Sustainability, urban regeneration and social inclusion

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Abstract

Since 1994 Europe has been formally working towards, and committed to, a socially inclusive environment [1]; one where all participate in society and as such society reaps potential benefits. The UK's commitment to this is demonstrated through its pledge to increase participation at all levels of society. For it is argued that sustainability and urban regeneration cannot be achieved with high numbers of unemployed, low levels of literacy and sectors of society excluded from the workplace due to discrimination and ignorance.

The UK government firmly believes that education may provide the mechanisms to overcome many of the obstacles to inclusion. This is in line with the thinking of UNESCO who believes that education has been increasingly accepted as being central for achieving sustainable development [2]. This role was confirmed at the Earth Summit [3] where the notion of 'education for all' was reaffirmed. But does education hold such a miracle cure? Will education overcome the problems of high crime levels, drug abuse, poor health, low esteem, social behavioural problems, high teenage pregnancy rates, all of which are often symptomatic of a socially excluded society? This paper will examine the nature of exclusion within the UK, the problems associated with such exclusion, provide possible solutions and highlight the potential problems associated with these.
Keywords: social inclusion, social exclusion, regeneration, employment, sustainability, poverty, education.

1   Social inclusion: a European objective

Social inclusion has been on the European agenda since 1994 when it was argued that an inclusive society was a necessity for economic growth and social justice [1]. Since then this issue has been the subject of much debate and since

the year 2000 all European countries are required to produce a National Action Plan on how they will tackle social exclusion.

2   What is social exclusion?

Social exclusion and poverty are frequently linked together as poverty is often seen as the primary cause of exclusion. However, before examining social exclusion, and by way of explaining the difficulties in measuring it, we must begin by asking who is being excluded from what?

There are many definitions that describe social exclusion. For example, The Inter-American Development Bank defines social exclusion as

> 'a chronic scarcity of opportunities and access to basic and quality services, labour markets and credit, physical conditions and adequate infrastructure and the justice system' [4]

Whereas the UK government describes it as;

> 'a shorthand term for what can happen when people or areas suffer from a combination of linked problems such as unemployment, poor skills, low incomes, poor housing, high crime, bad health and family breakdown' [5]

Further, The Inter-American Development Bank claim that social exclusion

> 'affects an individual's opportunity to find good work, decent housing, adequate healthcare, quality education, safe and secure living conditions as well as their treatment by the legal and criminal justice systems' [4]

Therefore, individuals or groups may be excluded from participating fully in society.

Defining social exclusion is relatively simple. Solving the problem however is a much more difficult problem. For as Vranken et al [6] points out inclusion in one area does not automatically mean full inclusion within society.

3   Who are the excluded and what are they excluded from?

The UK Cabinet Office [5] believe that those at risk of social exclusion are those on low incomes, with family conflict, those in or leaving care homes, those with school related problems, ex offenders, ethnic minorities, those living in deprived areas, those with mental health problems, the disabled, older people and teenage mothers. These, they argue, are linked and mutually reinforcing.

The difficulty for those researching social exclusion is that there is no universal method of calculating exclusion. This is evident through the lack of concise data on the subject. The Scottish Office often uses unemployment figures when referring to the socially excluded. As a measure of exclusion these

figures are highly subjective and dependent on the method of calculating unemployment. For to be classed as unemployed within the UK one must be of working age, capable of working (i.e. not incapacitated) actively seeking work, and registered as such (claimant unemployment). Whilst this measure is useful for many purposes by definition it excludes many of the categories defined as socially excluded e.g. those with certain disabilities and lone parents with young children. The Social Inclusion Unit on the other hand tends to use data on poverty levels and suggest that those on incomes below 60% of the national average are in danger of exclusion [10]. These data sets, whilst useful, often result in very different figures.

In the UK it is however, it is estimated that some 10% of the population are at high risk of being socially excluded with around 33.3% at risk at some point in their lives [5].

To complicated matters more it is not sufficient to simply identify who the excluded are but we must also ask what are they excluded from. For without this knowledge the problem cannot be solved. Is it exclusion from employment, education and training, decent housing, good public services (including health), and a crime free environment and does exclusion from any one of these mean that you are socially excluded?

4   Why is social exclusion a problem within Scotland?

According to Wojtas [7] 22% of those capable of working in Scotland are currently unemployed. This figure hides the fact that certain groups are more likely to be unemployed than others, for example, lone parents with very young children or those with few or no qualifications [8]. The significance of this to the economy can be found in the welfare costs related to these groups. For example, teenage mothers currently cost the UK government £116m in benefits annually [5]. In 1973, 2.5m working aged adults in Britain were dependant on welfare payments, by 2000 this had increased to 6.2m [8]. Social security expenditure for 2000/01 was £100bn. If we examine these figures against poverty rates we find that in 1990-91 twelve percent of the population were considered to be living in poverty whereas by 1993-94 this had increased to fourteen percent. Meanwhile between the 1980s and '90s social exclusion intensified in the UK.   The causes suggested for this include increased unemployment, increased workless families, increase in wage gap, increased numbers excluded from schools, increased drug abuse and increased crime. Whilst the UK poverty level since 1997 has declined the number of children living in poverty has in fact increased. Children living in absolute poverty in the UK is the highest in Europe when measured as those living in household with incomes below 60% of national average. Additionally, in 1995 there were 1.7m lone parents in the UK with 43% of these living in poverty [8]. Further, the proportion of households with children in which no adult is employment is 19%, again the highest in Europe. These figures are particularly worrying as research indicates that those that grow up in low income families are more likely to end up unemployed and in poverty.

5   Counting the costs of social exclusion

Social exclusion is not cost free. Every sector of society from the government down to the individual has to pay the price associated with exclusion. The UK Government has identified some of the associated costs as, at the individual level; underachieving educational potential, financial loss through low pay, poor access to services, stress and other health problems, plus lack of hope. To the population as a whole they believe the costs are; reduced social cohesion, higher crime levels and fear of crime, extra pressure on resources, and reduced mobility (due in some cases to fear of entering some areas). Reduced potential economic growth could be added to this list. The costs to the taxpayer include; increased public spending, cost of crime estimated at £60bn a year, young offenders estimated at £75,000 per offender or £175m to the exchequer, school exclusions estimated at £406m, teenage mothers estimated at £116m in benefits yearly, drug abuse estimated at between £3.2 and £3.7bn, plus homeless person staying in hospital due to lack of accommodation estimated at £900-£1000 per week [9]. Again, loss of tax revenue from under-employment could be included here. Finally, the costs to businesses are highlighted. These include the lack of skilled a workforce, lack of customers, lack of entrepreneurship and the increased tax burden. Therefore, the Scottish Executive is right to be concerned with social exclusion.   The costs born by society cannot be justified within a highly developed economy.

6   Tackling social exclusion

Before tackling social exclusion we must have an understanding of what it is and its ultimate effect. Vranken et al [6] points out that

> 'Exclusion is not just about common ruptures in the fabric of society; the concept refers to real gaps that lead to a division between 'in' and 'out'. In Order to arrive at such a situation, society must possess certain characteristics. It must for example, be structures according to a centre/periphery relationship and society's economic, social, and cultural capital must be distributed unevenly'. [6]

Therefore, to overcome social exclusion each aspect that causes exclusion must be addressed, not in isolation, but holistically. However, this does not seem to be happening within the UK. Here, much of the emphasis has been placed on producing Equal Opportunities Legislation, the assumption being that removing discrimination will provide the opportunities for inclusion. Not only does this approach ignore the redistribution issue but it assumes that discrimination is at the route of the problem. Teenage pregnancies are not caused by discrimination and therefore such an approach will not solve this problem. Yet this is a major problems currently facing Scotland. Government statistics show that 8527 teenagers gave birth in Scotland in 2002 of which 649 were less than 16 years of age [10]. Therefore, prioritising discrimination as a method of inclusion does

not address the issue of teenage pregnancies in Scotland. Nor indeed does the concept of inclusion though employment. Berthoud [8] found that 80% of lone parents (a high exclusion risk group) with young children were unemployed; most of these are single mothers many of whom are also teenagers.

Poverty is also deemed to be a significant factor in exclusion. Townsend [11] argued that poverty had to be understood not in terms of subsistence, but in terms of the ability to participate in the customary life of society. He offers 3 approached to social inclusion; the Redistributive Discourse (RED), the Social Integration Discourse (SID) and the Moral Underclass Discourse (MUD). Each of these approaches offers a solution to exclusion based on the cause. For example, RED argues that exclusion stems from poverty therefore by increasing incomes we reduce exclusion. SID argues that paid work integrates those of working age into society. This approach again assumes that the excluded are those unemployed or those at risk of unemployment. However, it does not consider those in low paid work. MUD emphasises the moral and cultural causes of poverty and suggests that addressing these will alleviate exclusion. These methods acknowledge the fact that no single approach will suffice.

7 Sustainability, urban regeneration and social inclusion

According to DEFRA

> 'sustainable development should be the organising principles of all democratic societies, underpinning all other goals, policies and processes. It provides a framework for integrating economic, social and environmental concerns over time, not through crude trade offs, but through the pursuit of mutually reinforcing benefits. It promotes good governance, healthy living, innovation, lifelong learning and all forms of economic growth which will secure the natural capital upon which we depend. It reinforces social harmony and seeks to secure each individual's prospects of leading a fulfilling life' [12]

In other words sustainable development will overcome many of the problems that cause social exclusion. Further, Schou [13] points out that 'developmental sustainable economic systems and social welfare development go hand in hand'. Jean Lambert MEP adds to this assertion in that she believes that social inclusion is an essential element of sustainable development [14]. However, whilst sustainable development will help eradicate social exclusion great care must be taken when formulating policies to ensure that the policy does not in fact compound the situation. For the causes of exclusion may differ geographically. For example, ethnicity is not a major issue for exclusion in rural areas, whereas age is, with the young and the old often facing major problems through isolation. Therefore, it is important that these differences are taken into consideration.

8   Dilemma for the policy makers; can a 'one size fits all' approach be taken?

One of the problems when formulating policies aimed at regeneration and sustainability is that policy makers often adopt a 'one size fits all' strategy. But as we have seen, whilst a policy may alleviate a problem in one area it may in fact aggravate the situation elsewhere. For example, inner city deprivation often leads to social exclusion as citizen's fear leaving their home due to fear of crime. Transport on the other hand is rarely a major issue in inner cities. However, whilst crime levels in rural areas may be relatively small transportation can be a major problem with some rural areas virtually cut of from cities, employment prospects, education and shops through lack of a suitable public transport system. Moreover, policies aimed at reducing car ownership may worsen the situation for those in rural areas yet within cities this type of policy may be welcomed to alleviate congestion. Therefore, quite clearly a 'one size fits' all approach is unsuitable.

9   The role of education

On coming into power in 1997 the Labour Government announced that its priorities were 'Education, Education, Education'. They firmly believed that education was the key to solving all of the UK's ills, and in particular social exclusion. Indeed, the UK's Sustainable Development Plan [15] outlines 3 broad areas for policy direction; economic growth, social progress and environmental protection. Employment is subsumed within economic growth whilst poverty, social exclusion, education, health, housing and crime all come under the heading of social progress. The Scottish Parliament repeatedly emphasises the importance they place on education believing that it is only through education and training that the unemployed can be provided with the skills required to fill the jobs available within the economy.

Beattie [16] identified those least likely to participate in education and found that they were older men, youngsters leaving care homes, young offenders, those from dysfunctional backgrounds, those lacking confidence, those with few or no skills, those with behavioural problems, and drug users. A very similar list to those most likely to face exclusion. This is corroborated by the Centrepoint Study [9] which found that over ¾ of young homeless teenagers were either long-term non-attendees or had been excluded from school. This survey also found that nearly 40% of teenage mothers in South London had left school with no qualifications compared to the national average of 6%. The report further found that over 60% of prisoners had been permanently excluded from school at some point. All of these figures suggest that education is indeed an important element of inclusion. It is interesting also to note that whilst the UK has higher than average levels of social exclusion it also has lower than average (for Europe) numeric skills and adult literacy levels. Wendy Alexander, the then Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning pointed out in her opening speech of the Adult Literacy Conference in Glasgow in 2002 that 20% of the Scottish

population had poor literacy skills. In a service sector economy these are essential skills for the work-place. The UK also falls well behind the European average for engagement in education for those 18yrs with only 50% engagement in the UK compared to the EU average of just over 70%. Berthoud's study [8] examining the role of education and employment found that the likelihood of being unemployed reduced significantly with educational attainment. Table 1 shows that with a degree the likelihood of unemployment is only 1.9% but that this increases to 8.8% with no qualifications. Therefore if we are simply measuring exclusion from employment then education plays a crucial role.

Table 1:   Estimated probability of non-employment by education.

	(%)
Degree	1.9
Further education	2.9
O'levels or GCSEs	3.5
Lesser qualifications	4.9
None	8.8

(abridged) [7].

However, this study also points out that only a modest share of the overall education and training expenditure goes to those living in the poorest areas.

10 So what works?

Whilst the role of education cannot be underestimated for inclusion in employment and the alleviation of poverty this paper argues that exclusion is not just about wealth. It is brought about by a host of often interrelated problems such as old age and poor health (a case where employment would certainly not be a solution). To solve the problem and achieve sustainable development decision makers therefore must acknowledge the wide variety of issues involved

The UK Government's Social Exclusion Unit [9] accepts that previous policies have failed, particularly those aimed at simply trying to overcome urban degradation. At best these policies have resulted in the status quo however in many cases they have worsened the situation. For policies to be successful they now accept that a community approach best. One successful project is the 'Castlemilk Partnership' [9]. This project was founded amid a population decline of 37,000 in 1971, to 17,000 by 1988, and higher than average levels of unemployment (almost twice as much as that of neighbouring Glasgow). The private/public partnership tackled housing, health, education, the economy, training, land use, image and marketing plus social regeneration. The results were that unemployment halved; there was a 38% reduction in reported crimes, demand for housing outstripped supply and secondary school attendance improved. The shopping Mall has been overhauled and is now bustling with shoppers spending their money. The area is now a lively thriving community where private and social housing stand side by side. A very different place from

the run down squalid district of the mid 1980s. By tackling socially exclusive issues at the local level inclusion and regeneration was successfully achieved.

11 Where do we go from here?

As most of the UK funding for social inclusion is directed at increasing employment we are likely to see a reduction in poverty in the long run, This is a very positive message for those excluded from employment, but not so good for those excluded for other reasons. Also, whilst the government claims to be committed to social inclusion they are at the same time cutting revenue from local authorities who are often in a better position to assess the problems and requirements for their local area.

Full commitment to social inclusion means taking a bottom up approach. Local authorities must work alongside the private sector to secure projects that will produce long term benefits to the fabric of society and the life style of the community. Education does play an important part but it is by no means the solution.

12 Conclusions

Whilst the UK government is committed to social inclusion, sustainable development, and regeneration, they place most weight on education as the solution to the problem. This paper has argued that whilst education plays an important role in increasing employment prospect and thus alleviating poverty this does not necessarily bring about inclusion. Exclusion may be dependant upon many interrelated factors and without these being addresses exclusion will persist.

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