

Book Review

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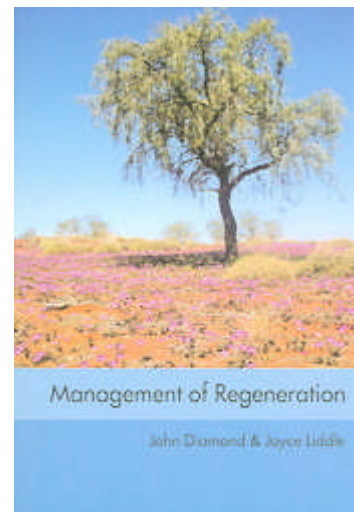
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Management of Regeneration: Choices, Challenges and Dilemmas

*By John Diamond and Joyce Liddle, Publisher: Routledge, Abingdon, UK
ISBN 0-415-33421-7 Price £21.99*



The principles of area-based, multi-agency regeneration in Britain can be traced back to the Urban Programme and Community Development Projects of the late 1960s. The key factors are: the identification of a geographical area which requires improvement (for example through the use of deprivation indicators compared to the norm); the formation of a partnership structure to devise a strategic plan following community consultation; a complex and generally short-term funding structure; implementation by some kind of public sector body, reporting to the partnership which will include representatives of local people; and a succession strategy.



Although there have been differences in emphasis under various governments, the general approach is now nearly forty years old. It is striking, therefore, that the occupation of regeneration manager is not widely recognised as a skilled managerial role.

Although many of those responsible for implementing regeneration programmes come from different backgrounds of skills and knowledge, by now they may well have worked on regeneration initiatives for many years. Recently, training courses in regeneration are beginning to be established, many at postgraduate level to take into account the previous experience and qualifications of regeneration managers.

These training courses need textbooks, and that is where *Management of Regeneration* seeks its market. The editors explain that those working in regeneration require 'a substantially new skills set and knowledge base' which includes both implementation and strategic skills, plus an approach to working with rather than for communities. Important factors include: good interpersonal and communications skills; proficiency in building up networks; and the ability to tolerate ambiguity and to work across flat managerial structures.

After setting out the context for regeneration and discussing in more detail the necessary skills and knowledge mix, five chapters deal with key regeneration concepts of: strategy; leadership and stakeholder engagement; partnership; capacity building; and governance, scrutiny and accountability. After a chapter about international dimensions to regeneration, conclusions are drawn. The structure sets out clearly the type of cross-cutting issues in which regeneration managers must become proficient.

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The most important strength of the book is that it encourages regeneration managers to reflect on practice, located within their own experience. This is particularly the case in the chapters on strategy and on capacity building. The former identifies the complex and highly political nature of regeneration strategy and the importance of putting an individual case into context – hence what works for one programme may not work for another. The authors state that ‘the emphasis on rational, linear and prescriptive approaches sits uncomfortably with the complex, cyclical and iterative worlds in which regeneration managers work alongside partners to achieve commonly agreed goals’ (p.51). The use of public sector management principles in the regeneration context are examined and their shortcomings discussed. This chapter provides the material for a more subtle approach to planning for regeneration strategy. The chapter on capacity building also asks important questions and makes the point that ‘capacity building’ is often limited to providing local people with the skills to engage with bureaucrats, rather than ensuring that state officials think about how they might be excluding community participants. Again this is a thought-provoking chapter that provides original material for practitioners.

However, some aspects of the book are disappointing. A major flaw is the referral to ‘the UK’ when it actually deals with England. The United Kingdom (UK) consists of England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Many English authors have difficulty distinguishing between the two, as well as failing to understand that the UK includes Northern Ireland and that (Great) Britain consists only of England, Scotland and Wales. All four jurisdictions have different histories of regeneration and most of the examples given in this book pertain to England only. Strangely, the book contains a description of the constitutional changes made by Labour after 1997, but does not mention that since 1999 regeneration is a devolved function to the Scottish Parliament, the Northern Ireland Assembly and to a lesser extent the Welsh Assembly Government. As Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland have had fewer targeted regeneration programmes than England, it would have been fine to state that examples come from England only (short of annoying the rest of us in the UK!) but to confuse these terms is becoming increasingly unacceptable.

A second point is that the context chapter does not provide a solid body of knowledge about the development of regeneration in England, nor does it point the student towards adequate further reading for this purpose. The chapter contains a useful analysis of why community involvement in regeneration has failed, but this should have been separated more clearly from a coherent chronological account. The table at the end of this chapter does not include recent initiatives such as the Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy, the New Deal for Communities and Sure Start, and should have been updated during the final editorial process.

A final frustrating aspect is the lack of guidelines to help those involved in regeneration programmes (in any capacity) to address the fundamental power imbalance between actors. There are two particularly striking cases: central government requirements which shape the local implementation of regeneration programmes (with the possible exception of new Deal for Communities) and the ongoing difficulties in involving communities in regeneration in any meaningful way. Regeneration managers can feel caught between these two aspects of their work and, in feeling powerless, can fail to appreciate the powerlessness of others. On several occasions, the work of writers on power, such as Bachrach and Lukes, is mentioned in passing. It would have been useful to include a chapter focused on power imbalances, structured around the theoretical approach of these two writers and others.

To summarise, this book is a useful contribution to thinking about regeneration for practitioners, which - commendably - goes beyond the remit of a conventional textbook by questioning the orthodoxies of the regeneration world. It would be most useful when complemented by other sources, more case studies, class discussion, and of course grounded in practitioners' own experience.