

New Deal for Communities in England: Is Area Based Urban Regeneration Possible?

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ABSTRACT

The New Deal for Communities (NDC) Programme, announced in 1998, is one of the most intensive area based initiatives (ABIs) ever to be launched anywhere. This is a 10 year Programme designed to narrow the gaps between these 39 deprived English neighbourhoods and national benchmarks in relation to education, crime, health, jobs, and housing and the physical environment. Each of the 39 schemes is overseen by an NDC Partnership Board normally with a majority of resident members. Each of the 39 local schemes is funded by £50m over 10 years. This is a significant sum but Partnerships have been given a very clear steer that in order to achieve their outcome targets they should work in conjunction with other delivery agencies such as the police, local authorities, health agencies, schools and so on.

Since 2001 the Centre for Regional Economic and Social Research at Sheffield Hallam University has been carrying out the national evaluation of the Programme. This has primarily involved 3 household surveys carried out by Ipsos MORI in 2002, 2004 and 2006; collation and analysis of government administrative data by the Social Disadvantage Research Centre at Oxford University; and locality and case study based qualitative work.

A late 2006 review of available change data indicated that although progress had been made in all 39 areas, change in ultimate outcomes (more jobs, better health, better educational attainment rates, and so on) was relatively limited. Other deprived areas not in receipt of ND funding were often showing similar signs of positive change.

NDC is one of the most intensive and well funded of ABIs. Why are there not more obvious signs of improvement?

- It may be that analysis to be undertaken in 2007 of longitudinal data sources -i.e. of those who have stayed in NDC areas-will show more obvious signs of positive change.
- Positive change is more obviously evident in relation to place based indicators of change (crime, satisfaction with the area, etc), rather than people based indicators (health, education, jobs); maybe ABIs are better at helping to create positive place based outcomes than to attain much in the way of change for people.
- Some changes-say in health-will simply take many years to become fully evident; these are very deprived areas and will take decades to 'turn around'.

- There is the inherent problem to all ABIs: people based interventions and any positive associated outcomes may well seep away as individuals leave these localities.
- Although relatively well funded, total resources are small compared with the needs of these areas.
- Area based regeneration is very complex requiring NDC Partnerships to eke out 10 year plausible strategies to improve the lot of constantly evolving populations, in an era of considerable market and institutional flux.

Key Words: neighbourhoods, regeneration, community