

The New 'Community Planning' Agenda – Institutional Morphing in Dundee

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Introduction

Changing political agendas have shaped models of urban regeneration in Scotland. Latterly, this has focussed on social justice and inclusion reflecting the policy direction of 'new labour' and the Scottish Parliament. In addition the experience of community regeneration and imposition of a national 'Community Planning' agenda, has contributed to the development of strategic instruments for tackling poverty and exclusion in its cities.

For the previous 4-5 years in Scotland, the idea of community planning has attracted considerable interest in local government circles as a means of defining practical agendas for positive policy action between the numerous and diverse agencies engaged in local governance, economic regeneration and social inclusion. Community planning was perceived as an approach to re-asserting the role of local authorities at a time when new relationships, policy agendas and national priorities were being developed in Scotland to accommodate the Parliament (Sinclair, 1997). The emphasis on community planning represents a policy move that is entirely consistent with measures that stress the role of local involvement and empowerment in policy implementation. These enabling moves have been introduced elsewhere, including the establishment of community based regeneration programmes and Social Inclusion Partnership initiatives.

Very recently (i.e., June 2000), Wendy Alexander, Minister for Communities in the Scottish Parliament, announced that the Scottish Executive intended to introduce a statutory power of community initiative and of community planning in the forthcoming local government bill (Alexander, 2000). More specifically, the Minister asserted that for local government the new power of community initiative "will help make a reality of joint working with other bodies; cross cutting initiatives and it will provide strong foundations for community planning.

The Dundee Partnership reflects these dynamics of change in terms of an institutional framework and strategic approach for the delivery of these particular strategies. Currently its vision sets out priorities for regeneration and social inclusion at both the neighbourhood level and across the city. The morphing of institutional arrangements to respond to this and the community planning policy paradigm is examined in the paper. It is explored in the context of reform and development of over-arching policy agendas, governance of community planning at the local level and the 'new labour' social inclusion agenda.

Context

Also in recent times, significant displacement and reform of (other) institutions has taken place (Marr, 1995). This has triggered procedures, which have delivered macro level processes of devolution and decentralisation. These guiding principles of policy reflect a 'third way' in politics and a practical concern that the UK constitution is relatively highly centralised when compared to other advanced industrial economies (Hutton, 1994). As such the Government has implemented a programme of constitutional reform and devolution of power that are proposed to enable political systems to achieve greater democratic accountability in the processes of government. This includes a Scottish Parliament, a Welsh Assembly and a strategic planning authority for London.

Devolution, in particular, has been an important policy priority. The Scottish Parliament takes over powers and responsibilities of what previously had been those of the Scottish Office. These matters include health, education training, local government, social work and housing, economic development and transport, law and home affairs, environment, agriculture, forestry and fisheries, and sport and the arts (Himsworth and Munro, 1998). This creates a clear domestic agenda for the Scottish Parliament, although, in practice, it remains a reactive legislature with relatively modest policy making powers which is constrained by external influences in addressing its internal affairs (Norton, 1998). This does not suggest that the Parliament will be unable to innovate with respect to its particular responsibilities (Mitchell, 1998). Active government is linked with the politics of decentralisation. Policies are thus an appropriate vision of government and will result in institutional innovation, as is the case with respect to urban and community regeneration.

Governance and Community Planning

There is a particularly Scottish dimension to community planning practice as a consequence of its history and what has been described earlier in terms of the evolving constitutional position. The notion of community planning builds, for example, on an important Scottish tradition of community leadership by local government. At the present time also, the creation of the Scottish Parliament has resulted in an ongoing reconsideration of its relations with local government (Alexander, 1997). In the mid 1990s, local government in Scotland was reconfigured into a unitary network of 32 authorities. Devolution took place therefore at a sensitive period of institutional change. The McIntosh Commission (1999) subsequently advocated that local authorities be granted a power of general competence within which community planning would then play a central role.

Although at an early stage in development, currently all 32 local authorities in Scotland are in the process of advancing their community planning strategies, however, not at the same speed. There is undoubtedly a tremendous range and depth of work being undertaken and as such community planning is well placed, to one degree or another, to have a key enabling role to play in renewing communities (COSLA, 2000). This is viewed as offering a way for Councils at the local level to work together with the community, voluntary and private sectors to develop and deliver an agreed joint vision for social inclusion in their communities.

Community planning builds on the historical experience and positions present day local authorities firmly into the new political modernisation agenda. In addition, research into the community planning process shows public agencies have a key role in encouraging the development of the community planning process (COSLA, 2000). In Scotland, the community planning process displays that it has the potential to:

- Overcome the increasingly fragmented landscape of public policy and service provision
- Establish a joint vision shared by partner organisations; and
- Streamline, integrate and improve partnership working and community consultation and involvement

Social Inclusion

Prior to the election in 1997, the Labour Party (then in opposition) pledged itself to more open government, greater decentralisation of power, greater accountability in governance and constitutional reform. As a result of Labour's election to Government, in May 1997, new forms of governance and a 'third way' in politics has emerged to dominate policy formulation. This is subsequently reflected in the key features of social inclusion programmes in the UK today. The government has then fostered an interest in devolution and social inclusion as ways of meeting both its ideological objectives and in practical terms some of its related manifesto promises. Giddens (1998) has articulated other principal political arguments similarly associated with the 'third way'. In addressing contemporary challenges associated with globalisation, individualism, political polarity and ecology, the 'third way' seeks to renew democracy. Emphasis is placed on a new mixed economy, involving partnership and importantly, social inclusion.

Case study: the Dundee Partnership

Governance

The post war experience of Dundee reflected a process of long term endemic decline in its traditional industrial and corporate sectors from the 1960s to the present. The collapse in established industrial sectors was not matched or compensated for by significant inward investment or indeed local economic diversification. The economic and corporate restructuring spilled over into the social and community structures in the city, it eroded its skill base, reduced the city income level and undermined the provision of private services and local authority community facilities (Docherty, 1991). Initially, there were a number of concerted actions by successive local authorities in Dundee throughout the early post war period to address the physical problems and reconstruction challenges faced by the city. It is in this period that the context was created for the subsequent development and execution of the partnership approach to urban and community regeneration, and now social inclusion and community planning in Dundee.

The Dundee Partnership, in its more recent configuration, surfaced in 1991. The institutional capacity of the city to respond to the evolving pressures of multiple and widespread forms of poverty and re-development (at this time) is reflected in the formation of the Dundee Partnership. Although the Dundee Partnership faced opportunities for growth it also confronted real difficulties in sustaining its provisions, not least the more advanced features of regeneration. This was balanced by a need to capture the political benefits of being associated with managed recovery of local and regional economies. The Dundee Partnership:

- represents a means of securing the informal co-ordination of the priorities and activities of its constituent participants; and
- is an informal institutional arrangement between key players in the regeneration of the city's economy, and it provides a link to other organisations such as the private sector and the trade unions .

The Dundee Partnership represents a good example of a local response to the economic, social and physical problems associated with the industrial and corporate restructuring of a city which have taken place over an extended period of time. In other words, the Dundee Partnership acts as an important conduit of priorities for policy formulation and implementation towards a common objective - the regeneration of Dundee and renewal of its communities.

The relationship between the Partnership and the community planning process will therefore be very intimate and pronounced one. This reflects not only the Dundee Partnership as it evolves but also the capacity of these structures to morph when statutory duties and policy requirements are placed upon it. Consultation and involvement have been vital aspects of the Partnership work to date and will become increasingly important as the economic base of the Partnership is extended to embrace the six themes of the Community Plan (see table.1: Community Planning Themes).

Table.1 Community Planning Themes

Theme	Lead Organisation
Social Inclusion	Dundee City Council
Community Safety	Tayside Police
Health and Care	Tayside Health Board
Sustainability	Scottish Enterprise Tayside
Economy and Enterprise	Dundee Partnership
Lifelong Learning	Dundee City Council

Social Inclusion Partnerships

It is asserted that "Scottish circumstances differ from England in that those suffering exclusion in Scotland are disproportionately concentrated in specific communities" (Dewar, 1998). Its basis is that the main urban centres are characterised by poverty and exclusion, which in turn is centred on mainly dormitory and peripheral housing estates. Consequently, regeneration instruments in Scotland have been geared to tackling urban poverty, which have been couched in a framework that recognises cities as socially, politically and economically functional structures. As such city partnership have remained central to the designation of social inclusion programmes; together with an achievable long-term strategy and the involvement of local communities. In this respect the Scottish Executive expects "partnerships seeking support to demonstrate that they have convincing strategies, will work together, and can do the job their communities deserve" (Dewar, 1999).

Over time, urban regeneration in Scotland has evolved into a distinctive approach that relies on specific elements - the geographical targeting of aid, the principles of partnership and empowerment, the identification of thematic priorities and the implementation of initiatives within a strategic city wide framework. Against this background, the new social inclusion agenda builds on the conventional approach to urban regeneration through the designation of geographical communities or neighbourhoods through sectorally targeted communities. The focus is very much on people - community regeneration - rather than the more established approach, which emphasised the rebuilding of the property base in such communities.

The most recent initiative, the Social Inclusion Partnerships (SIPs), for example, also emphasises the designation of communities for practical support for specific projects within a city wide regeneration strategy. This approach stresses the need for the vehicle of partnership to implement policy programmes at the community level. This distinctive combination of policy elements reflects the historical development of urban regeneration and social inclusion policies in Scotland. The SIPs build on and apply the principles of the Scottish Social Inclusion Strategy, which stated that "Scotland today is an unequal society" (Dewar, 1998), where:

- too many people are deprived of the life chances most of us take for granted;
- too many families live in poverty; and
- neglect, decay and crime blight too many communities.

Overall the SIPs initiative appears to be an advance on previous policy initiatives for urban regeneration in Scotland since it attempts to address the causes of urban decline rather than simply ameliorating the effects of such decline.

The Dundee Partnership meanwhile represents a means of securing the informal co-ordination of the priorities and activities for this strategy and of its constituent participants. Partnership working in this case has demonstrated

synergy between different organisations, co-operation and co-ordination of activity, strategic and long term thinking and the implementation of flexible, innovative and responsive policies to local need (Chapman, 1998). It is within this broader social paradigm, that SIPs represent important attempts at policy innovation. In particular, the delivery mechanism involved, as witnessed in Dundee, is that of partnership which is to operate within a citywide strategy. The question may be can this however be reconciled within the broader, more strategic process of community planning?

Community Planning Agenda

Community planning is also an attempt to provide a coherent policy agenda at the local government level. A tremendous responsibility - in terms of the required resources and skills - will be placed on local authorities in mediating the different (and differing) policy agendas of the various organisations engaged in local governance. This will set out a common agenda for action within which (a) individual policies and initiatives will perform, (b) within which cross cutting bodies, such as partnerships will operate, and (c) it will establish a strategic operational network within which all future activities will be deployed.

In July 1997, the Secretary of State for Scotland and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA) established a joint working group - the Community Planning Working Group (CPWG) - that was comprised of officials from the two organisations. Its responsibility was to examine the ways in which Scottish local authorities engage in partnerships with other bodies to provide for and promote the economic, social and environmental well being of the communities they serve. The CPWG (1998) described the aims of community planning as follows:

- to improve the service provided by Councils and their public sector partners to the public through closer, more co-ordinated working;
- to provide a process through which Councils and their public sector partners, in consultation with the voluntary and private sector, and the community, can agree both a strategic vision for the area and the action which each of the partners will take in pursuit of that vision; and,
- to help Councils and their public sector partners collectively to identify the needs and views of individuals and communities and to assess how they can best be delivered and addressed (Community Planning Working Group, 1998).

Dundee, in particular the Dundee Partnership, is in a relatively promising position to deliver community planning. As a consequence of considerable foresight and work at the partnership level over the last decade and longer, it appears Dundee can demonstrate a range of qualities, which offer a solid foundation for the implementation of a successful community plan. This relates to amongst others:

- A well proven track record in partnership working (including community regeneration and Social Inclusion Partnerships).
- Developing visions and congruent objectives across a broad range of partners, not least the community and voluntary sectors.
- A range of multi-agency plans and strategies that cut across the themes of the partnership's Community Plan.

The morphing of institutional arrangements in Dundee and through the Dundee Partnership that is ongoing, and is particularly the case in relation to its social inclusion objectives, lends itself to change and the capacity to adapt institutionally.

That said, the community planning concept, at the local level, could also be a means of setting out a cost effective provision of services to local communities by bringing some order to the fragmented institutional arrangements which prevails in many places. On the other hand it may be intended to provide a more strategic, integrated framework for policy within local authorities areas and between adjacent authorities with respect to the management of change. These potential purposes may not even be mutually exclusive.

Local Government and Community Leadership

The CPWG highlighted the leadership role of local government in asserting local agendas for the delivery of services and in providing a managed framework for effective inter-organisational relations. This was intended to address the existing complex of existing arrangements which include statutory and non-statutory plans, partnerships and other initiatives emanating from a wide range of different organisations. Community planning clearly offered an opportunity to address the potential and existing gaps in these arrangements. It would involve full consultation with individuals, communities and the private sector although it is clearly driven from the public sector community. Detailed community planning for each individual area would reflect prevailing and inherited economic, political and social conditions, different inter-organisational relations and a process of learning or evolving to address the needs of the individual local community.

The CPWG suggested that a small number of areas should be identified as Pathfinders to allow good practice to be disseminated across the country. In order to review the progress of the Pathfinder areas and to identify lessons learned from their experience of the community planning process the CPWG commissioned an evaluation of the five Pathfinder projects. The study concluded that the value of the process is beyond doubt and that there was a high level of agreement about the fundamental value of community planning within local councils and their partner organisations (Rogers et al, 1999). It suggested that community planning served as a vehicle for resolving the limitations of organisational arrangements for delivering public policy and service provision at a local level although there were operational tensions associated with the implementation of agreed strategic vision at the local level. The Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA, 1999) has since described Community Planning as:

- a process through which a council comes together with other organisations to plan to provide for or promote the wellbeing of the communities they serve; and
- a belief that councils, as democratically elected bodies have a community leadership role.

It is clear that the concept of community planning involves a structure (the Plan) and a culture or process of negotiation whereby the different interests and policy positions of all the bodies concerned with community are drawn together into a common agenda. The local authority in Dundee is following this example of partnership and community leadership. Although the local authority is leading the initiative with the agreement of its partners, other partner organisations have been encouraged to adopt a leadership role in relation to particular themes (see previous table.1: Community Planning Themes).

Partnership

The concept of community planning is viewed in terms of any process of public administration through which a Council comes together with other organisations to plan, provide for, or promote the well being of communities they serve. In other words, community planning represents an attempt to provide a strategic framework for the activities of the multifarious institutions engaged in community capacity building, social inclusion and regeneration. It is a dynamic process that involves local authorities working together with their principal public sector partners to plan for and deliver services that meet the needs of their local constituent communities. More formally, it has been described as a means by which local authorities can put forward an informed view of the challenges and opportunities facing their communities. This process is inclusive of the key players and interest groups involved in those localities to contribute to the overall well being of the community at large (Sinclair, 1997).

The Community Planning partnership has developed around the existing Dundee Partnership, which in turn provides a strategic focus for its work. This quite clearly builds on what works locally and is reflected in model proposed for the community planning structure. It includes groups that are easily allied to are therefore subsumed in the existing partnership structures:

1. The **Community Planning Forum** that comprises elected members of the Council and board members of the key public sector partners as well representatives from the business, voluntary and community sectors.
2. The **Community Planning management group** that consists of senior executives from the five public sector agencies. This group will develop the plans overall strategy and monitor its development.
3. **Community Planning Co-ordinating Group** that will involve representatives from the key public sector agencies including the chairs of groups responsible for each theme. This group will be ensuring that the plans themes are jointly progressed and developed.

The community planning structure that is emerging takes into account the vast amount of partnership working and strategy development that is already in place and presently being implemented. At the level of partnership this is reflected in the Dundee Community Plan vision. The plan centres on six key themes, which follow the strategic values, goals or priorities of the major public sector agencies in Dundee and are underpinned by clear direction from the Scottish Parliament (COSLA, 2000). Consequently there is already congruence between the partners.

Community Planning Strategy and Partnerships

Although the community planning process repositions local authorities in relation to the Scottish Parliament (Sinclair, 1997) there are questions about the burdens placed on individual Councils in discharging this new responsibility. In particular, community planning requires adequate skills, energy and resources on the part of local authorities (Lloyd and Illsley, 1999). If community planning is not adequately resourced then it may prove to be an unwanted burden on individual councils. This is important in the context of defining the key players and communities that should be involved in the intended inclusive character of community planning. The key issues in this context that have been identified in Dundee, and therefore by the Dundee Partnership, appear consistent with those emerging from the pathfinder authorities. These include:

- Joint working on strategic themes must add value and not merely add another layer of bureaucracy and administration.
- The boundary of the Council differs from that of its public sector partners and potential exists for competing demands and priorities.
- Rationalisation of existing partnership arrangements will be necessary to enable the partnership to fully resource the new arrangements.
- A clear role and degree of influence must be established for representatives of the voluntary, private and community sectors.
- The level of response and degree of involvement which the partnership can expect from the Scottish Executive in contributing to the community plan.

It was suggested that Community Planning “links a council with the complex of local agencies and organisations that have an impact upon the community in its area. It recognises that the Council has a concern for local well being that extends beyond the services that it provides. It is a role that addresses and encourages participation from diverse local communities” (Kitchen, 1999, 7). This provides a clear focus on the new relations being forged at the national and local levels of governance to secure a more cost- effective provision of services.

The Parliament is committed, for example, to a political programme intended to promote social justice and inclusion in Scotland. This, it has attempted to do through emphasising “integrated local actions, often involving expenditures by different government agencies and a range of government departments, are now essential aspects of partnerships to promote area regeneration and individual well-being” (Scottish Executive, 2000a, 19). COSLA takes the view in this area that the community plan should engage with other local partnerships, including city-wide regeneration partnerships and SIPs. This is articulated in Dundee under the Partnership’s social inclusion theme, which in turn draws in the strategies being administered through the partnership’s Community Regeneration Strategy. These quite specific objectives are clearly prominent in the vision set out in both the Partnership’s overall aims and its Community Plan.

Conclusions

The origins of community planning reflect the tension between its local and strategic roles. On the one hand, for example, the concept of community planning reflects the broader modernisation agenda being driven by the Labour Government in Westminster and subsequently the 'new labour' administration in Scottish Parliament. This is intended in part to overhaul the effectiveness of local government delivery mechanisms (Giddens, 1998). The political synthesis of social democratic and neo-liberal ideas into the 'third way' is moulding the contemporary policy agenda of the Labour Government with respect to the re-defined and re-invigorated relationships between government, business, communities, localities and individuals (Butler, 2000).

Community planning is also bound up with broader debates about the future form of sub-national governance to emerge in Scotland. On the one hand, this would allow action to be taken by local authorities without the need for statutory powers. It would give councils more freedom to work with the other partners involved and it should formalise the purpose of local government and the nature of the relationship with the Scottish Parliament on key policy areas. This is reflected in the implementation of strategies that deliver social inclusion and attempt to ameliorate social exclusion. The morphing of the partnership's structures in the case of Dundee gives an example of an established strategic partnership that is able to respond effectively to the imposition of the key political goals of social inclusion and community planning. The institutional capacity of the partnership in Dundee shows governance that is adaptive to these changes and pressures, which not only provides a mechanism through which the Community Plan could be delivered but also as the vehicle for developing joint action in a variety of contexts.

Achieving an appropriate balance between the advantages and possible disadvantages of this way forward for local governance is clearly essential. Community planning in this context must enhance such institutional and constitutional arrangements and provide value added to the delivery of local services.

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