Supporting regeneration in hard times - a tall order?

A Special feature p 8 - 11
A view from the chair

Ian Wall
SURF Chair

Unusual business
Uppermost in many minds are the UK elections, not that we are being presented with important choices but the reverse. There appears to be a united view that those least able to bear it are to suffer for the outcome of the long party, from which in any event they were excluded. All the fun and pleasure was taken by a small minority (except for the false promise of paper wealth of excessive house prices) but the hangover is to be experienced by the rest of us.

The culmination of the worship of the abstraction of the ‘market’ and the refusal to challenge it and those who benefit from it is not just the economic crisis, the worst since the 1930s, but that the share of wealth of the bottom half of society has fallen over the last thirty years from 8% to 5%.

Thirty years ago in the UK seven million were employed in industry, now it is three million; this is particularly significant in Scotland where industry was a greater part. Those areas which have seen industry go bust and closed have not seen replacement investment nor, more importantly, the repair of the social and human investment that was also destroyed. The recent combining of the Coalfields Community Campaign and Steel Action to form the Industrial Communities Alliance is a necessary response to this.

‘Business as usual’ will lead to large public sector cuts to follow the private sector bankruptcies and redundancies. The sensible response to this was described in J K Galbraith’s book – ‘The Affluent Society’ (easily obtainable through the Abebooks website) in which, amongst much good sense about economics and society, he points out that we have never been richer but remain fixated on growth whilst many live in poverty; to which he proposes, amongst other things, a concentration of public facilities for those who, through poverty, are unable otherwise to prosper.

In the current period, whatever the election delivers, it is essential that those groups and organisations that are rooted in our communities or who work with them obtain greater resources and support. The need for working together has never been greater, we need to come together not just to share experience and learn from each other but to develop practical policies and actions so that those least able to bear it can protect themselves, a role our Annual Conference just past helped to fulfil.

A crisis brings widespread damage but it offers also opportunities. We have a long tradition of finding and implementing shared solutions to defend and make the world better. The economic crisis has stripped any legitimacy the ‘market’ and ‘business as usual’ had, and thus we need to identify the solutions and commit the resources that will ensure that in our communities, towns and cities we emerge from this period not worse off but stronger and better.

Andy Milne
SURF Chief Executive

Welcome to the Spring 2010 edition of scotregen.

Taking up the ‘Sustaining and Re inventing Community Regeneration’ theme of the recent SURF Annual Conference, this issue of Scotregen features some articles highlighting continuing sources of support for our collective efforts in these difficult times. These are in addition to the regular columns on planning, housing, poverty, health and imagining a better and more sustainable future.

As Scotland’s independent regeneration network, SURF draws on the knowledge, experience and support of its varied membership of practitioners, policy makers and academics. Together we can both support each other in our work while we help shape better regeneration policy and practice in the future.

Like SURF itself, Scotregen is a collaborative effort, everyone contributes their views and articles freely. As part of SURF’s extensive cross sector network, your views and ideas are always welcome, and if there are other aspects of regeneration you think we should be looking at in future editions of Scotregen, please just email me at andymilne(at)scotregen.co.uk

The purpose of this quarterly journal is to use SURF’s independent position to raise discussion and debate about important developments in regeneration policy and practice. Scotregen is part of SURF’s regular output of publications, events and discussions aimed at supporting more successful and sustainable regeneration efforts across Scotland.

Apologies to Prof. Catherine Ward Thompson of the I’DGO research consortium, whose surname was incorrect in her article on “Outdoor Environments for the Elderly” in the previous issue of Scotregen.
Much has been written in Scotregen and elsewhere about the impact of the current recession on our communities. However, a report published by the Industrial Communities Alliance shows that the ‘real’ impact of the recession in terms of unemployment is just beginning to become clear. In this article Anne Houston summarises an ICA report by Prof. Steve Fothergill which suggests that we need to take a wider view of unemployment statistics to recognise that official measures have never really captured the full picture.

Boom? What boom?

Even at the end of the recent economic boom, many industrial communities had 10% or more of the population on incapacity benefit. In charting the real levels of unemployment, ICA statistics included JSA claimant count, additional ILO unemployed and the ‘hidden’ unemployed on incapacity benefits. The figures concluded that in general, claimant count figures are still relatively modest, between 3-7% but that the real level of unemployment in our former industrial communities is much higher, typically between 8-15%. Indeed, the claimant count can be seen to massively understate the problem and in former industrial communities, as a rule of thumb, the real level of unemployment was more than double the reported levels.

Additionally, the ICA had previously collected similar statistics for 2007 which concluded that prior to the recession only 1 in 5 industrial communities had a real unemployment level that was at or above the national average and that more than a third of these communities had real levels of unemployment in excess of 10%. Our industrial communities therefore entered the recent recession already struggling with unemployment.

Manufacturing the future

It is worthwhile considering what is important to Industrial Communities moving forward out of this recession. Despite the fact that manufacturing has been in terminal decline in the last few decades, it still accounts for over 13% of the UK GDP and indeed for many of our industrial communities, small scale manufacturing continues to play an important role in the local economy. Sadly, one in four jobs lost in the recession were in manufacturing - a sector that accounts for 10% of jobs in the UK economy.

There needs to be a continued focus on providing jobs in former industrial communities since the recent recession blew the myth of full employment apart. This should include the consideration of the role of manufacturing in the Scottish economy and initiatives such as short term working subsidies. Town Centre’s also play a part in the retention of the identity of former industrial communities and this is one area of focus for the newly formed Cross Party Working Group on Industrial Communities in the Scottish Parliament which is chaired by Cathy Jamieson MSP. A debate also needs to take place on the City Region agenda and its success or otherwise in providing real opportunities for more rural former industrial communities.

It is clear that there is still a huge job to be done to help our former industrial communities back on their feet after the recent recession and consideration needs to be given to whether current economic policies are based on ‘real’ or limited statistics.

The Industrial Communities Alliance (ICA) represents local authorities in the traditional industrial areas of England, Scotland and Wales. The ICA inherits a formidable reputation with the UK Government and the European Union in Brussels, a professional staff experienced in working at the highest level, and an extensive network of support in all of Britain’s industrial regions.

For further information on the ICA including membership, publications or events please contact Anne Houston on Anne.Houston2(at)ntlworld.com or Dave Hewet on David.Hewet(at)east-ayrshire.gov.uk

SURF Conference Quotes

“...the necessary rebalancing of the national local government relationship has left a temporary vacuum of policy at the most challenging time. We need a staged theory of change – do we have one? Does the government have one?”

The Real Impact of the Recession

Barony Colliery ‘A Frame’ in Cumnock

Anne Houston
Industrial Communities Alliance
Anne.Houston2(at)ntlworld.com
Letter from America
Scotregen’s regular USA columnist and international community facilitator, Denys Candy, here looks at the presence of hope and imagination in the future of community regeneration across the Atlantic.

FIELD WORK
“In a new city, there are ghosts of old cities. There are lies and recreations. Everyone thinks that a city is full of hope, but it isn’t. Sometimes, it is the end of imagination.”

Currently in the USA we can’t quite imagine giving everyone health insurance, generating new kinds of work, imprisoning fewer people or taxing the mega-wealthy, leading me to wonder how to address this collective lack of imagination. In our desire to craft a healthier future, how do we conduct what poet Seamus Heaney (quoting T.S. Elliot) calls, “a successful raid on the inarticulate?” Here are some notes from my field work as a consultant, facilitator and trainer:

Re-making master-planning
Increasingly, when master-plans incorporate sustainable solutions or chapters on green or open spaces, they are subjugated to a primary focus on commercial, housing and transportation markets. But re-making a place can be productively enriched when the native expertise of locals is combined with that of ‘outsiders’ to re-experience and re-imagine places on the way to delivering projects, designs and development proposals.

When I asked residents in Pittsburgh’s Hill District (through a series of experiential events) to look at their landscape to discern their future, before seeking out corporations that might bring jobs to the area, the result was a renewed, deepened awareness of the natural environment and a strategy for civic ecology that can now frame the City’s master-plan for the area. Called Greenprint, this strategy builds on the history of the place and its people, proposing an expansion of woodlands from the hillside edges into the central “village” core, and new ways for water, people, animals and vehicles to get around. Our mantra is, “Remember the woods, the village and conviviality.”

With Greenprint, the city authorities and local partners are collaborating to ground the entire master-plan in a focus on the health of the area’s landscape and people, including their relationships to markets. Our human or civic imprint on the landscape can thus remediate, heal and nurture it, hence the term civic ecology. Practical application for the Hill’s residents kicks in, for instance, when a developer proposes new housing; local stakeholders can insist on site plans that expand the woodlands right into the heart of the community.

Through Greenprint, the health of the landscape will influence both the master plan and subsequent developments. Greenprint would be a good example of a successful raid on the inarticulate. To borrow from another poet, Mary Oliver, it is a “truly contemporary creative force… something that is built out of the past, but with a difference.” As the poet Charles Simic said in a newspaper interview in 2005, “You need reality to make the imagination do interesting things, to renew itself. Take the reality out of the situation and you simply repeat yourself.”

Addressing the reality of racial and economic segregation
As a (part-time!) songwriter I have encountered many interesting musicians, visual artists and writers. Several years ago, novelist Fiona Cheong (Scent of the Gods; Shadow Theater) and I wondered aloud how artists might shine a light on the entrenched segregation in our region. The community organiser in me wanted to organise a public dialogue, but noticing that art events and performances tended to reflect the city’s segregated life by drawing segregated audiences, we took a different route and organised a performance series. Our goal was to create an environment – a joyful space – in which a diverse audience could gather to enjoy music, poetry and prose, and to transform social relations on the spot.

Confluence was designed to attract all kinds of people. It featured both well-known and emerging artists of Asian, African, Hispanic and European heritage. Events (with child care) alternated between two locations – an established arts venue in a middle-class area and a community centre in a low-income area, thereby inviting/challenging our audience to move in new ways around the city.

The results were magical, drawing hundreds of people from the unemployed to the well-heeled. Arriving by bus, bike, banged-up and fancy cars (on one occasion braving hurricane-strength winds and rain), many different-looking folk participated. The artists were energized by the format and the mix of people responding to their work. In a welcoming environment, it was easy for poems, songs and stories to work as the glue connecting everyone.

Addressing intractable societal challenges
This is tough work, and success often seems fleeting. Confluence was impermanent. But our choice must be to create in microcosm, even temporarily, that which we want to see in the macrocosm, to seek transformative moments in our social relations and be sure to pay attention to and learn from them when they arrive. As pianist Keith Jarrett says, “Transformative moments are very rare, or they seem so due to our inattention. But maybe this is wrong, and they happen constantly, though we are absent.”

1. Dionne Brand, A Map to the Door of No Return, Vintage Canada, Toronto, 2001 (P110)
2. See Scotregen 48, available online at the SURF website (www.scotregen.co.uk).
3. www.confluenceart.org
Looking backwards to Utopia

The imaginative possibilities for the city are constantly threatened by the twin forces of dreary monotony, on the one hand, and contrived excitement, on the other. In the first case, cities become uniform spaces that resemble each other, so-called ‘clone cities’. In the second case, marginal differences are magnified and exaggerated as ‘unique selling points’. This gives rise to the urban paradox of stultifying boredom and tedium at the same time as the endless distraction of place promotion.

The credit-led boom tended to reinforce the latter trend. Every mundane place found itself in competition with every other to siphon-off some of the surplus finance that was sloshing around the system. Successful techniques for doing this were mimicked everywhere, undermining the original impetus towards spatial difference and diversity.

As credit and finance is choked-off, will straitened economic conditions preserve or accentuate place pluralism? Or will it drive urban policy further into monoscaping the city, only at a lower level of investment?

Of course, only time will tell. Instead of banal repetition and grandiose spectacle, it may lead to processes of conserving and making-do with the inherited objects of our material environment. It may also lead to large-scale utopian dreaming about the city.

A neglected example of this is Edward Bellamy’s utopian novel, Looking Backwards 2000-1887. Published in 1888, Looking Backwards had a wider political impact than any other fictional utopia, save perhaps George Orwell’s 1984, though nothing could be more dystopian than the capital city of Airstrip One. Looking Backwards was a bestseller and led directly to the setting up of radical, socialist and populist movements in America.

Revolutionary transformation

Bellamy’s wealthy protagonist, Julian West, falls asleep in the Boston of 1887 and awakens in 2000. In the meantime, America has undergone a revolutionary transformation. Competitive individualism has been replaced by collective solidarity. Poverty, violence and squalor have disappeared. Turns are taken at doing unpopular jobs at reduced hours. People specialise in work where they demonstrate an above average aptitude. Wages are equal. Money is abolished. Things run on a work-based credit system. Borrowing and saving are redundant ideas.

Crime does not exist, nor does the legal apparatus that crime supports. Everyone under twenty-one takes courses in higher education. There are no shops, only ‘sample stores’ that resemble luxurious catalogue stores. Retirement is at forty-five, or for personal reasons at thirty-three, after compulsory employment since the age of twenty-one. Then people can enjoy a full life as average age expectancy rises to ninety and beyond.

West’s Boston of 2000 has also been transformed, with no trace of the squalor and corruption of 1887. No longer is the city dark, filthy and polluted. In line with other Victorian middle class reformers, the city is bright and clean, with wide, tree-lined streets, shielding well-built and commodious apartment blocks of varying size and design. Impressive public buildings, idealised monuments to society, parks and fountains break up the vista. Neighbourhood squares provide a focus for community laundries, restaurants and kitchens, releasing women from domestic drudgery as contemporary feminists demanded.

The last laugh

Bellamy’s utopia has some parallels with others of his time. In some respects it resembles Patrick Geddes’ idea of the shift from Outopia (‘No place’) to Eutopia (‘Good place’), although William Morris objected to Bellamy’s authoritarian celebration of industrial organisation and centralisation. This latter judgement has tended to prevail after the experience of Stalinist urbanisation and industrialisation. But, under a society-threatening crisis, maybe Bellamy’s utopia, for all its problems, not least the authoritarianism so often embedded in utopian schemes, will have the last laugh.
Designing quality streets – an overdue paradigm change

Following up on the focus on Master-Planning in the last issue of Scotregen, Keith Gowenlock points the way to better street design.

The last edition of Scotregen featured an upbeat focus on the role of effective masterplanning in creating quality places. One reason we are now making real progress in delivering successful places is because we are starting to design and deliver quality streets – a vital component of all communities. Key to this is a much needed paradigm shift that has been taking place for many engineers/transport planners. This took a further major step forward with the launch of the Designing Streets policy/guidance document by the Scottish Government on 1st March. I headed the WSP led team developing the document and am convinced that it will have a major role in accelerating this change of approach. For too long, and with notable exceptions, engineers have often been seen as stifling innovation through an unnecessarily prescribe, tick-box approach to design creating roads (where car movement dominates) instead of streets with their much wider placemaking functions.

Out of the cul-de-sac

Why has this been the case? Engineers and transport planners in Scotland have contributed enormously to the design of many of our finest cities and transport systems, working alongside other professions and local communities. Their input is critical to the design, delivery and ongoing maintenance of successful streets and places. There are also many more examples where these professions have taken leading roles delivering practical initiatives that tackle key social and environmental agendas. One such example is the development of more accessible communities. Key to this is a much needed paradigm shift that has been taking place for many engineers/transport planners. This took a further major step forward with the launch of the Designing Streets policy/guidance document by the Scottish Government on 1st March. I headed the WSP led team developing the document and am convinced that it will have a major role in accelerating this change of approach. For too long, and with notable exceptions, engineers have often been seen as stifling innovation through an unnecessarily prescribe, tick-box approach to design creating roads (where car movement dominates) instead of streets with their much wider placemaking functions.

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Bold approaches by a number of exemplar projects in Scotland and the rest of the UK have helped these professions break away from this cautious and reactive paradigm and rediscover true engineering that responds to context and needs. In examples such as Crown Street in Glasgow, Ardler in Dundee and more recently Craigmillar in Edinburgh, the engineers and transport planners have been key members of the consultancy and local authority teams from the very start and have thrown away the old rule books. Unconstrained, they have helped deliver successful streets which contribute powerfully to sustainable transport agendas (putting walking, cycling and public transport before the car), to street and community safety and to environmental sustainability (through innovative SUDS approaches).

Our work developing PAN 76 New Residential Streets and the substantial consultation this involved, highlighted considerable enthusiasm for changing approaches but without substantive research on key issues such as safety and also risk and liability, many engineers were unwilling to move away from their old rule books. When developing Manual for Streets in England and Wales we were fortunately able to address these research issues. A form of postcode lottery has however remained south of the Border with some authorities and developers embracing the new agenda with more enthusiasm than others. The Scottish Government and our team were determined that this wouldn’t happen in Scotland and thus took the bold step to develop and issue the document as a combined policy/guidance document. Designing Streets cannot be ignored and will have significant impact on the design of streets, particularly residential streets but also busier streets and retrofit.

Optomistic agenda

Engineers will need support taking onboard this new agenda in the public and development sectors. Developers, masterplanners and politicians will also need to embrace the agenda. I am optimistic though. We are currently training many local authority engineers and planners though a programme run by the Improvement Service and the response of delegates is overwhelmingly positive. SURF Chair Ian Wall and myself are also working with Napier University colleagues, who are keen to deliver this training to undergraduates. The Engineering and Transport Planning professions are eager to once again take proactive, positive and practical roles working with other professions and local communities to delivering high quality design and engineering solutions that in turn deliver successful places.
Planning Aid for Scotland is a unique and independent national organisation that helps people to engage in the planning process. In the latest regular PAS Scotregen column, Petra Biberbach argues for a stronger role for the third sector in more successful planning.

Scotland’s innovative third sector should be leading the way in the reform of public services - including the delivery of planning system reform.

The Scottish Government says that the aim is to focus government and public services on creating a more successful country, with opportunities for Scotland to flourish through increasing sustainable economic growth. A successful planning system plays a central role in this vision, particularly during the recession and beyond.

Planning Aid for Scotland (PAS) complements the statutory role of Scotland’s councils and national park authorities to enable them to contribute to community-based sustainable development. In the context of greater demand for public involvement in planning and a reduction in funding within councils, Planning Aid for Scotland is ideally placed to work more closely with local government.

As the reforms take hold as a result of the Planning etc. (Scotland) Act 2006, Scotland’s modernised planning system aims to ensure that development plans (strategic and local development plans) are ambitious, visionary and up-to-date. By doing so, they contribute to the improved efficiency of planning enabling investment decisions to be made and planning applications to be determined with a degree of certainty. Improved efficiency and certainty is particularly relevant given the current economic climate.

New demands
Changes introduced by the Act place additional requirements on all planning authorities to undertake increased public consultation during the preparation of development plans. Increased consultation will in turn stimulate greater awareness and demand for public involvement.

PAS already provides a wide range of innovative training workshops throughout Scotland to a diverse range of audiences. We provide training to everyone from elected members and community councils to local community groups, young people and minority groups on these important changes and opportunities for their engagement and involvement.

We also undertake training to developers and community groups involving our toolkit for better public engagement, SP=EED (Scottish Planning = Effective Engagement and Delivery).

Working in partnership with PAS brings the benefit of making the most efficient use of limited public resources, ensuring that consultation requirements can be provided and delivered in a resource efficient way through our 250 plus planning volunteers. Through the programmes, planning authorities and community planning can gain the input of additional professional resources while volunteers gain experience and skills in community engagement, share experiences, benefit from CPD and gain additional skills and knowledge without additional cost to their employers.

Efficient and effective
There is an increasing recognition of the value that third sector organisations can bring to the efficient and effective delivery of public services and indeed the aim of our own organisation is to position it as a key ally alongside local government.

As public sector budgets are squeezed, transfer of functions to voluntary organisations can ensure that public services are still carried out efficiently while reflecting the needs of our communities.

Third sector organisations need to ensure they have the means, quality and flexibility to move forward. The challenge now is to find solutions to exactly how the sector can be developed to fulfil this potential. Planning Aid for Scotland is ready to play its part.

www.planningaidscotland.org.uk
Planning Aid for Scotland helpline: 0845 603 7602

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As part of this issue’s focus on the continuing support mechanisms for regeneration, Gordon McLaren of ESEP highlights the considerable potential of a major EU urban regeneration investment initiative.

Over recent months the Scottish Government, in cooperation with ESEP, has been working with the European Commission and the European Investment Bank on arrangements for the delivery of a new investment stream for regeneration projects in Scotland, which goes by the name of JESSICA.

JESSICA, the Joint European Support for Sustainable Investment in City Areas, is a joint initiative of the European Commission (DG Regio) and the European Investment Bank (EIB). JESSICA offers Member States and Managing Authorities of EU Structural Funds Programmes the possibility to “transform” grants from their European Regional Development Fund Programmes (ERDF), into repayable and recyclable assistance, to fund urban development. This significant new development is a welcome addition to the urban regeneration landscape and promises to provide a lasting legacy beyond the initial investment period and the limited spatial targeting on the local authority areas eligible for ERDF support.

Not a one-off
JESSICA is designed to invest in urban regeneration capital infrastructure, through repayable loans, guarantees and equity – not one-off grant funding. Investment proposals must be capable of generating a financial return in order to service any debt and importantly to establish JESSICA as an evergreen fund. As a strategic investment vehicle, JESSICA will invest in projects which comprise a package of activities, not all of which need to be ERDF eligible, but must be components of an integrated plan for sustainable urban development.

The types of investments envisaged for JESSICA support include business parks and business space, e-infrastructure, re-use of buildings and brownfield development, renewable energy investments, development of social enterprise and sustainable urban transport management schemes.

Balanced Investment
It is important to understand that JESSICA needs to generate returns on investment sufficient to create a sustainable fund. The challenge is to balance investment returns with the achievement of local, national and EU policy objectives, and to deliver social and economic benefits to local communities.

Sustainability and Leverage
JESSICA offers added value to Structural Funds, as the recyclable nature of ERDF contributions should ensure sustainability of investment, plus the leverage effect from loan capital contributed by the EIB, financial institutions, banks and private investors. It also provides the opportunity for sustainable urban investment projects to benefit from the financial sector’s technical and financial expertise.

With economic recovery showing modest growth, little or no confidence in the property sector and very tight public sector budget settlements, JESSICA offers a very real prospect of continuing investment in major regeneration activity. This is vital if marginalised communities are not to fall even further behind neighbouring and more prosperous areas and to play their full role in supporting economic recovery.

A formal Scottish Government announcement on JESSICA is expected in the next few weeks and Scotregen plans to carry further information in the next issue.

What’s happening elsewhere in the UK?
The East Midlands Development Agency set up the £20m East Midlands Urban Development Fund, in February 2010 aiming to enhance the region in terms of innovation, science and technology. The London Development Agency (LDA) signed the first JESSICA agreement with the European Investment Bank (EIB) in the UK in December 2008. The LDA will use JESSICA funding in support of their Climate Change agenda.

The Northwest Regional Development Agency has set up a £100m holding fund, the Northwest Urban Investment Fund, to help regenerate sustainable development in urban areas in the North West of England.

In October 2009, the Welsh Assembly Government announced their plans for a JESSICA UDF, known as the Regeneration Investment Fund for Wales, investing across Wales, but with a primary focus on the areas earmarked for EU Convergence funding.
Competition for jobs in the current economic climate is challenging for even the most confident and skilled individuals. For others across Scotland, with barriers to entering employment, education or training, the distance from opportunities can be a considerable gulf; making the role of the agencies providing support to these groups all the more important. Caryn Elder outlines how the City of Edinburgh Council are trying to help bridge the gap.

The Employability and Skills team of the City of Edinburgh Council's Economic Development Unit has been set a target to bring 3,000 people with significant barriers into sustainable employment, education or training by 2012. To achieve this, the team is involved in a combination of direct and indirect delivery of interventions through the city's own Joined Up for Jobs strategy and network.

Direct services including - Capital Skills, Working for Families, Get On and the Public Sector Academy - are tailored to help different priority groups. Through a combination of advice, support or training, and subsidised jobs through the DWP Future Jobs Fund programme, the Team aims to equip individuals with the necessary skills and confidence to enter into sustainable employment, vocational training or further education. Through the city's Jobs Strategy partnership the Team can also offer support to employers in assisting them with their recruitment, securing the most suitable workforce and at the same time broker opportunities for the priority target groups.

Monitoring progress, measuring success

A Caselink system allows the team to track and measure their success by recording clients' contact with both Council and partner services and providing management information on the reach and impact of those services. Caselink holds customer details, including an assessment of their needs that is used to direct them to appropriate services. This simplifies the process for the client and allows the team to measure the number of clients assisted into sustainable employment, education or training, and at the same time follow up on their progress and to measure the impact and sustainability of the interventions.

In a time where unemployment is rising, equipping clients with the necessary skills to stay in employment is vital. Despite the challenges of the economic downturn, the Employability and Skills Team continue working towards a positive impact in the parts of Edinburgh most in need of support. So far in this operational year the team are on track to achieve their goal of assisting 1000 individuals towards or into sustainable employment with over 1100 clients engaged and over 830 progressing on to a positive destination. In the current economic climate this work is more important than ever.

Supporting Employability and Skills

For further information, contact Caryn Elder in the City of Edinburgh Council at caryn.elder(at)edinburgh.gov.uk.
Asset transfer to communities and third sector organisations contracting for public services is all the rage; but do they have the expertise to make the most of the opportunities and to spot when assets are actually liabilities. Maureen Munro of Edinburgh Business Development outlines some of the support available for making sure community regeneration is good business for local groups.

Whilst many social enterprises and third sector organisations are facing the challenges of funding cuts, moves to contracting and reductions in charitable donations, support for the sector has seldom been so strong. The Scottish Government’s Enterprising Third Sector Action Plan has helped to finance a raft of initiatives to help the sector make the step change towards greater sustainability, reduced grant dependency and increased enterprise skills. EBD, part of the Edinburgh Chamber Group, is playing a vital role along with its partners in delivering a range of support services to help the sector grow.

Social Enterprise Edinburgh is a City of Edinburgh Council-funded initiative that provides business support to existing and aspiring social enterprises. Edinburgh-based business support agency and enterprise trust, Edinburgh Business Development (EBD), helps to deliver this service across the city, offering access to expertise in areas such as business planning, marketing, market research, feasibility studies, financial planning, HR, as well as a wide range of training and skills development support. Through its sister company, Edinburgh Chamber of Commerce, social enterprises working with EBD can benefit from a year’s free membership. Many social enterprises and third sector organisations are looking to strengthen their links to the private sector. Membership of the Chamber can help them do this. They can also benefit from access to a free 24-hour legal and taxation helpline, legal insurance and HR support, along with a variety of cost-saving schemes.

Access to expertise – wherever you are
Realise Mentoring, a Scottish Government-funded mentoring programme for third sector organisations across the country, is run by EBD and its partners. The aim is to provide free mentoring support to leaders of third sector organisations, to help them improve the financial sustainability of their organisations and make a step-change to become more enterprising. Any third sector organisation can apply, irrespective of turnover, staffing levels, location or sector.

This programme enables organisations to benefit from the experiences, networks and contacts of others in the private, public and third sectors. Mentors can provide a sounding board and share their experiences, helping to support the mentee to make their own decisions.

It doesn’t matter where an organisation is based. Mentoring support can be provided in a range of ways, including face-to-face, by telephone, email and online. In fact our first mentoring match was with a Skye-based organisation and a mentor based in Edinburgh. More information on Realise Mentoring can be found at www.realisementoring.org.uk

Additional support
Through the Edinburgh Social Economy Partnership, EBD is involved in the provision of additional support to third sector organisations to help increase their skills and ability to tender for public sector contracts. This programme is helping to up-skill organisations and is supporting them to form consortia with others, enabling them to tender for larger-scale public and private sector contracts.

As well as running a range of regeneration programmes and initiatives, EBD provides a signposting service for organisations. So if anyone wants to discuss the range of services available to them, they can contact us on 0844 7362992 or email me at maureen.munro(at)edinburghchamber.co.uk

Jackie Killeen, Head of Policy at The Big Lottery Fund in Scotland, was one of the contributors to SURF’s 2010 Annual Conference, where she confirmed that BIG is planning to continue its substantial financial support to a wide variety of community regeneration projects via its new funding programme.

The central purpose of these programmes will be to continue encouraging and enabling the building of stronger communities in a sustainable way. They will cover themes familiar to the previous “Investing In Communities” funding stream. The intention is for the first of the new programmes to open at the end of June.

Jackie also announced that BIG have added £100m to the value of their community investment programmes in Scotland over 2010-2015. The total for the period is now £400m. Most of this funding will go directly to community projects, but £50m is ring-fenced for programmes that address ‘deeper need’, such as supporting young people in care.

You can keep an eye on future developments at the BIG website: www.biglotteryfund.org.uk/scotland
Supporting an outbreak of consensus?

SURF Chief Executive, Andy Milne, looks for some supportive messages from the March 2010 Scottish Parliament debate on regeneration.

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SURF  
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An important aspect of SURF’s work is to constructively relay the experience, views and ideas of its extensive, cross sector membership to help inform the Scottish Government’s future regeneration policy considerations. This is normally done through relevant civil servants and ministers but all MSPs are kept up to date via regular SURF bulletins, including this quarterly journal. SURF welcomes any feedback it receives from the members of parliament, whose views are obviously critically important in supporting or blocking policy proposals, particularly in the case of a minority administration. It was therefore interesting to review their exchanges in the recent Scottish Parliament debate on regeneration. In this article I just want to flag up what seemed to me to be some of the most interesting elements evidenced by the debate.

Routes to regeneration

Firstly, there was no surprise in noting extensive references to the importance of community engagement and community empowerment as the basis of more successful and sustainable regeneration. As always, the important questions are about how this can be best supported, with what resources and through which processes. It was encouraging to note several contributions reflecting a message that SURF has been indicating for some time, i.e. that conventional Community Planning processes may not always be the best route for achieving this goal and that in fact, in some cases, the reverse is true. Community Planning is a useful approach to improving the organisation and targeting of large scale public services at a strategic level, but its necessarily bureaucratic nature is not suited to much more than informing and consulting people as service consumers. The more ambitious goals of increased community empowerment, enterprise and ownership of assets and processes are much more likely to be achieved through the support and encouragement of community based housing associations, community trusts, co operatives and related social enterprises.

Awareness of the importance of the role and potential of ‘the voluntary sector’ was also much in evidence and there were clear signs of realistic concern about the threat to this vital but fragile community support fabric from the impending cuts and resultant closures sweeping across all local authority areas. In the world of post ring fenced funding and financial collapse, some elements of the discussion had a wistful air of creaking barn doors and the sound of receding hoof beats of long bolted horses. There were references to the many millions of pounds that have been ‘poured into’ regeneration areas over the years without a lot to show in terms of overcoming the material and asparitional poverty of those living there. This understandable observation could have been better balanced by similar concerns about the wider economic forces which have simultaneously sucked out resources and confidence from these same areas and undermined individual and community well-being on a much larger financial and personal scale.

Alternatively, some MSPs offered rosy revisionist retrospectives on the success of earlier regeneration strategies, most strikingly on the impact of the ‘New Life for Urban Scotland’ initiative in Castlemilk, Whitfield Ferguslie Park and Wester Hailes. It is interesting to observe how, over the years, professional consultants reports are edited, recycled and then presented as historical fact. This is important as it was the New Life template which was prematurely stretched and replicated to address community and economic regeneration in 45 areas of disadvantage across Scotland in the form of Priority Partnership Areas. These later morphed into SIPs which were eventually subsumed into the nationwide framework of Community Planning Partnerships.

Securing sustainable support

All of that said, this was an interesting and important debate for everyone concerned with community regeneration. One aspect of the MSPs discourse which was particularly encouraging was the evident cross party consensus that any serious attempt to secure meaningful and sustainable improvements in community regeneration will require adequate and consistent investment of time and resources in a targeted, holistic, strategic manner based on both effective large scale public services and the energy, ideas and expertise of communities themselves. SURF is well placed to independently facilitate a cross party discussion aimed at working out a basic structure of key regeneration policies and resource streams which can be relied on through and past the upheavals of election cycles and spending reviews. That would offer significant support for everyone involved in trying to build a better Scotland for all.

The full transcript of the parliamentary debate is available from the Scottish Parliament website at the following link: http://tinyurl.com/yh79gkd

"The public sector is now where the private sector was two years ago. Its like the Coyote in the cartoon which is still running off it has run off the edge of the cliff because it hasn't looked down yet."

SURF Conference Quotes
Dr Stirling Howieson at the University of Strathclyde is interested in numbers. From understanding the ‘big bang’ to managing your credit card repayments, numbers hold the key to everything. Here, in his regular Scotregen column, he offers some more interesting figures…

55% - “lies, damned lies and statistics”

Painkillers, it was widely reported in the press, can increase your chances of having a heart attack by between 24% and 55%. A piece of information clearly missed by Michael Jackson and his physicians. Who would be crazy enough to take these painkillers (Ibuprofen and Diclofenac) after reading such headlines? We already have a relatively high prevalence of ischaemic heart disease in Scotland, so to double our chances simply to relieve the occasional ache and pain would appear to be – on the face of it – nothing less than suicidal. But do these painkillers actually ‘cause’ a 55% increase in risk, or is there a bit of statistical jiggery-pokery going on here?

British males between the ages of 30 to 69 have a 0.6% chance of having a heart attack in any given year (NB mortality rates have now dropped to under 4% for a primary event). For women, the incidence is 0.2%. If you smoke, eat lots of pies, have diabetes and get bladdered every night, somewhat unsurprisingly your relative risk factors increase. Conversely, if you are not overweight, don’t smoke, take regular exercise, do not abuse alcohol and eat a balanced diet, your relative risk factors decrease, and you will be no more likely to suffer a heart attack than the female of the species.

The published research paper on painkillers demonstrated that individuals appear to increase their relative risk by one extra heart attack for every 1005 people popping these pills; a rise of just under 0.1%. These figures, however, do not necessarily prove causality, as some other associated variable may well be the culprit. The additional increase in the natural frequency is quite frankly tiny; 0.1% of 0.2% is not really worth mentioning, unless of course you are in the business of selling advertising space by worrying the chattering classes with entirely bogus health scares based on the most absurd contortion of the statistics that even Disraeli could not have imagined. If this was a one-off mistake by an innumerate newspaper editor, it would surely be excusable, but this is not the case. The papers are packed with this type of deliberate abuse of numbers and the fall-out from this ‘misinformation’ can be significant.

Measles, mumps and rubella - diseases that can still kill and/or leave children and adults with severe and debilitating impairment - are now suddenly back on the agenda, as a greater percentage of parents (over 20% in some regions) avoid the MMR vaccine due to the press latching on to one man’s opinion; a man who has, coincidentally, reportedly earned almost £500,000 in expert witness fees from the Legal Aid Board for a few court actions, claiming that the MMR vaccine ‘causes’ autism. The original anecdotal study (n=14 and all referrals to this one consultant) has been discredited and withdrawn. The British Medical Journal (BMJ) recently found him ‘guilty’ of professional misconduct and he is now in the process of being ‘exposed’ by the very papers that for 10 years promulgated his statistically underpowered research.

When it comes to manipulating numbers, newspaper editors appear to be totally bereft of any sense of social responsibility. When it comes to manipulating numbers, newspaper editors appear to be totally bereft of any sense of social responsibility and underestimate the collateral damage they can inflict on public health. In 1998 there were less than 50 cases of measles reported. In 2008 there were 1348. Where were the headlines? - “UK measles epidemic - cases rise by 2700%!”

If you don’t fancy the needle, you could of course opt for homeopathy; a bizarre fantasyland based entirely on sugar pill placebos. Sweet - but like the stats on painkillers - exceptionally hard to swallow.
All Together Against Poverty?

In the latest of a regular series of columns from the Poverty Alliance, Peter Kelly explores poverty’s position on modern political agendas.

As the UK general election draws near, all manner of lobbying organisations, coalitions and campaigners will be attempting to get their messages into the media and into the public debate. They will all be trying to find ways to highlight their cause in the media, to encourage prospective MPs to support key policies, and to build relationships with politicians that can be developed in the next Parliament.

The Poverty Alliance will be no different. We will be working to ensure that the profile of the key campaigns that we support, the Scottish Campaign on Welfare Reform and the Scottish Living Wage Campaign, are raised during the campaign. We will also be working alongside national campaigns, such as End Child Poverty and the Get Fair Coalition. In all of these campaigns, we will be working alongside community and voluntary organisations, trade unions, faith based organisations and a range of other civil society organisations.

These campaigns will, quite rightly, be advocating for specific policy proposals across the spectrum of social justice issues. But the Poverty Alliance will also be pushing to raise the profile of poverty issues more generally during the election campaign. Over the last two months, we have been running a series of ten seminars across Scotland to help us identify the issues that our members and wider stakeholders want us to prioritise during the election campaign. Some of the issues that have been identified so far will come as no surprise – increasing benefit levels to protect against poverty, defending public services that people on low income rely on, action to address low pay, additional support for young people to find and stay in work. When our seminar series is completed, we will use the results to carry out media work in the run up to the elections.

A sympathetic ear?

But in an election campaign that looks likely to be dominated by debates about who can cut public spending furthest and fastest, what is the likelihood that the arguments about poverty will get a hearing? The results from the latest survey of public attitudes from the National Centre for Social Research suggests that support for redistributive taxation is at its lowest level since the early 1980s. Again, hardly the best context for having a debate about the policies required to address poverty and inequality.

Despite the economic context and the hardening of public attitudes to redistribution, however, there is a real need for greater debate about how we effectively address poverty and inequality. The interest in the work of Wilkinson and Pickett around income inequality suggests that there is growing recognition of the need to press for more comprehensive long-term approaches to address poverty. And whilst the election campaign provides an important opportunity to raise issues for debate, the long term solutions that are needed to address poverty require on-going public debate.

Durable dialogue

In February, the Poverty Alliance held the first Scottish Assembly for Tackling Poverty, as part of our ‘Evidence, Participation, Change’ project. This event brought together more than 200 people from across Scotland – people from communities, local authorities, local and national politicians, voluntary organisations, trade unions, faith groups – to debate how we move towards a more socially just Scotland. The Assembly was the first that will take place over the next four years. We hope to establish the Assembly as an annual event that will allow a broad range of people to review where progress is being made to tackle poverty, and to hold politicians to account.

This first event was a success on this basis. Ministers from the Scottish and UK Governments were reminded of the need for urgent action to address poverty and inequality. And all of those present would have left with the clear message that the poor should not be made to pay for the current economic crisis. The event discussed wide ranging issues such as green jobs and the new economy, the impact of educational inequalities, options for income maximisation. Over the coming weeks and months the Poverty Alliance and our members will be following up on the many demands and actions that emerged at the Assembly.

At the next Assembly in 2011, we will report back on the progress that has been made and will ask our politicians to do the same. In doing so, we hope to ensure that issues of poverty and inequality are kept at the top of the political agenda, and do not simply become a debating point at general elections.

For more on the Evidence, Participation, Change project, visit: www.povertyalliance.org

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The 2010 Scottish Assembly for Tackling Poverty
Young people - old problems?

This issue’s regular column from colleagues at the substantial housing, health and regeneration research project, GoWell, explores the context of residents who are troubled by the behaviour of young people in their neighbourhoods.

In 2006, GoWell surveyed 6008 adult householders (aged 16 years or over) in 14 relatively deprived Glasgow neighbourhoods and asked what people thought about their homes and communities. Many interesting findings emerged, one of which was the large number of people who regarded young people hanging around to be a ‘serious problem’ in their area.

We have analysed this issue further to explore how this finding compares with national surveys and also to understand more about the people who cite teenagers as a serious problem.

Negative perceptions

In terms of comparisons with national surveys, our findings fit reasonably well. English, Scottish and UK surveys of perceived anti-social behaviour have found that ‘teenagers hanging around’ is the most, or one of the most, frequently cited neighbourhood problems.

To find out which kinds of GoWell participants were particularly likely to cite teenagers as a serious problem, we looked at a range of characteristics, including gender, age, ethnicity, housing tenure, employment and health of the people who cited this problem. We also looked at whether they had children living at home, regular contact with neighbours, used local amenities and how long they’d lived in the area.

We found that negative perceptions of teenagers were associated with specific types of individual disadvantage, such as ill health (frequent GP visits) and financial problems. What we found surprising was that perceiving teenagers to be a problem was also relatively high amongst younger adults, and people who had children living with them. People who talked to neighbours, used local amenities and who had lived in their area for several years were also more likely to report this problem.

Challenging the stereotypes

This finding differs from some popular stereotypes. For example, when we initially presented GoWell figures about perceptions of teenagers being a problem, feedback from local community groups often included the view that we, "probably over-sampled old people who rarely left their house".

In future work, we will try and establish the causal direction of these associations. For example, are regular health service users more likely to worry about teenagers because they feel vulnerable? Or does worrying about neighbourhood problems exacerbate ill health and, consequently, greater health service use? Questions of cause and effect are difficult to answer from a single survey, so our next steps also include longitudinal data (from subsequent GoWell surveys) and responses from focus groups on young people.

Policy implications

Whatever the cause, our findings suggest that concern about teenagers hanging around is more than just an abstract perception but is rooted in direct experience and exposure. Further services might be part of the solution, although past experience does not always support this. A current policy response is that of enhanced community policing, and future GoWell surveys will help assess its impact on these perceptions. Other approaches to enhance community cohesion should, however, also be considered – informed by a better understanding of what people are concerned about, and where social divisions are most likely to exist.

For more information on GoWell visit www.gowellonline.com or contact Jennie Coyle at jennie.coyle(at)drs.glasgow.gov.uk or 0141 287 6268.
Common Challenges in Health Inequalities

In the fourth of a series of articles for Scotregen on the progress of the Scottish Government’s Equally Well Framework, Karen Grieve provides an update of the ongoing efforts to tackle health inequalities across Scotland.

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Equally Well is the Scottish Government Framework for the reduction of health inequalities in Scotland. The ministerial taskforce has been reconvened since January, to review progress within the work to date, and will publish an update report by early summer 2010. One part of the wider Equally Well programme, is the eight local test sites working across Scotland.

Test sites

Throughout our series of articles running in Scotregen, we have explored what the test sites are doing, how we are trying to connect learning between the eight sites through a robust learning network and online social networking site, and some of the different approaches we are using to redesign in local public services (using complexity science and simple rules).

Emerging patterns

In this article, we are going to explore some common challenges across the eight sites - which on paper look very different (with their unique geographies and themes). A key aim for the test site programme was to ensure that they worked together and learned together, building one theme upon each other in all of the areas. Dr Harry Burns, Chief Medical Officer for Scotland, has always driven this thinking within the test sites, explaining that health inequalities will not be solved by one theme in one patch; it will need all the elements moving together. Initially, this seemed a big ask, as many national pilots had tried this in the past. Early buds of change, however, seem to be emerging!

Some key themes worth focusing on are:

- Community engagement; for this to be truly meaningful, community leaders should be given ownership of a problem and responsibility for finding a solution. A recent discussion paper from NESTA describes ‘Mass Localism’, a way to help small communities solve big social challenges.

- Intergenerational, long standing inequalities; a useful approach to thinking about this is the Aaron Antonovsky model of ‘creation of health’, whereby people need a ‘sense of coherence’ to want to aspire to be healthy. People need to be able to make sense of their world, and of this, of course, starts in the earliest years of life, knowing and trusting that you will be cared for. The next step is being able to manage your life, though things like school attainment, jobs, money, housing, relationships etc. Only then will you see life as being worthwhile, and you as being worthy of being healthy and happy, and being all you can be. Aspiring for more can be difficult, especially when all you know tells you the opposite.

I recently attended an evening lecture run by the Glasgow Centre for Population Health, led by a film maker called Eleanor Yule, which was titled ‘Scottish Miserablism!’ This was specifically looking at the portrayal of life in Scotland through the genre of Miserablism, which has dominated in recent decades. Many of the films and TV clips used showed a dark Scotland, stark poverty, violence and lack of hope. One line stood out for me, where a mother was shouting at her teenage son, telling him to get a job and stop dreaming about what he could be - that if he was meant for more he would have been born into more. It was a sad blow to hope, and one that many people facing inequalities in Scotland face day-in, day-out. The test sites are all working on elements of the Antonovsky approach, trying to address the root causes and in small steps help communities and people gain a sense of coherence.

- Changing public services; all of the test sites are working across a collection of community planning partners, all with their own structure, rules and cultures. So in this way, they are learning from each other on what works, and how to beat systems that sometimes crush innovation. So for example, using simple rules, and getting key leaders on board can really help to free things up. This is especially crucial in a time of financial cuts in spending, as we need to make sure we don’t waste money on systems that are not reaching the spot. All the test sites are facing tough times locally within their organisations, and are trying hard to give the message that crisis can offer great opportunities for radical change – and to avoid going back into only doing the normal stuff. This element was a key message in the recently published Marmot report on health inequalities for England, saying that radical change in professions and services is needed.

“Aspiring for more can be difficult, especially when all you know tells you the opposite.”

1 http://equallywell.ning.com
2 http://www.nesta.org.uk/publications/assets/features/mass_localism
3 http://www.marmot-review.org.uk/
Housing is a key element of regeneration, both as a fundamental necessity and as a driver for wider related activity, particularly via Register Social Landlords. In the latest of a regular series of Scotregen columns, David Stewart wonders if we should look back to the decade of big hair, Pacman and the Rubik’s Cube.

Following the credit crunch and the recession that followed, the huge sums spent refinancing the banks and providing a stimulus to the UK economy has resulted in a large borrowing deficit. At present, all of the major UK parties are talking about reducing public spending in real terms in order to pay off the debt.

Worrying times, then. Some commentators believe that spending on public services such as housing could be cut by 50% in real terms in the coming years. Given the outstanding level of housing need in Scotland (there are 200,000 people on local authority housing waiting lists in Scotland) and the well-documented fact that the labour intensive nature of housebuilding means that investing in new-build affordable housing is an effective economic stimulus, all the talk of cuts and spending restraint is extremely disappointing.

For those of us who can remember the early 1980s, the thought of a return to tight public spending and its likely consequences is frightening. Back then, cuts in public spending led to a rapid rise in unemployment, with the young particularly badly affected. Professor David Blanchflower, no stranger to regular readers of these pages, recently warned that planned spending cuts proposed by George Osborne MP, the Shadow Chancellor, could see UK unemployment rise as high as 5 million. The Conservatives are not alone in proposing cuts to balance the books.

Daunting targets
At the same time, the impetus to cut carbon emissions and reduce fuel costs continues to gather pace. The Scottish Government recently consulted on the Energy Efficiency Action Plan (EEAP), a document that looks at how as a nation we can achieve the ambitious targets set out in the Climate Change Act. The Climate Change Act has been described as “the toughest climate change legislation in the world” and the targets are indeed exacting. Scotland is to cut carbon emissions by 80% by 2050, and more immediately emissions must fall 42% by 2020.

Economists believe that housing is one of the more practical and affordable sectors through which to deliver these cuts (although the term affordable has to be viewed as relative – by their own estimates the Scottish Government believe it will cost an average of £7,000 per house to achieve the targets – a staggering £7 billion in total).

While these targets are intimidating, perhaps they provide a real opportunity in a time of rising unemployment. The media has made much of the potential of renewable energy to reduce carbon emissions and provide a growth area for the Scottish economy. At the same time, a number of housing associations and other bodies are involved in developing proposals to provide clean and affordable energy through microgeneration schemes.

Lessons from the 1980s
Both of these developments are welcome and bode well for the future. More immediately, however home insulation schemes such as those seen in the mid-1980s could bring real benefits - as well as helping eradicate the scourge of fuel poverty, investing in home insulation has the potential to provide much needed jobs and training opportunities at a time of growing unemployment. The Scottish Government has already taken a step in the right direction with the announcement of a further £10 million to fund the Home Insulation Scheme, now more investment is needed by both the UK and Scottish Governments.

So maybe we can learn something from the 1980s. After all, a decade that made legwarmers and luminous socks fashion accessories must have produced something good by way of compensation.
The focus of design and management of the Open Forum and networking programme continues to be on the adaptation and development of the programme in pursuit of informing and, hopefully, influencing regeneration policy.

A ‘Food for Thought’ (FfT) lunch discussion was convened in early February in Glasgow on the theme of ‘Creating Quality Places and Sustainable Communities. The event was part of the continuing development of the networking programme, whereby a larger Open Forum event is followed by a smaller group event on the same broad theme. This smaller group event is convened with a view to examining some key points in more detail.

SURF was able to enlist a 15-strong group of well placed representatives ranging from; private sector developers; senior management NHS Health Improvement Scotland; chartered surveyors; architects; urban designers; a UK development consultancy; a Scotland-wide third sector organisation (environmental group); law practices; and Scottish Government funded agencies. This all provided a genuinely cross-sector perspective, including that of the private sector, for participants.

Representation and contributions from our partners at Scottish Government’s Scottish Centre for Regeneration (SCR) were welcome and very useful in helping to provide an appropriate context for the discussions.

Notable among the outcomes were;

- Guests agreed on the critical need for ways and means to be developed to identify, measure and promote the added value that is created in quality place-making.

  “Guests agreed on the critical need for ways and means to be developed to identify, measure and promote the added value that is created in quality place-making.”

  designers are not recognised or given sufficient scope to produce their best? The guests at this FfT did not feel that a lack of indigenous skills was a priority problem

- It was also notable that many guests sought discussion about the ability of professional Institutes and bodies to drive forward leadership and new thinking on place-making and sustainable communities.

- The FfT guests supported the preceding Open Forum view that, on place-making, the most urgent need for now is not for more Government policy statements and guidance, but for leadership to be displayed by decision makers on quality design matters.

SURF is developing it’s in-house capacity and expertise on creating and facilitating these smaller group events, as testified with just a few quotes from an informed, robust and discerning audience;

‘Thanks to you and your colleagues for arranging and facilitating a thought provoking lunchtime discussion. Hearing various differing perspectives being articulated on a single topic is always an interesting thing to witness and, usefully, allows the different stresses on a process to be aired.

Thanks - great event, very constructive. As always, just feel free to invite me along to any future events.

Many thanks for a very interesting lunch which I thoroughly enjoyed - the range of expertise round the table was very stimulating… - and impeccably chaired! I'd be delighted to be on your potential invite list for future events.’

A discussion paper derived from the Open Forum and FfT events, was subsequently compiled by SURF for discussion with relevant Scottish Government policy personnel. This forms part of the continued adaptation and development of the networking programme in pursuit of informing and, hopefully, influencing regeneration policy. SURF is appreciative of the assistance provided on these developments by our partners in the SCR.

The SURF Open Forum programme is funded by SCR with the aim of facilitating independent feedback and opinion to policy makers in Scottish Regeneration and Community Planning. Open Forum participation is open to all without charge. SURF welcomes suggestions or offers of contributions for future events with regard to the core programme themes of sustainable development and sustainable communities, and tackling poverty and inequalities through regeneration. Contact Edward Harkins; edward(at)scotregen.co.uk or direct line 0141 585 6850.
Scotland with Style’ shtick is a sham which serves to avert attention from argued that corporate Glasgow’s relentlessly vaunted ‘Smiles Better, truly compassionate nation at both a political and a personal level. It is faceted study.  The substantial evidence condemns our failure to act as a subjective analysis of Scotland’s psyche in the later stages of this multi-faceted study. The Tears That Made the Clyde is a challenging book. By drawing on Scottish scientific research, social history, literature, poetry, anecdotes and personal experience, Carol Craig challenges the fundamental myths that Scotland, and specifically Glasgow, use to define their cultural roots and current identity.

An opening battery of social statistics softens up resistance to a more subjective analysis of Scotland’s psyche in the later stages of this multi-faceted study. The substantial evidence condemns our failure to act as a truly compassionate nation at both a political and a personal level. It is argued that corporate Glasgow’s relentlessly vaunted ‘Smiles Better, Scotland with Style’ shtick is a sham which serves to avert attention from spiritual dislocation and economic apartheid on an industrial scale.

Work versus life?
In a recent article, Ben Fincham highlights that for bicycle messengers, the distinction between work and leisure is porous and distinguished only by the fact that sometimes the activity of cycling is done for pay, and sometimes not. Bicycle messengers race during time-off (‘life’), improving their speed and bike handling skills to make them more efficient bicycle messengers. The pay-back is that they also get to race during shifts (work), competing with other couriers to collect and deliver the greatest number parcels over a given time period. Fincham does not state outright what is implicit, that that blurring of the work-life distinction gives considerable extra value to the employer as well as employee. This is worth consideration in times of economic downturn, when work-life policies are often seen as a perk.

Who does what - and how?
Another group who blur the distinction are software writers, the self described ‘techs’ or ‘geeks’, the innovators who gave us the defining tools of the last decade with internet commons such as Wikipedia or the Firefox web browser. Whereas the cycle couriers are locked into individualist combat, each individual in this group harnesses the power of collective intelligence and still gains prestige when their work is taken up. As with bicycle messengers, the needs of the individual and the wider economy are converged almost seamlessly.

Collective intelligence also anticipates future need better than individuals or single, narrowly focused, departments. Collective intelligence is better for matching resources to new problems. It breaks down silos - the who does what, how and for whom. When unanticipated change or crises threaten, it is good to have as wide a network of skills, experiences and know-how as is possible, and not to assume there is only one approach to a problem.

How does this relate to allotments? Allotments are… …resilient networks of knowledge, experience and problem solving (What grows in which soil and climate? What tastes nice? How do we tackle different pests?) …and undertaken for more than money; a form of non-economic activity that can actually promote the economic viability of our future way of life. How can we enable more growth of this approach in the mainstream?

The Tears That Made the Clyde
A review by Andy Milne

‘The Tears That Made the Clyde’ is a challenging book. By drawing on Scottish scientific research, social history, literature, poetry, anecdotes and personal experience, Carol Craig challenges the fundamental myths that Scotland, and specifically Glasgow, use to define their cultural roots and current identity.

An opening battery of social statistics softens up resistance to a more subjective analysis of Scotland’s psyche in the later stages of this multi-faceted study. The substantial evidence condemns our failure to act as a truly compassionate nation at both a political and a personal level. It is argued that corporate Glasgow’s relentlessly vaunted ‘Smiles Better, Scotland with Style’ shtick is a sham which serves to avert attention from spiritual dislocation and economic apartheid on an industrial scale.

Ultimately, no easy answers are offered, but the importance of breaking the spell of national delusion is made clear. The Scottish Government is challenged to prioritise well-being above economic growth. The political left is challenged to abandon its traditional aversion to accepting the key role of the conventional family, and all of us are individually challenged to re-examine not just what we are trying to do, but how we relate to ourselves and each other in the process.

At a point of crisis and change, and in the absence of constructive, radical leadership, this is a timely and usefully disturbing book.
LANGUAGE GAMES

Chik Collins, of the University of the West of Scotland, continues his personal look at the role language plays in social change.

Whose word counts?

For many a year it has been said that successful regeneration requires recognition of the knowledge of local communities. So, the word of community organisations has to count for more – even if this challenges the policy makers and implementers. But in practice things have been otherwise. A recent textbook on Urban Regeneration in the UK (Jones and Evans, 2008) counsels us to remember that: “the state is frequently quite willing to crush local opposition to a particular regeneration scheme if that project is seen as a priority”.

That local communities should be treated with such cynicism is appalling – but no great surprise. We’ve always known poor communities need to struggle hard to get heard and harder to get heeded. What is more surprising is how the word of rather more powerful folk can be disregarded by the state when they pose a problem for a project “seen as a priority”. An example is the increasing disregard of the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP), in its ongoing drive to get people off of benefits, for the word of the medical profession – particularly its General Practitioner (GP) wing.

The DWP’s challenge to the medical profession

In assessing eligibility for Employment Support Allowance (ESA – the replacement for Incapacity Benefit), a GP’s familiarity with a patient is nowadays seen, not as an asset, but as a problem. Due to misplaced sympathy, or as a response to ‘pressure’, GPs are seen as liable to conclude that someone is unfit for work when in fact they are perfectly capable of it. And, because unnecessary ‘worklessness’ is seen to be harmful to a person, GPs have, by clear implication, been damaging their patients.

For this (alleged) reason, the word that now counts at the DWP is that of a health care professional (HCP) certified by the Secretary of State (at the DWP). This HCP is nowadays working for a private firm (Atos Healthcare) and is obliged to work within the DWP’s own strictly prescribed methodology for assessing ‘clients’. They are not allowed to call them patients. It’s a ‘performance driven’ environment – with targets which the DWP won’t reveal. Very big money is involved (£80m in 2008-2009).

Perhaps unsurprisingly, significant numbers of people who would seem to have serious health issues are now being found fit for work. There has been something of an outcry in the media – illustrated with case studies of what can happen to those unfortunate enough to find themselves incapacitated and in the hands the DWP (Remember reader, one day it could be you.) Most have a GP whose word has been discounted.

Fighting back

Mercifully, some of these people are able to get support from voluntary and community organisations. My friends at the Clydebank Independent Resource Centre (CIRC) tell of a recent ESA appeal for a client assessed by an HCP as having no incapacity issues at all. 15 points would have seen the client awarded ESA. The Appeal Tribunal awarded him no less than 54 points and then, very unusually, declared their incredulity at the HCP having awarded “no points at all”.

Interestingly, those appealing such ESA decisions – claimants and organisations like the CIRC – can be seen as defending not just themselves and their communities, but the professionalism of all of those GPs whose word is distrusted and discounted at the DWP. What is most remarkable is that the GPs seem, with a few exceptions, somewhat less concerned with defending that themselves. In all of this, it’s the thing that surprises me most.
Scotegen

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Review:


- Review by Edward Harkins, Networking Initiatives Manager, SURF

Readers involved in regeneration may not view the findings in this report as surprising, or new. The value of the report, rather, lies in the extensive evidence and data that underpin the conclusions and recommendations.

The independent National Equality Panel was set up in October 2008 at the invitation of the Rt. Hon. Harriet Harmon MP, UK Minister for Women and Equality. It investigated the relationships between the distributions of various kinds of economic outcome on the one hand, and people’s characteristics and circumstances on the other.

The report demonstrates that the UK is among the most unequal countries in the rich world and more unequal now than a generation ago. Internationally, of the 30 members of the OECD, a club of mainly rich countries, only 6 show greater inequality.

Class and money are often argued to be determinants in how people do in life in the UK.

In the words of the report authors, “For some readers, the sheer scale of the inequalities in outcomes which we present will be shocking.” Perhaps almost as shocking is the relatively low level of discussion and debate that has flowed from this publication.

The authors state, “We have written this report against a back-drop of widespread public ignorance of the scale of inequality in the dimensions we have examined. Most people are unaware, for instance, either of their own position in the income distribution or of the true scale of differences…”

Ignorance may well explain public tolerance of gross inequalities whereby the household wealth of the top 10% of the population is £853,000 and above – 100 times higher than the wealth of the poorest 10 per cent, which is £8,800 or below.

This report is, hopefully, part of a response to the need for awareness-raising on inequality in the UK.

The report could also be part of a renewed dialogue on the direction of UK policy. The authors state that, “Many of the issues we point to emphasise the importance of policy interventions, often aimed at having long-run effects on people’s life chances”. In asserting that key differences and inequalities “are not immutable”, the authors cite evidence on tax and benefit reforms and the (slow) closing of gender gaps in pay and individual income.

They also argue that “public policy can ensure that access to important aspects of life - from health care to safe parks and public spaces – does not depend on income…”

The scope and content of this report is, necessarily, large and detailed. Time-pressed readers could, nevertheless, peruse the more accessible summary accompanying the main report.

The full and summary report of the National Equality Panel, and the UK Government’s response to the findings, can be downloaded at:

http://www.equalities.gov.uk/national_equality_panel/publications.aspx