

Britain – the first industrialised countries



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Britain grew up as one of the first industrialised countries early in the 19th century, and a short period of time saw traditional rural practices being phased out by the newer heavy industries that centred on the ever-growing towns and cities of this period. Unfortunately, in more recent times, these are the areas that have been subjected to a massive urban decline. The areas that were once the 'power' of the British industrial revolution, and the 'workshop of the world' became an ongoing problem with latter 20th century politicians and governments.

There is a multitude of problems that has led to a 'demultiplying effect' on many of the inner city areas within the British Isles. The largest factor that contributed and initiated this sequence of decline in these areas would be the change in the type and the locations of industry. Heavy manufacturing and extractive processes and industries were the central employer of these inner city areas. Nearly all other business and industry was based upon these. The workforce for this industry was located in the inner cities, and as this type of industry declined, there was a massive increase in unemployment. There were simply better locations for these type of industries and this was often abroad, so they ceased to operate.

Not only this, but new industry was choosing to locate elsewhere, often on the outskirts of the city. This was due to the fact, that newly developed suburban greenfield sites offered large expanses of flat land, good infrastructure for raw materials and product transportation and these industries no longer needed to be particularly close to their workforce. This was compounded by the fact that these areas offered attractive surroundings, wide-open spaces and leisure facilities. In comparison, the

inner city areas with Cardiff docks being a good example had a dirty environment that was heavily polluted in some cases and the land was cramped and simply did not have what any new industries would look for in a business location. The inner city areas had become old, and often obsolete.

Unemployment was seen to be highest among the young, the poorly skilled and poorly qualified members of the community and especially the members of ethnic minority groups that that often lived in ghettos of social segregation. A change in population saw outward migration from the inner cities. Often it was the young people with job prospects and an affluent future that chose to move away from the inner city area to better surroundings, and prospects. This left a community of people who were either too old to work, or simply did not have the practical ability to work in the skilled jobs that local governments wanted to attract.

All of these factors lead to a sense of deprivation, or indeed a 'cycle of deprivation'. There was a sense of lost hope and despair in the inner city regions; nothing was being done to help the plight of these people, and the outlook was bleak. Children saw a future with no job prospects, and the education system suffered as a result. If they saw a future without a job, then realistically they could not be expected to give their full efforts to their academic life. Along with more increases in unemployment again crime and illegal activity increased and it could be seen that peoples obvious frustrations were vented with violence. This was seen in its most dramatic effect in the riots of the 1980's.

Vandalism again decreased the attractiveness of the area. People rarely took pride in the area in which they lived, which according to the cycle made it less likely for investors to develop in these areas, hence adding further to their problems. In the worst cases it could be seen that people suffered from multiple deprivation and lived in poverty not akin to modern British life, and some lived in slum like conditions. There was no way of helping themselves, so they simply suffered.

As a result of much industry moving away from the inner city area, the result was a much smaller tax base for the local governments to spend on local services and projects designed to re-initiate economic life into the inner city. Less money could also be spent on services such as education and health, and the people of the areas to which these served suffered accordingly, in turn adding to their desperation. If it could be seen that the local government itself had little money to invest in an area, then it was unlikely that private investors would see the inner city as a good place to invest their interests and their money.

Recent times has brought about the realisation that there must be change in terms of the economic, social and environmental factors of our inner city areas. The 1980's and 1990's saw a range of initiatives that were designed to alleviate some of the problems above, whilst alleviating all of the problems that they had brought. It was also realised that this was a process that might take several years and even decades to regenerate the deprived areas due to the huge task in hand. The ethos of all the proposed initiatives and ideas was to attract large amounts of private investment to these areas (often property or land based) which in turn was expected to lead to jobs,

improved services (due to a larger tax base) and better infrastructure. The aim was that public spending on these kind of initiatives would herald a five times return in spending from private business.

There were four major initiatives introduced by the government to help regenerate the inner city areas. Grants formed an integral part of these initiatives, as the government issued three different types of regeneration grant. These were 'The Urban Programme' which was paid to private and voluntary sector organizations in order to improve social and economic infrastructure of deprived areas, 'The City Grant' paid to private companies to generate and develop derelict and. The final type of grant issued was 'The Derelict Land Grant', and was paid to the voluntary sector to regenerate physically degraded land.

Enterprise Zones were first introduced in 1981, and were areas of specially designated land by the local government, to try and attract business (often of a high-tech component nature) to relocate or establish themselves there. As incentives for business to locate in these new areas, the government offered special exemptions from particular taxes, and planning regulations were also relaxed. The idea of these new Enterprise Zones was that by attracting new 'footloose' industries, and a more diverse range of industry that the local area would benefit from secure and well paid jobs.

It was the general belief that enterprise zones failed very badly in the task the set out to do, and the government was criticised for their widespread implementation. Few actually succeeded in creating new employment, and the jobs that were created were generally in established industry that

already existed at that location. They also put areas at a huge disadvantage that were outside the boundaries of the enterprise zone. Industry that may have been in competition with companies inside the enterprise zone did not have the same tax redemptions and incentives to succeed as those inside. This may in turn may have caused them to close, even though they may have been only a shirt distance from the enterprise zones, and this became referred to as: 'The Shadow Effect'.

The third main method of urban regeneration came in the form of Urban Development Corporations. Again these were launched in the early 1980's period, when much of the initiatives mentioned were introduced. 'UDC's were government agencies that were given responsibility for the regeneration for a particular area. The government appointed boards of corporation members that were mostly made of figureheads from the local business community.

UDC's had almost complete control over planning for any regeneration, and they were free from the constraints of local authority controls. They were asked to seek out market opportunities and private sector investment, and were able to purchase land or buildings whenever they felt it would be beneficial without the need for permission from any other bodies. With this in mind they often acted independently of their local government, often creating conflict due to ignoring existing plans.

Criticism came in large quantities, especially after the UDC's were disbanded and people could access the success of the corporations. One of the greatest criticisms was that the UDC's drastically reduced the power of the local authority, the people who were voted in a democratic process to operate the

functions that the UDC's gained power over. The public felt physically excluded as UDC's tried to introduce projects that were simply not suitable for the residents of that particular area. For example, introducing high cost luxury apartments or highly skilled office jobs does nothing to alleviate the problems of a predominantly working class area.

UDC's were also dependant on property speculation as a means of making an area profitable again. Unfortunately in a large percentage of cases, property values subsequently fell, and huge sums of money were lost. This coincides with the fact that these organisations were not cheap to run anyway. They were run in parallel to existing local governments hence accentuating further cost that had to be met while they were in operation. Their most fundamental flaw came in the fact that even though huge quantities of public money had been invested to encourage the private investment, they simply did not create enough jobs to alleviate the problems faced by the inner city.

The forth government initiative came in the form of the 'City Challenge' and this was announced in 1991. It represented a switch in funding towards that of a competitive bidding system. Local councils were pitted against each other and were required to come up with the most original and imaginative projects in the regeneration of their run down areas, and the winning designs would receive financial support in implementing these ideas.

Most criticism came in the form of the idea that local authorities should not have to compete amongst each other for public funding. This money was intended to be shared among the most needy parts of the country where

deprivation was at its highest, but instead local councils were competing for their own regeneration. Many disagreed with this idea.

In summary, it could be seen that much of the regeneration project was far too fragmented. There were too many initiatives happening simultaneously, and this caused the regeneration to become confused. Urban regeneration schemes have been successful to an extent, but when saying this it must be considered at what cost. Huge quantities of money have been invested, but the results simply did not meet the expectations of the proposals of each of the projects.

The approach of the urban renewal schemes has changed according in result of the many problems that have been encountered during the last 30 or so years. More inclusion of local people and their needs, has reaped more success and the opinions of local people must be headed to ensure continued success in this field in the future.