

Urban Regeneration

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2nd
edition

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I Introduction

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In the introduction to the first edition of this book we observed that urban regeneration is a widely experienced but little understood phenomenon. Although subsequently much has been done to rectify this lack of understanding, it remains the case that more needs to be done to provide insights and inspiration, based on advances in both theory and practice. Then, as now, it is important to emphasise that there is no single prescribed form of urban regeneration practice and no single theoretical explanation that can be used to analyse all urban problem situations and develop appropriate solutions. In the much changed circumstances of the twenty-first century, time and place both matter, and urban regeneration has to reflect the particular local circumstances which define it.

As ever, circumstances both constrain and support urban regeneration. Despite the constraints of sometimes unduly rigid policy or the extreme difficulties encountered in a particular place, there is substantial evidence to demonstrate the ability of innovative and well-managed regeneration initiatives to take root even in the most unsuitable conditions. What much of the experience of the past decade has demonstrated is that there is no universal or 'one-size-fits-all' solution to the problems encountered in urban areas. This would appear to be true in both advanced and less-developed nations, and it surely represents the enduring importance of economics, geography, politics and history in determining what needs to be done to secure effective and lasting regeneration.

The aim of this book is to distil the evidence of good practice and combine this evidence with explanations of why urban regeneration is necessary and how it functions. A mixture of theory, explanation, evidence and the direct experience of implementation provides the practical philosophy which has guided the preparation of the second edition of this book. The intention is to offer the reader a guide to urban regeneration which is comprehensive, accessible and practical. In particular, the book aims to provide an insight into the reasons for the occurrence and persistence of urban problems, the successive changes that have occurred in the theory and practice of urban regeneration and the lessons of good (and bad) practice.

By contrast with the situation which obtained a decade ago, when there was a much more limited quality literature encompassing the whole of the organisation

and functioning of the urban regeneration process, there is now a wealth of research and practice evidence. In addition, there is a wide array of more fragmented information on 'fashionable' topics such as partnership, promoting economic revival, tackling social exclusion, the targeting of investment, supporting urban sustainable development and the old faithful of promoting 'flagship projects'. Despite these enhancements to the literature, there would still appear to be substantial demand for a book that brings together the basic elements of regeneration, such as the physical, economic, social and environmental dimensions, alongside the implementation, management and evaluation of the urban regeneration process and then illustrates them through examples drawn from different jurisdictions. This book builds on the first edition and through a comprehensive survey of key topics and cases it provides guidance based on both the theory and the practice of urban change and regeneration. As was the case when the first edition was published, the aim is to provide assistance to those who are engaged in a variety of urban regeneration policy areas and in the active management of urban transition.

The Structure of this Book

The material contained within this book is organised in a way that allows the reader to either dip into those sections that are of particular interest, or to read the text in full.

Although each part and chapter is self-contained to the extent that it deals with a particular theme or subject, the material presented is organised in a manner which allows the reader to gain a rapid overview of the enormous span of urban regeneration issues and activities. Even though the scope and content of this book is wide-ranging in an attempt to provide a comprehensive treatment of the field of urban regeneration, it would be wrong to suggest that it is a complete treatment of a subject that is extensive in terms of its practices and applications. Because urban regeneration is by its very nature a dynamic rather than a static phenomenon, it is almost impossible to capture all of the features of current practice or to predict the future evolution of the subject with any degree of certainty.

In order to assist the reader, and to set the context for the remainder of the book, an introduction to the origins, challenges and purposes of urban regeneration is presented in Chapter 2. The material in Chapter 2 is cross-referenced to later chapters in order to guide the reader to the more detailed discussions which they contain. Chapter 3 introduces the reader to basic notions such as partnership, strategy and the lessons that may be gained from the study of best practice. These are recurrent features that can be seen in many aspects of urban regeneration practice, and the discussion attempts to identify common elements which help bind together the diverse subjects that are contained in the following chapters. Chapter 2 chiefly provides an introduction to the individual topics that are considered in Part II, whilst Chapter 3 introduces the management issues contained in Part III.

Most of the chapters in this book have been prepared by authors who between them represent the required blend of practice experience and academic explanation considered necessary to tackle the complexities that are inherent in any individual aspect of urban regeneration. In Part II, the contributions of the various authors have been organised in such a way as to provide the reader with an introduction to each of the basic 'building block' themes and topics that are fundamental to an understanding of urban regeneration policy and process. These chapters deal with:

- economic and financial issues;
- physical and environmental aspects of regeneration;
- social and community issues;
- employment, education and training;
- housing and associated issues.

Cutting across all attempts to stimulate urban regeneration are a number of other important issues. These issues govern the ways in which urban regeneration proceeds and how it is organised. Three 'cross-cutting' issues that are of particular importance in all urban regeneration schemes are examined in Part III of this book:

- the legal and institutional basis for regeneration by land development;
- the monitoring and evaluation of regeneration programmes;
- questions of organisation and management.

In order to provide lessons from best practice and offer examples of how to construct and implement strategies for regeneration, all of the chapters in this book contain a variety of case studies. Other valuable experience can be gleaned from the experience of urban regeneration in countries both within and outside the UK. The first three chapters of Part IV offer an insight into some of the major features and important characteristics of efforts to promote urban regeneration in the towns and cities of the mainland of Europe, in Australia and in North America. Chapter 13 in Part IV is somewhat different; the purpose of this chapter is to offer examples from the three Celtic nations of the UK.

A final chapter attempts to distil the major lessons from the past and present experience of urban regeneration, to identify the sources of strength and weakness which are evident from such experience, and to propose an agenda for the future. This concluding chapter draws upon the analysis contained in the earlier parts of the book in order to clarify the future role of, and prospects for, urban regeneration as it enters a new century. In addition, the final chapter also considers the extension of urban regeneration to the metropolitan and regional levels.

At the end of each chapter, except in the case of the present chapter and Chapter 16, a summary of key points is provided. These points either indicate some of the major issues and actions arising from the discussion, or provide some contacts and sources of further information.

Most books of this nature are selective. Other authors and editors would choose different themes and cross-cutting issues for inclusion in a volume on the subject of regeneration. This book inevitably reflects the skills, experience and preferences of the editorial team and the individual authors: this combination of factors provides the rationale for the selection of material presented here.

Next Steps

Whilst it is apparent that a book of this nature can only ever expect to provide an introduction to urban regeneration theory and practice at a given moment in time – in this case mid-2015 – we hope that this second edition will offer guidance and advice to all those who are embarking upon the task of regenerating urban areas. The value of such a book is that it can provide immediate help and support, and also stimulate the exchange of experience. It is likely that your experience of urban regeneration will confirm some of the messages contained within this book and it is certain that the material contained in the book will also suggest new ways of approaching difficult and complex problems. We welcome your response to the content and style of this book and, in addition, we seek your experience – both successes and failures – in order to help us in preparing future editions.

As editors we have gained considerable knowledge and understanding about the subjects addressed in this book during the course of its preparation. We have come to realise how daunting the task of urban regeneration must appear to many who participate in it, and we have discovered that what may seem to be self-evident to one participant in the regeneration process may never have occurred to another. Most importantly, we have come to appreciate the need to view urban regeneration as a continuous process. No sooner has one problem been solved, another emerges.

This suggests that it is essential to view the process of urban regeneration as a long-term cycle of activity; there are no ‘quick fixes’, ‘one-size-fits-all approaches’ or permanent solutions here. Each generation faces its own particular set of problems, has its own priorities and works in ways which reflect these priorities and the availability of resources. However, whilst each successive generation will face its own particular challenges, the value of learning from previous experience cannot be denied. We hope that this book will help to document our state of knowledge at the start of the second decade of the twenty-first century and that it will provide a basis for good practice in urban (and regional) regeneration during the coming years.

Too much time and energy has been lost in the past through ‘reinventing the wheel’ or through the needless destruction of expert teams that are, in the British way, discarded as one policy initiative and structure succeeds another. More significantly, between the publication of the first edition of this book and now, we have also lost significant elements of ‘institutional capacity’, especially the much-lamented British Urban Regeneration Association, but also other organisations, such as the Academy for Sustainable Communities. This book will have served its purpose if

some of the negative consequences of this erosion of capacity are avoided and the accumulated experience of urban regeneration is captured for all to use. The importance of this task cannot be emphasised enough; most policy cycles last a relatively short length of time and the wheel of urban and regional regeneration policy has turned full circle twice during the past 60 years.

In addition, we realise that institutional and spatial frameworks for regeneration will vary both over time and between places, reflecting both the policy preferences and priorities of government and a changing perception of the span of the field of action within which regeneration problems can best be addressed. Thus, for example, whilst much urban regeneration effort in the mid-1980s was directed at the physical regeneration of individual problem sites and small areas, the emphasis in the late 1990s shifted to the regional level, to communities and to soft infrastructure, and in the twenty-first century, under conditions of austerity, it has moved to focus on economic regeneration. The message this sends to the keen observer or practitioner is that regeneration problems and opportunities should best be considered within a spatial-temporal continuum. The spectrum of regeneration activity varies from the individual site to the nation-state; there is no single or fixed field of action that represents the ideal spatial level for the practice of regeneration over time.

Looking Forward

It is evident at a late stage in the publication of this book that some of the material is already out of date or is close to becoming time expired. However, there is much contained in the book that is enduring and represents good or best practice, irrespective of the specific detail of an individual policy initiative. In order to assist the reader, the main areas of policy development that are of particular relevance to urban regeneration include the following:

- in relation to the future development of wider regeneration strategy, the abolition of the Regional Development Agencies (with their strategic role at the regional and sub-regional levels) initially led to a vacuum of both thinking and action, but this is now increasingly filled by the work of the Homes and Communities Agency, Local Enterprise Partnerships and sub-regional joint local authority initiatives;
- in relation to economic and financial aspects of regeneration, the revised funding arrangements and the provision of resources under new initiatives including locally generated resources and the Regional Growth Fund;
- in relation to physical and environmental regeneration, varying emphasis on urban design and quality, a continuing commitment to sustainable development, the provision of resources for the reuse of brownfield land;
- in relation to social and community issues and to associated aspects of regeneration, a reduced level of central government resources for social housing and a greater emphasis on locally determined and voluntary and private sector approaches to regeneration;

- various associated advances in policy and practice can be identified, including an increased level of emphasis on local democratic accountability, enhanced devolution to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland (and a series of consequential developments that are intended to allow for new policy initiatives and the fine-tuning of existing policies), and the redefinition of a number of key policy objectives and responsibilities for matters such as community and commercial regeneration schemes.

Whilst these issues are not dealt with in any detail herein, the material contained in the following pages provides many of the basic tools that are required in order to design and implement regeneration strategies. Although the details of policy may vary over time, sufficient supplementary literature exists to allow the reader to project forward from the position stated in this book. We will, of course, seek to incorporate the detail of new aspects of policy in a third edition.