

Area based regeneration programmes | evaluation



“ Area based regeneration programmes contribute to managing social exclusion but they do not resolve the problem”. Critically discuss this statement.

The following is a critical discussion of the statement that area based regeneration programmes contribute to managing social exclusion yet fail to resolve the problem. Area based regeneration programmes were developed for various reasons, such as tackling poverty, economic regeneration, reducing unemployment, and managing social exclusion. That the latter was not the sole or exclusive objective of the area based regeneration programmes may explain whether these programmes have or have not resolved the problem of social exclusion. There are also arguments that social exclusion is not a problem that could be completely resolved by any single political, economic, and social policy operating by itself. Social exclusion could be understood in different ways so that some organisations or individuals may believe that managing it or resolving it would be harder or easier than other people would expect. The management of social exclusion without resolving the problem as a whole may or may not be a commendable achievement within its own right, even if it still leaves the problem of social exclusion in existence, this to will be critically discussed.

Area based regeneration programmes came into existence to counteract the damaging economic and social consequences of industrial decline in Britain's inner cities like Liverpool, London, or Birmingham; and in some of the country's most heavily industrialised areas such as North Eastern England, the Clyde, and South Wales from the 1970s onwards. These industrial areas were locations where the Conservatives electoral support had often been weak although until the Thatcher government the party had been content to

subsidise industries in these areas. Previously, government policies did not specifically attempt area based regeneration programmes to tackle social exclusion. Instead governments aimed to use Keynesian economic policies to maintain full employment, and when necessary would keep factories, coalmines, and shipyards open in run down areas with government subsidies. Where any regeneration had taken place it had usually been the replacement of slum housing with new housing estates and tower blocks (Fisher, Denver, & Benyon, 2003 p. 12). Government policies were meant to reduce, manage, or resolve social exclusion by helping people upon an individual basis by targeting social security, health, education, and housing policies to those that needed that help the most. Individuals rather than geographical areas, or local communities were the focus of help from the government. To tackle social exclusion governments had also introduced legislation to reduce social and economic discrimination, such as race relations and equal pay legislation (Coxall, Robbins, & Leach, 2003 p. 397).

Ironically enough the impetus for the development of area based regeneration programmes would occur under the Conservative governments after 1979, which were not initially interested in managing social exclusion or implementing area based regeneration programmes. Running these regeneration programmes was contrary to the Thatcherite ethos of reducing state involvement in social and economic policies. Thatcherite economic policies ended subsidies to the nationalised industries leading to factories, coalmines, and shipyards closing down. Those closures and the collapse of uncompetitive private sector companies lead to high unemployment in former industrialised areas and the inner cities, that in turn increased levels

of social exclusion (Moran, 2005 p. 14). The Thatcher government only began area based regeneration programmes as a response to the inner city riots of 1981, which, highlighted the problems that social exclusion and economic decay could cause (Taylor et al, 2000 p. 331). At this point the social exclusion and economic deprivations in the former industrial areas and the inner cities reached levels that had not been witnessed since the hard hitting depression of the 1930s (Jones, 1999 p. 8). At first the Thatcher government seemed unable to slow down the increasing levels of social exclusion let alone manage or reduce that problem, which it considered less important than lowering inflation, weakening the trade unions, and rolling back the state. Of course increasing levels of unemployment actually meant that expenditure on social security benefits increased rather than decreased. No doubt the Thatcher government was helped in its decision to start area based regeneration programmes by the availability of European Union regional development funds, that were allocated to the most economically deprived and socially excluded regions within the member states. This meant that the government was able to receive extra funding to regenerate the areas most severely affected by the recession of the early 1980s, and were by-passed any economic recovery or moves to manage social exclusion (Moran, 2005 p. 100).

Area based regeneration programmes were primarily aimed at economic regeneration to reduce unemployment, and its linked social consequences such as rising crime levels and increased incidence of social exclusion. It was believed that reducing unemployment would manage and perhaps eventually remove social exclusion, whilst social security benefits were

supposed to help those that did not or could not work. The Conservatives established regional development corporations to carry out regeneration programmes in the inner cities and former industrial areas, for instance regenerating parts of London, Birmingham, and Liverpool. However under the Conservatives the main efforts to manage social exclusion were confined to helping individuals through government training schemes such as Training for Work and the Youth Training Scheme (Fisher, Denver, & Benyon, 2003 p. 16).

New Labour was keen to extend area based regeneration programmes to proactively manage, and perhaps eventually resolve social exclusion, and increase measures to reduce unemployment. New Labour extended its New Deal initiative to cover deprived areas within the New Deal for Communities programme (Seldon & Kavanagh, 2005 p. 175). The New Deal for Communities programme was meant to be in a slightly different form to previous area based regeneration programmes as local community groups were supposed to have a greater influence over the projects selected to regenerate their local communities (Fisher, Denver, & Benyon, 2003 p. 216). Generally community groups have welcomed being able to have an influence over the projects selected to regenerate their communities. Community groups before New Deal for Communities often felt excluded from the decision-making processes relating to the areas in which they lived in (Seldon & Kavanagh, 2005 p. 175). Not every New Deal for Communities programme has gone well, most notably the Aston Pride Project which failed due to a poor relationship between the community groups, the local authority, and various government agencies. The project was closed down

early amidst allegations of corruption within the community groups and counter allegations of racism within the local authority and government agencies (Dale, May 28 2004).

Whilst area based regeneration programmes have been largely effective at managing social exclusion, there are limits to explain why these programmes are unlikely to resolve the problem of social exclusion altogether. When area based regeneration programmes have been completed there maybe new businesses that have moved to that location and sometimes the standard of housing has been improved, certainly positive achievements, yet not likely to resolve social exclusion by themselves (Seldon & Kavanagh, 2005, p. 175).

Both Conservative and New Labour governments have found through experience that area based regeneration programmes are more likely to succeed in managing and eventually resolving the problem of social exclusion when used in conjunction with other initiatives, such as tackling discrimination, poor housing, health and education services. Social exclusion will also need reduced crime levels to stand a chance of being managed (Jones et al, 2004, p. 619). Schemes such as Training for Work & New Deal can lower unemployment, yet there are limits on what they can achieve. Completing those schemes has made people more employable, although they may gain employment outside of the deprived or regenerated areas that they live in. New Deal is probably here to stay as part of New Labour's welfare to work strategy. New Deal itself targets extra help to those groups that have found it harder to find or keep jobs, such as lone parents and the disabled (Seldon & Kavanagh, 2005 p. 316). These groups are more vulnerable to suffering from social exclusion without living in areas that are

economically or socially deprived. These groups are not only helped by New Deal, they are also helped by tax credits and child tax credits. The government wished to improve the opportunity for all children with better education provision and the Sure-start programme for children from deprived areas or families with low incomes. New Labour has also attempted to tackle social exclusion amongst pensioners with the introduction of pension credit (Seldon & Kavanagh, 2005 p. 315).

Therefore it can be concluded that area based regeneration programmes have helped to manage social exclusion without being able to remove the problem itself. Area based regeneration programmes were primarily set up to lower unemployment and reduce social exclusion that was higher in the inner cities, and former industrial areas such as North East England, and South Wales. The Thatcher government in many respects made the problem of social exclusion worse rather than better as it pursued economic and social policies that increased unemployment, crime, and social deprivation. The inner city riots of 1981 got the Thatcher government to start area based regeneration programmes in order to maintain political stability, and economic growth. It however became harder to manage levels of social exclusion due to the sell off of council houses that made it harder for people on low incomes to afford their housing costs. The beginning of EU spending to boost and regenerate the most run down areas in the community provided extra funding for the British government to spend more on managing social exclusion. New Labour has been much more interested in managing and if possible resolving the problem of social exclusion by using area based regeneration programmes in combination with other measures such as

Surestart, New Deal, and EU regional development funds. New Labour has tried to increase the amount of area based regeneration programmes in existence with its New Deal for Communities initiatives which have included local community groups in the decision-making process and have contributed to managing social exclusion effectively aside from the Aston Pride Project.

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