
Policy Evaluation in Practice in Scotland

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These processes of increasing residential development are occurring in mature residential areas, many of which are high amenity value. Some are designated as Conservation Areas, and the individual buildings may be of considerable intrinsic architectural merit; many, for example in Edgbaston, being officially noted for their architectural and historical interest. These mature residential areas also represent a sizeable proportion of the built-up area of many cities. They thus represent a considerable resource for more intensive residential development. During periods of high prices, even the sites of Victorian semi-detached houses are vulnerable to redevelopment. The scale and nature of these processes must be understood before the considerable implications for townscape management, in these valuable but particularly vulnerable areas, can be assessed.

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1. Introduction

In the UK, and many developed countries, the theme and buzz in the 1980's was urban renewal and forging public and private sector partnerships. The latter was in recognition of the fact that public agencies could not tackle the plethora of problems and decay alone.

Different tools of policy and a confusing ever-changing series of mechanisms for funding came in and out of fashion over the decade. It was a decade that out of an early deep economic recession urban economies began to revitalise and the urban environment was transformed, in certain locations quite dramatically, by regeneration of its very fabric and function.

The pace has slowed down as recession again blights progress. It is an apt time to contemplate the real successes of policy and practice.

What form should this assessment take? We can learn from the lessons of the past and borrow both concepts and practices from one another. To promote and understand the dynamics of urban renewal, however, the end products can only reflect the complex nature of our different cultures, economies, government systems and attitudes to the role and nature of our built environments.

This article therefore provides an insight into an approach adopted for policy evaluation and specifically policy evaluation of area-based development initiatives in Scotland. Its basis is work carried out by my company - Pieda plc - for a public agency, the Scottish Development Agency.

The work was on two levels:

- (i) Policy evaluation of individual area-based initiatives; and
- (ii) Development of an approach for use in the evaluation of all types of area-based initiative funded by the SDA.

Firstly a case study of a specific area-based initiative - the Leith Project, Edinburgh will be provided and secondly the structure of the approach used to evaluate the success of the project. A summary of the conclusions of the project evaluation will conclude this insight.

2. The Leith project - Edinburgh

Leith is an area of Edinburgh and the port for the city. It was formerly a separate administrative area. The Leith Project had its origins in a Working Party formed in 1979. The Working Party comprised representatives of the SDA, the City and Regional Councils.

In 1979, the Working Party reported that Leith faced serious problems of unemployment, employment decline, poor physical environment, dereliction, substandard housing and inadequate supply of industrial land. To address these problems the report stated that additional resources would be required from all levels of government, public agencies and the European Community. It recommended that the problems be tackled through a special integrated project in the area.

The report also drew attention to the paucity of relevant economic information on the Leith Area. Economic and environmental studies were proposed in advance of the creation of the special integrated project.

Prior to the studies an 'Early Action Programme' was promoted comprising:

- * Construction of small industrial units;
- * Treatment of derelict/vacant sites;
- * Stone cleaning of buildings;
- * Feasibility studies re-use of particular vacant buildings; and
- * SDA assistance to a factory relocation.

Ultimately 19 workshop units and 21 environmental projects under this programme at a total cost of *2.07 million.

Birth of the Leith Project

From the preparatory studies the main thrust of the Leith Project was identified as:

- * Provision of finance and financial advice;
- * Provision of sites and premises;
- * Improved advisory and support services; and
- * Promotion of Leith.

Action was also proposed on encouraging development of the Docks, development in the Central Area of Leith, access to jobs for Leith residents, environmental improvement, housing and community development. The recommendation of a semi-autonomous Project Team was following resistance embraced.

The Project Agreement between all the participating agencies was signed in May 1981.

Project Context

A picture of the area for the pre-project stage was compiled in advance of the formulation of the Project Strategy. The key features of Leith 'pre-project' were amassed under the following sub-headings:

- (i) Employment and Unemployment;
- (ii) Population;
- (iii) Property and Land;
- (iv) Physical Environment;
- (v) Housing; and
- (vi) Business Development

The Project Strategy

From the assessment of the area three main objectives were set for the Project:

- (i) To stem business decline in Leith and realise potential for business development;
- (ii) To assist Leith residents in gaining access to jobs; and
- (iii) To improve the environment.

The focus remained that identified in the preparatory studies. To compliment this main thrust of the Project a series of support actions were identified:

- * A sector study of Scottish ports;
- * Effort to encourage development of Central Leith including the Shore;
- * Liaison with Central Government's Employment Agency;
- * Environmental works mainly to support economic development;
- * Assembly of land for housing and preparation of feasibility studies; and
- * Social and community programmes involving welfare benefits take-up and creche facilities.

Internal Review

At the end of the first year an internal review was undertaken of progress. It provides a ripe example of the complexities of assessing the true impacts of policy.

The conclusions were that private sector confidence was increasing with restaurants opening, housing conversions proliferating, interest from private housing developers, a modest growth in office employment and the introduction of privately funded workshop units.

The renewal and confidence can not be directly attributed to the area-based initiative policy in year 1. There had been pre-project momentum which was further encouraged by investment in the 'Early Action Programme'. The Project can at this early stage be appreciated as a stimulus and further catalyst to progress.

In relation to business development and access to jobs - two key objectives of the Project - results were less encouraging. This was attributed to lack of priority to Leith from the Employment Agency and lack of a Careers Office which was a remit of the Regional Council.

The results of the review provided further programme direction. The proposals will not be reiterated but instead a summary of the conclusions of the second year review will be provided.

At the end of the second year there had been a growth in business development activity including specific



assistance to 100 firms. Tardiness in development of small industrial units had in fact raised concerns that there would be a shortage in supply of premises.

There was also a relative shift towards housing development as a key feature of local regeneration. There was increased attention to the role of environmental improvement in assisting housing, commercial and tourism development.

In the third year the programme continued with an emphasis on positive marketing of Leith as a place to live, work and do business.

Following the end of Year 3, three reviews of the Project were undertaken. They identified the strengths and weaknesses of policy implementation and revised strategy was devised to harness the strengths and ameliorate the weaknesses.

Revised Strategy

The Revised Strategy set the following tasks and objectives:

- (i) Securing Leith's future as a place to live and visit.
 - * Maximise housing potential of proximity to Edinburgh; and
 - * Create new ambience for Old Leith.
- (ii) Consolidate Leith's service sector role.
 - * Attracting new service sector firms by focused marketing (slipstream Edinburgh, focus on media and technological business).
- (iii) Ensure infrastructure support.
 - * Maintain range of sites and premises; and
 - * Remove traffic constraints on development.
- (iv) Ensure continuing business assistance and support.
 - * Development of self-sustaining business assistance network; and
 - * Introduce manpower scheme.

The Revised Strategy illustrated a shift towards the service sector, the role of housing development and the role of physical improvement including environmental improvement. This shift fundamentally reflected the Project Team's developing understanding of the areas potential.

3. Policy evaluation - An approach

The approach was founded on studies of three projects in Central Scotland undertaken by Pleda plc. These projects were in Motherwell and in areas of Glasgow and Edinburgh. It is recognised that alternative approaches to evaluation exist or could be devised. The approach presented is however consistent with what are considered to be fundamental principles of evaluation and has been 'field tested' on these specific projects.

The approach recognises:

- (i) Area-based initiatives have multiple objectives;
- (ii) Such initiatives generally involve diverse policy instruments;
- (iii) There are numerous 'non-policy' influences operating on any area; and
- (iv) Data limitations are generally severe.

Objectives of Evaluation

The fundamental objectives of evaluation studies are:

- (i) To assess the not impact of area-based initiatives on their areas and on Scotland as a whole;
- (ii) To set out the costs and benefits of an initiative so that an overall assessment of the net benefit of the initiative may be made;
- (iii) To identify the effectiveness of specific policy instruments and combinations of instruments; and
- (iv) To assist the development of future policies.

The Project Balance Sheet

The Project Balance Sheet can be described as:

" a systematic statement of the costs and benefits of an initiative and aims to show the relationship between the objectives, inputs and outputs of an initiative".

It is the methodology used in preference to Cost Benefit Analysis as the latter explicitly aims to express

costs and benefits in monetary terms. Area initiatives can not be effectively analysed on this basis.

The principles of the Project Balance Sheet method are:

- (i) Monetary valuations are used for those elements where market values exist (eg output);
- (ii) Where possible, impacts are quantified (eg numbers of jobs); and
- (iii) Systematic descriptions are given where neither valuation nor quantification can be achieved.

Some impacts can of course be measurable by a combination of all three principles.

The Balance Sheet approach also aims to identify the impact of the different component instruments of the initiative rather than simply to measure a total project effect.

Table 3.1 provides the structure of the Balance Sheet approach. It recognises that the same objective may be served by different policy instruments and that different policy activities may operate together to produce impacts. The factors to be considered within this structure are:

- (i) Objectives;
- (ii) Activities;
- (iii) Costs (i.e. inputs);
- (iv) Intermediate outputs;
- (v) Ultimate outputs;
- (vi) Project management effects; and
- (v) 'Non-Project' influences.

Research Method

The research method used combined aggregate 'top-down' analysis and survey work. Neither approach is adequate in itself. Aggregate data are too limited to carry the whole burden of evaluation. A survey-based approach may miss impacts and synergy effects.

It is found that careful top down analysis will generate specific hypotheses for the survey work to pursue. It also ensures that survey work is directed to areas where information is deficient and where impacts can not be assessed from aggregate data. Detailed survey work should therefore follow top-down analysis.

Top down analysis in the project evaluations addressed:

- (i) The pre-initiative position of the local economy;
- (ii) Major changes during the lifetime of the initiative;
- (iii) Post-initiative status of area including prospects and potential; and
- (iv) An overall assessment of the change in the areas status and prospects compared with what might have been expected on the basis of 'pre-initiative' trends.

The specific topics and dimensions considered were drawn from the following:

- * Employment levels and trends;
- * Unemployment;
- * Demographic statistics;
- * property market indicators (ren-

tal, lettings, planning applications);

- * Housing market data;
- * Openings and closures of businesses;
- * Investment and assessment information by project participants; and
- * Social indicators.

In other evaluations the topics may vary depending on the main focus of policy.

The survey work had three principle objectives:

- (i) To provide detailed information unavailable from aggregate data;
- (ii) To provide a basis for assessing the net impact of the initiative on key decisions; and
- (iii) To assess the net impact of the project.

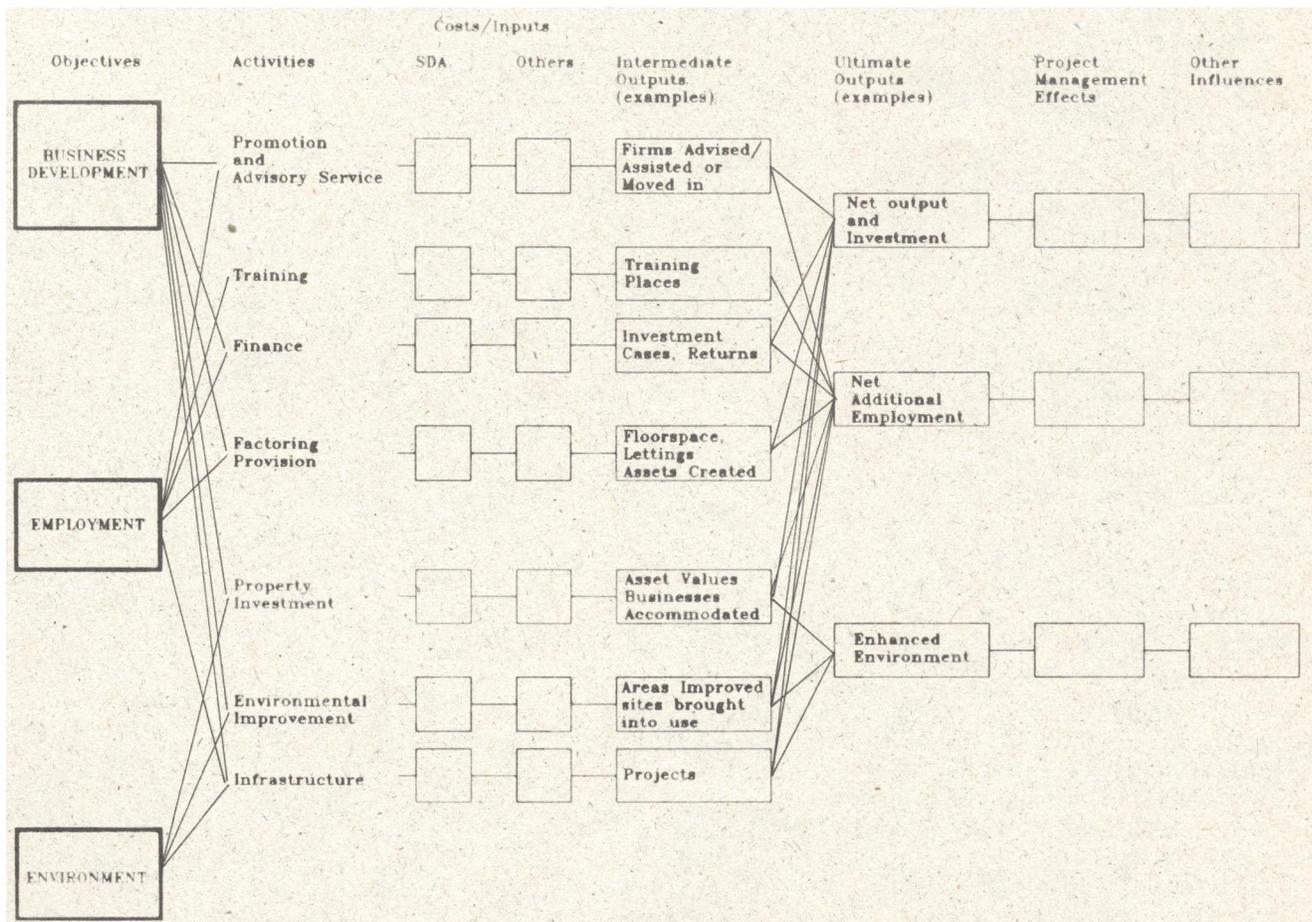
Ultimate Outputs

To illustrate the product of the approach I have omitted detailing the Intermediate Outputs of the evaluations and instead moved onto the Ultimate Outputs. The objective is to provide a checklist of factors which require to be incorporated in area-based initiative assessments.

The issue which require to be covered are:

- * Economic activity;
- * Property;
- * Land and environment;
- * Social and community;
- * Perceptions;
- * Leverage;
- * Synergy; and
- * Prospects.

Table 3.1: Balance Sheet Structure



4. Implementation of approach - The conclusions

The approach described has been tested - the Leith Project being one of the three area-based initiatives used in the study.

The conclusions of the policy evaluation's overall assessment was that the Leith Project is, in realistic terms, a success in that:

- (i) Local employment has been significantly strengthened although perhaps with little real benefit to local residents;
- (ii) The image of the area has been radically improved; and
- (iii) Confidence in commercial/residential investment in the area has been increased although there is some fragility of that confidence.

Success in these terms has been achieved because the area did have constrained potential. It was also small enough to permit actions to be concentrated sufficiently to produce visible effects and to feed on one another (ie synergy). Activities and impacts have been spatially concentrated. The approach and its success however depended critically on the proximity and relative economic strength of Edinburgh.

The evaluation identified the following main areas of relative weaknesses/failure:

- (i) Transport infrastructure improvements; and
- (ii) Training.

It has had little impact on local or regional unemployment. For local residents, the main benefits have been an improved environmental and improved housing. The influx of private sector housing has meant that the social composition of the area has been changed.

At The Regional of Scottish level the benefits are termed urban renewal benefits. The Project has facilitated a restructuring process and finding a new role for Leith. A number of benefits can be listed:

- (i) The risks of cumulative social and economic decline in the area reduced;

- (ii) The potential of the urban environment is exploited;
- (iii) The quality of the life for a large number of people is protected and improved;
- (iv) The provision and use of urban infrastructure.

There have been major beneficial interactions or synergies related to initiatives in environmental improvement, property investment, promotion of the area and of the Project Team's brokerage role. The commitment of the Project Team has been crucial.

This Project, and the others we evaluated, indicated that the area development approach can be an effective policy instrument in assisting urban and economic regeneration within a local area.

They however succeed to a considerable degree by diverting economic activity from adjacent areas or areas within the same subregion. This can be regarded as a perfectly legitimate policy objective.

The shopping list for a successful area-based initiative, from our experience and set in a Scottish context contains the following basic requirements:

- (i) Concentration of resources in a small enough area;
- (ii) Existence of some genuine local opportunity/potential;
- (iii) Environmental improvements of a sufficient level and on key sites to exert a noticeable impact on image and perceptions; and
- (iv) Energetic local management and promotional efforts.

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