Revitalising the Waterside in a Community Context: The Experience of the Mersey Basin Campaign

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Introduction

In the context of revitalising watersides, water, people, and their communities cannot be isolated each other. The waterside, the place where land and water meet, has always been vital in determining the amenity and quality of human settlements. The delivery of both economic and environmental sustainability to communities has been increasingly emphasised in waterside-related issues. However, revitalising watersides has been dominated by the concept of large-scale dockland regeneration hence ignoring community involvement.

Context of the Research

In recent years, community involvement has been promoted as a key determinant in waterside-related issues in line with the principle of sustainability. It is now clear that revitalising waterside is a task not only for central government or local authorities, but also for all local partners, including private investors and local communities. Such an idea has stimulated the concept of a partnership approach in contemporary waterside revitalisation by recognising the need for integrated and holistic perspectives. However, it is recognised that there are operational difficulties in practice, partly because of traditional fragmentation and hierarchical approaches in environmental matters. It is important and timely to review the waterside partnership approach which encourages local populations to value their local waterside environments. By assessing a new generation of waterside partnership approach, the research aims to establish the best prospects of achieving good, long-term results in revitalising watersides.

Content of the Research

In terms of a wider definition of 'revitalisation', the research will provide a brief overview of waterside revitalisation in both environmental sustainability and economic development. It will include, in particular, river management experiences in the UK since the early 1970s which have been reformed from improving public sector services delivery to stimulating local community involvement .

It will also review the significance of, and barriers to community involvement in waterside-related issues. It is arguable that community-based actions (to 'do a few things well in a short period') will not be the best way to achieve waterside revitalisation, although there is increasing demand for community involvement in revitalising watersides.

Additionally, the research will identify nine principles that can be applied to make waterside healthier for environment, community, and economy: cleanliness, conservation, connectivity, accessibility, usability, diversity, affordability, attractiveness, and stewardship. These provide the basis for a more detailed evaluation of case study. The research will conclude with guidelines for good practice in facilitating community actions of revitalising watersides.

Case Study

As a case study, Mersey Basin Campaign has been chosen. The Campaign is a government sponsored 25 year partnership initiative to clean up the river, canals and estuary of the Mersey Basin and improve degraded land so that it is useful to the community. Formally launched by the Department of the Environment in 1985, the Campaign is one of the largest river basin projects in the world. Beyond the argument of the Campaign's ability in accomplishing actual projects, it has achieved remarkable success in mobilising community actions by changing people's view of their waterside environments.

The Campaign will be evaluated in terms of its formation, aims and objectives, organisation and operation, and scope of actions. The case study will indicate the Mersey Basin Campaign's approaches of leading local community actions to waterside revitalisation. It will also examine the potential and limitations of the Campaign's approach in relation to other organisations which are involved in river management of the Mersey Basin.

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