

Partnerships in Environmental Regeneration in North West England 1980 – 2010: a Practitioner Perspective

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Abstract

The authors of this paper have worked to establish and deliver a range of key environmental regeneration partnerships in the region over three decades including:

- Groundwork
- Mersey Basin Campaign
- Keep Britain Tidy
- Sustainability North West
- The Land Trust
- Community Technical Aid Centre
- National Centre for Business & Ecology
- Green Infrastructure Workstream, Natural Economy Northwest

In doing so, between them they have worked for and been on the boards of NGOs, partnership organisations, local authorities, the North West Regional Development Agency, Universities, Central Government departments and agencies and business.

The period under review was bookended by the Toxteth (and Moss Side) riots of 1981 with the appointment of Michael Heseltine as ‘Minister for Merseyside’ and the formation of the Coalition Government of the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats who immediately set about dismantling and starving of funds of the regional government infrastructure (NWDA, Government Offices), regeneration programmes (Single Regeneration Budget, Neighbourhood Renewal Partnerships), local authority resourcing for tackling poverty and disadvantage (in education (schools and Sure Start), community development, employment and housing to name just four) and support for NGOs in the region (Keep Britain Tidy, Groundwork, community forests). Furthermore the new Government deliberately suppressed the evidence base for all of this work by turning off existing Government websites and starting afresh under the guise of ‘efficiency savings’.

In this paper the authors will draw on their experience and learning derived from this period, with a particular focus on Groundwork and the Mersey Basin Campaign as case studies, but drawing on experience elsewhere where relevant.

Key factors affecting leadership, impact and sustainability will be considered on themes which will include:

- Origins and motivation for establishing new partnerships
- Financial and statutory power relationships within partnerships
- Timescales and sustainability
- Added value and challenges of inter-sectoral and inter-disciplinary partnership working
- Importance of individual leadership in institutional settings
- Value of inter-partnership and inter-disciplinary learning and of retaining and sharing evidence and experience of 'what works'
- Partnership achievements and added value

It will conclude with a brief discussion as to lessons learned by the authors and their applicability to the art and science of what was then called (sustainable) regeneration and is now called place leadership, with some pointers for the future.

Whilst wherever possible rooted in evidence, this paper is primarily a practitioner eye-witness account of a thirty year period in tackling the changing environmental challenges of the North West and of doing so in a variety of partnership settings.