*

Removing barriers to joined-up thinking means moving decision-makers out of their organisational silos and making individuals, teams and whole agencies think differently about working practices and how these affect the fortunes of regeneration areas and disadvantaged households. Means to joined-up action to support partnership working include: a corporate strategy approach in the local authority; co-ordinated regional development; and co-ordination and a changed organisational culture among central government departments. There is widespread concern among practitioners that central government departments fail to achieve a joined-up national policy framework.

### *A new financial regime*

Effective regeneration requires an integrated approach to funding. Financial inflexibility within a plethora of new initiatives, often based on challenge funding with short time limits, may not deliver optimum benefits. The time is right for stakeholders to work together towards a more innovative approach to the funding of partnerships. The report suggests a contractual arrangement between central and local government and block regeneration grants to local authorities, in return for commitments to modernise processes of governance, enhanced local democracy and strategic regeneration.

### *A coherent regional framework*

It is important to support partnership at all spatial levels, by ensuring that economic development and inward investment directly underpin regeneration and social inclusion. This is necessary for providing a coherent land use framework, for example to ensure that out-of-town shopping or housing doesn't undermine inner city vitality, and for ensuring that development is not at the expense of the environment. These issues require a means for taking tough regional decisions - otherwise partnership at lower spatial levels is less productive. In England, better co-ordination

between Government Offices for the Regions, Regional Planning Guidance, and RDA activity ought to provide an integrated framework for partnerships to work within, with a clear lead agency with a mandate for overall sustainable development linking economic advancement, social inclusion and environmental quality. Scotland and Wales need to do more to develop a coherent regional development framework which provides a context for regeneration among single tier local authorities.

### *A national urban policy*

Central government should be promoting strategic urban development to underpin regeneration, to balance spatial patterns of the country's economic development on a more equitable basis, that is away from the over-heated South East, to support industrialised cities losing jobs and population. A national policy - linking urban and rural development, high speed transport and investment in infrastructure - may be essential to allow partnerships, and the country as a whole, to achieve major objectives in the regeneration of our cities.

## About the study

The study looked at regeneration partnerships in East London and Newham, Birmingham, Greater Manchester, South Yorkshire and Sheffield, the Tees Valley and Middlesbrough, the Welsh Valleys and Rhondda Cynon Taff, Lanarkshire, Glasgow and Edinburgh. The Scottish case studies were joint-funded by Scottish Homes. The research team was led by Professor Michael Carley at Heriot-Watt University, with Mike Chapman and Karryn Kirk; and Annette Hastings, Raymond Young, Alison More and Jo Dean at Glasgow University.

## How to get further information

The full report, *Urban regeneration through partnership: A study in nine urban regions in England, Scotland and Wales* by Michael Carley, Mike Chapman, Annette Hastings, Karryn Kirk and Raymond Young, is published for the Foundation by The Policy Press (ISBN 1 86134 250 0, price £14.95).