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Hitting the target but missing the point: The case of area-based regeneration

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Abstract

Area-based regeneration projects have captured the imagination of diverse assemblages of community actors, governmental interests, and commercial stakeholders around the world. Their appeal derives from claims that they are exemplary instruments for combating intertwined social, economic, and environmental issues in an integrated manner. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of such initiatives remains contentious and continues to provoke divergent views. In the midst of an era of fiscal austerity, demands for increasing "returns on investments" and maximizing "value for money" have risen to the forefront. This paper investigates an area-based regeneration initiative in Europe that has been lauded for successfully achieving its regeneration outputs. Yet the research examines whether hitting narrowly constructed (economic) targets may be missing the point of yielding holistic (community) outcomes. Of broader international and theoretical significance, the merits of output-driven regeneration strategies are questioned.

Key words: area-based regeneration, measuring success, New Public Management, outputs, targets

Introduction

Holistic urban regeneration strategies, especially area-based variants, are predominantly devised to grapple with entrenched and intertwined social, economic, and environmental issues (Dargan, 2009; McArdle, 2012; Tyler et al., 2013). Nevertheless, precise definitions

vary across countries, policy initiatives, organizations, and actors. Distinct regeneration endeavors have captured the imagination of diverse groupings of community actors, governmental interests, and commercial stakeholders; spawning a myriad of partnerships, governance networks, and institutional configurations around the world, not least in the United States (US) and Europe. Area-based strategies have appealed to community development activists, professional "regenerators", and public policymakers alike, in part as an antidote to area abandonment, socioeconomic deprivation, and urban decay. Thus, regeneration can be conceptualized as a social safety-net and springboard to prosperity (Havers, 2013; Pugalis & McGuinness, 2013). The regeneration process comprises a constellation of diverse objectives, principles, and ideological presuppositions; as a result, it can be argued that the course(s) of action and inaction that are taken are neither necessarily transparent nor objective, a point which accords with a post-positivist ontology. Under that view, the ultimate objective of a specific regeneration project is never pre-given, but is derived by a sociopolitical and negotiated course of activity.

Over several decades pressing calls have been made to assess the capacity of intervention strategies in addressing sociospatial polarization trends that are a defining feature of the modern metropolis (Dreier et al., 2013; Harvey, 1973). The complexity of regeneration endeavors has also raised concerns about existing modes of capturing outcomes (Tyler et al., 2013) and especially the limitations of narrow frameworks of targets (Lefebvre, 2003 [1970]; Punter, 2007), which appear to favor a rather limited menu of quantitative measures.

The ascendency of evidence-based policy during the 2000s (Kisby, 2011), coupled with more recent pressures on state finances and fiscal purging in the aftermath of the global financial crisis, have combined to demand enhanced returns on investments and value for money. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of area-based initiatives remains contentious and

continues to provoke divergent views (McArdle, 2012). This would suggest the value of utilizing different methodological techniques for evaluating and measuring project outcomes. It is against this background that Arbaci and Tapada-Berteli (2012) have argued the benefits arising from "reconsidering success." Using New Public Management (NPM) techniques and their influence on urban policy, the paper examines the application and merits of targetry frameworks that feature prominently in European community and economic development schemes.[1]

Shaped by epistemological concerns that stress the importance of spatial particularity, the case study is selected as a method to investigate European urban regeneration practice. The goal, therefore, is for research findings to convey empirical depth as opposed to empirical breadth. The Sunniside Area Regeneration Initiative in England, which has been lauded for successfully achieving its official outputs, is critically probed and the logic of decision-making is analyzed. Being of both theoretical and policy relevance, the case study is used to illuminate the potentially much broader pattern that regeneration programmes may be hitting their targets but often missing the point of improving social, economic, and environmental conditions in a manner sensitive to the particularities of place. Unpacking and scrutinizing the merits of an output-driven regeneration strategy, the research helps to expose the politics at play in setting such targets, challenging the objectiveness of "factual" targetry frameworks.

The remainder of the paper is divided into seven substantive parts. Part one critically reviews some of the major ideological predispositions informing contemporary area-based regeneration practice. This discussion provides the conceptual scaffolding for the empirical body of research. Sunniside, located in the English city of Sunderland, is contextualized in part two before summarizing the methodological approach in part three, followed by a brief exploration of the institutional jigsaw in part four. The setting of strategic objectives and

mechanisms for measuring success is then analyzed in part five and a broader critique of hard outputs ensues in part six. The final section concludes with a summary of the key research findings.

Area-based regeneration practice: ideological predispositions

Area-based regeneration initiatives are part of a broader suite of urban policies that are usually administered to help combat complex socioeconomic processes that produce specific spatial manifestations (Pugalis & McGuinness, 2013). It is such materializations that often give rise to spatial categorizations and stereotypes, such as skid row, the ghetto, or sink estate. Typically, area-based interventions are designed as a curative form of urbanism – over and beyond universal welfare policies – to help resuscitate these supposedly "lifeless" or degenerative places. Therefore, area-based schemes are initiated as a special form of intervention as they usually apply to a specific neighbourhood, district, or geographic setting.

Taking an area-based focus has been a favored form of intervention deployed by governments around the world seeking to revive "distressed" communities, "failing" local economies, and derelict urban "wastelands". Since the 1960s, United Kingdom (UK) governments, for example, have engineered numerous top-down area-based regeneration initiatives such as Urban Development Corporations (Punter, 2007). However, government-led urban renewal programmes have an even longer lineage, including slum clearance programmes, which were popular in both the US and UK from the 1930s. While securing public sector support (especially financial aid) is a core aspect of most regeneration ventures, not all are initiated by governmental actors. Some area-based strategies evolve in a more organic, bottom-up manner, and these cases tend to rely on the leadership, skills, and dedication of local stakeholders, including residents, business owners, and community development professionals. There are also area-based regeneration projects that fused some

top-down characteristics, such as public policy tools, with bottom-up dispositions, such as community leadership.

During the 1980s NPM principles started to gain popularity in capitalist political economies, such as the US and UK, as the economic bottom line rationale of corporate decision-making appealed to those championing the restructuring of the Keynesian welfare state (Hood, 1995; Pollitt et al., 2007). This ideology sought to bring the managerialist techniques of the corporate sector to bear on the bureaucratic tendencies of the public sector. Guided by the doctrine that managerialist techniques (e.g. use of targets) produce the most effective "results" helped to support the notion that professional cadres of "objective" managers were required. Consequently, a new managerialist discourse gained traction, under which evidence of "success" tended to equate to measurable outputs and deliverables, and which influenced the design and direction of urban regeneration programmes. It is NPM ideas that underpin the standards of evidence-based policy and decision-making.

During the 1990s, buoyed by a NPM dogma, the UK's Conservative Government introduced the competitive "challenge funding" approach, which included initiatives such as City Challenge and the Single Regeneration Budget. The guiding principle was that prospective recipients of regeneration resources would have to bid for national pots of funding, which was deemed to "drive up" standards and "reward success". This philosophical outlook drew on an ethos of competitiveness, under which competition is deemed to spawn innovation, creativity and entrepreneurialism. Different regeneration schemes around the country were therefore pitched against one another, challenged to compete for finite resources.

Between 1997 and 2010, successive Labour Governments moderated the use of challenge funds through the creation of some flagship needs-based programmes, such as New Deal for Communities (Dargan, 2009), although not to an extent that a requirement to

compete for public sector funds was completely reversed (Pugalis & McGuinness, 2013). Analysts observe that the process has been justified on the basis of "value for money" criteria (Dargan, 2009), which has continued under a Conservative-Liberal Democrats "Coalition" Government since 2010 (Pugalis & McGuinness, 2013) through the language of "competitive tension" (Pugalis & Bentley, 2013). Critics have argued that this system is tilted in favour of opportunity, rather than need (Brownill, 2007), but this has failed to affect the prevailing ideologies of "doing more with less" that permeate political discourse in an era of austerity.

A critical point to note is that it is those devising urban policies who set the parameters for action, influencing who should act, how success is to be defined, and how success is to be measured. Conceptualizing area-based regeneration as an activity involved in the much broader social practice of spatial reproduction draws attention to the complexity of the process. Indeed, the regeneration process cannot be simplified as a mechanistic logic of capitalism, but is an often dysfunctional course of social conflict, everyday relations and discursive struggles. Regeneration is a changeable, context-specific activity.

Consistent with the epistemological concerns informing the research documented in the present paper, Kisby (2011) argues for an incessant political debate of "facts", "evidence", "values", and "interpretations" that are the platform for often taken-for-granted ideological presuppositions. Foucault (1984) provides a much broader critique of disciplinary techniques of power. It is this post-positivist view that has provided the inspiration to examine the methodological distinction between the accuracy and precision of regeneration targetry frameworks. Although often used synonymously in professional discourse and everyday debates, their distinction produces important methodological implications. For example, accuracy may be achieved by a regeneration scheme that is deemed to have met its objective(s). However, a measurement, such as a specified regeneration target, can also be precisely met without accurately achieving its objective(s). This may occur repeatedly during

the regeneration process to the extent that a series of precise, yet inaccurate, measures hit their targets but miss the original point of pursuing a regeneration intervention.[2]

Despite the comprehensive nature of regeneration projects and the complexity of processes entailed, the capturing of regeneration outcomes can often be oversimplified as part of attempts to objectively assess what works and measure achievements – or at a minimum, to provide the impression that an objective assessment has taken place. Such tactics may be deployed to appease funders or gain popularity with the broader public. Conforming to a professional disciplinary framework that limits alternative objectives and activities (Foucault, 1984; Lefebvre, 2003 [1970]), independent consultants, advisors and professionals, for example, often present their objective findings in final texts, which remove any hint of contradiction or disagreement.

The limitations of conceptual tools, research methods or policy frames – all disciplining the investigative and deliberative space – are conveniently silenced to support the socially constructed problem and politically infused solution. Indeed, on some occasions independent consultants are appointed to rubber-stamp pre-conceived political and ideological objectives, to present the air of credibility and transparency that evidence-based policy-making demands. This line of thought allows some to argue that in recent times there has been "a focus on policies intended to persuade the local public, rather than represent it" (Lovering, 2011, p. 592). Hence, even area-based endeavors purporting to be "community-led" or "for the community" have been critiqued for marginalizing those interests that they are purporting to support (Dreier et al., 2013; Harvey, 1973). Henri Lefebvre, therefore, advocates the use of "radical critique" to reveal the ideological predispositions inherent in "objective" targets (Lefebvre, 2003 [1970], p. 67).

Sunniside: background and location

Sunderland, on the eastern coast, is the largest city in Britain between Edinburgh and Leeds, with a resident population exceeding 275,000. However, it remains peripheral, geographically and economically, and its population is gradually shrinking (Centre for Cities, 2013). Its origins can be traced to Anglo-Saxon times, but it was its coal exporting and shipbuilding exploits during the British Industrial Revolution that helped to produce a globally significant economic space.

Nevertheless, facing deindustrialization from the 1930s onwards, over recent decades Sunderland has more often than not been associated with malaise than it has with rejuvenation (Leunig & Swaffield, 2008; Pugalis, 2012). Consequently, Sunderland tends to benefit from most governmental-backed regeneration funding sources due to its fragile economy. The case of Sunniside, although historically distinct, is useful for research purposes, as its development trajectory shares similarities with other places around the world challenged by deindustrialization and global economic restructuring, such as the so-called Rustbelt of the American Midwest.

Sunniside is a dense urban quarter covering approximately 17 ha, immediately to the east of Sunderland's retail and commercial core. A century and a half ago, Sunniside was a thriving area, home to rich merchants who resided in grand townhouses. But during the latter decades of the 20th century it entered a period of sustained decline as local businesses moved away to alternative parts of the region and the built heritage fell into various states of disrepair. It subsequently acquired a reputation in the late 1990s as "a place in need of resuscitating," according to research participants (and supported by secondary sources). To recount the words of a Sunderland property consultant, the area was calling out for "a bit of pump-priming and a bit of external cash."

In the early 2000s, the area was represented by the policy community as "the forgotten merchant city of Sunderland". At a meeting in July 2001, and reflecting growing

concerns about the area and its "unfulfilled [economic] potential," the Sunniside Area Regeneration Strategy, prepared by consultants Urban Cultures and David Lock Associates (2001), was endorsed by Sunderland City Council's Cabinet. Providing a brand name, the Sunniside Area Regeneration Initiative (SARI), helped to demonstrate "official" conviction. In effect, the publication of the strategy established public sector aspirations, helping to generate urban policy momentum and some investor interest. The 2001 vision for Sunniside thus marks a crucial watershed in the area's restructuring. It made visible Sunniside's untapped potential and attempted to position it clearly on investors' maps. At the same time other physical, social, cultural, and symbolic aspects of Sunniside's social space were made invisible, especially the local population of hostel dwellers, and people whom some regenerators characterized as "winos" and "druggies" during the reimaging exercise. During the next decade, the regeneration vision for Sunniside evolved as projects began to be realized and targets were met.

Case study methods

Using Sunniside as an entry point in terms of urban politics, governance, and policy, this article draws on empirical research generated with people in the frontline of a neighbourhood undergoing revitalization, including residents, business owners, visitors, community representatives, politicians, and professionals. The latter included project managers, conservation officers, planners, surveyors, appraisal officers, designers, community development officers, and regeneration practitioners.

Reflecting dissatisfaction with the gathering momentum of orthodox policy analysis during the last 30 years, the study adopted an interpretive form of analysis grounded in local knowledge (Geertz, 1983). Applying interpretive policy analysis, the research methodology was but one of the many possible entrances to re-presenting the regeneration process from a

particular situated perspective. "Partial truths" are reformulated (Clifford, 1986) and interpreted from the "subject positions" of plural groups and individuals (Lyotard, 1984 [1979]) to re-present the urban restructuring of Sunniside to date. Moving away from research standards dominated by positivist values, such as the ideals of objectivity[3] and rationality, this research concentrates on post-positivist concerns, such as fragmentation. Nevertheless, subjectivity does not necessarily refute or imply that no patterns, trends or themes are able to emerge. Interpretations, therefore, remain tentative in recognition of a range of possible abstractions, meanings and representations.

The investigation of urban change was approached by viewing the urban landscape as the research laboratory, where one could gain a feel for the place over the course of several years. Nevertheless, what this did not adequately disclose were the deal-making procedures and incidences of power plays taking place behind the closed doors of committee rooms and others arenas of governance. Therefore, participant observations of policy spaces helped to grasp institutional inner workings and dealings; highlight how funding proposals were scripted and the predispositions framing such decisions; unearth the involvement, roles and responsibilities of different actors; observe with whom people speak and interact and with whom they do not; reveal the power relations at play and highlight the personalities involved; and unpack the struggles over the type and form of regeneration.

Adopting the snowball sampling procedure, which started with officers involved in the regeneration of Sunniside, prearranged interviews were conducted with regenerators (n = 75), lasting from approximately 40 minutes to over 2 hours. These had merit in accessing the partial stories of those primarily engaged in shaping urban space and those with self-interest in the regeneration of Sunniside. On-street interviews were also conducted (n = 165), which were deemed to be a useful means of uncovering local conceptualizations of the regeneration process. A key advantage of this method was the ability to elicit insights from local residents,

regular users/visitors (e.g. local employees), as well as less frequent visitors (e.g. tourists) and those that used spaces in the vicinity of Sunniside but rarely or never frequented Sunniside. These interviews were typically much shorter in duration than those that were prearranged, the reason why a much larger number of on-street interviews were conducted. It is too simplistic to identify the prearranged interviews with professionals and the on-street interviews with community interests. It is better to associate the former interviews as focused on those occupying positions of relative power, which included community representatives or politicians involved in the various decision-making processes, and the latter as those less involved in the governance of Sunniside.

A reflexive multi-method research approach was used to help counteract the method effect from using a single approach. It permitted the navigation of multidimensional accounts, while taking different bearings on the same phenomena. Yanow (2000) argued that such a strategy adds depth, richness, and complexity to research accounts. Even so, the research is by no means without limitations. There is no foolproof way of checking that interpretations are correct, hence the reason for an iterative process of reflexivity, critical questioning, and tackling issues from multiple perspectives.

This article analyses the diverse subject positions of plural groups and individuals to challenge the official regeneration outcomes. Thus, no singular "truth" is forthcoming: "Readers will have to discover their own path and truth inside the case" (Flyvbjerg, 2006, p. 238). The hope is that the empirically grounded analysis offers readers new perspectives on issues that are often taken for granted.

The institutional jigsaw

Sunniside Partnership (SP) was established in 2003 as a not-for-profit organization, trailing the launch of the SARI by two years. The partnership was originally expected to operate for a

time period of 15 years, but subsequently closed in December 2010. Though lacking executive powers, its founding partners were the Regional Development Agency (One North East), an Urban Regeneration Company (Sunderland ARC), and the municipal government (Sunderland City Council). Each of these core partners brought regenerative-related legislative instruments to bear, including compulsory purchase and planning powers, as well as financial and human capital. The primary funders were the Regional Development Agency, which received a budget from central government departments and was directly responsible to ministers.

The partnership was an example of those which the Regional Development Agency pursued during the mid-2000s as it sought to retreat from being an active delivery partner to a more strategic organization.[4] This corporate policy move also supported the views of individual actors. For example, the self-ascribed "key Agency contact" for the regeneration of Sunniside perceived himself as the "back seat developer and deliverer." Described by some actors as a more "neutral" vehicle, this position was favored by the Regional Development Agency, which – in line with the NPM doxy – perceived that a partnership would improve effectiveness. Projects were still delivered within an accountability framework, but without political oversight of day-to-day operations. In other words, the arrangement circumvented excessive public bureaucracy but retained control via performance management systems.

As an arms-length extended enterprise, SP operated as a one-stop-shop for regeneration within the area, reporting to a Partnership Board and collaborating within a structure of care with overlapping groupings of interest groups, such as developers. Spearheaded by the partnership's project director and a small team of officers, the governance structure overseeing Sunniside's regeneration strategy included an assemblage of loosely coupled, but interdependent, organizations involved in urban governance. This included public agencies, departments, and bodies with overlapping and sometimes

conflicting mandates, meshed with some apparent and less obvious private interests and, arguably, tokenistic community representatives. For example, the Sunniside Forum that was intended to provide a mechanism for engaging community interests only met annually and failed to develop beyond a consultative forum, which it can be said conforms with tokenistic forms of citizen participation (Arnstein, 1969). Interviews corroborated by participant observations suggested that despite some initial hope for an active community role, the demands placed on officers, which they referred to as "the day job" (i.e. delivering targets), took precedence. In contrast, the Partnership Board and Sunniside Working Group convened more frequently – usually monthly. The key social development organization at the time was the Back on the Map New Deal for Communities Partnership, but they reported feeling "disconnected" from the work of SP.

The design and core membership of SP can be understood as a means to control the transformation of Sunniside's urban landscape, controlling the opaque institutional spaces that each claimed a legitimate regeneration role and also the forms of regeneration to be realized.

Stakeholders and other societal actors viewed SP in divergent ways, from "a holistic undertaking" to "an arm of the Council." Less disputed was the partnership's raison-*d'etre* to move Sunniside to a position of economic vitality, from a grant-dependant area to one in which projects were market-driven:

> The Partnership's reason for being is to make Sunniside a place where the private sector has sufficient assistance and confidence to invest …. One of our main aims is to spend as little public money as possible and in return attract as much private sector investment. (Sunniside Partnership, 2005, p. 3)

According to the project director, the role of the partnership was "to plug the gaps, to undertake demonstration projects, provide financial assistance (until market conditions are more robust) to ensure that the private sector has the confidence to invest in Sunniside." In the words of a senior manager of Sunderland ARC, the partnership was about "creating the employment space to bring in that [economic] diversity in order to anchor Sunderland's economic prospects." Such senior figures also publicly referred to the instrumental role of the private sector, recognizing that the public sector could not act alone, yet the role of other publics, such as local inhabitants, were deafeningly silent through their absence. Indeed, on-street interviews revealed that a significant number of urban inhabitants felt that regeneration was for "others," such as tourists and property developers, rather than for them in a manner that would address their needs.

There was general agreement between interested parties that the partnership had been expected to reverse problems of economic decline, physical decay, and to a lesser degree social malaise. This can be termed the official regeneration rationale.

Setting strategies objectives and measuring "success"

Sunniside Partnership produced a 14-year Business Plan for the regeneration of the area in its first year of operation. An accompanying Delivery Plan for the period 2003/04 to 2008/09 was also developed, seeking to implement a range of projects to achieve six strategic objectives, summarized in Table 1. If all objectives were achieved, SP believed that they would have increased the density, usage and economic activity of Sunniside, and thereby delivered a "successful" mixed-use community.

Table 1. Sunniside strategic objectives.

Strategic Objective	Summary
Strategic Objective 1 – Diversification of land uses	The designation of the area as a mixed–use urban quarter, including residential, commercial, leisure, cultural, and retail uses creating 1,000 new homes and over 500 new jobs to the area
Strategic Objective 2 – Securing appropriate development	The creation of a vibrant area that supports a quality lifestyle attractive to inward investors, current and future businesses and residents
Strategic Objective 3 – Improving the public realm and the environment	Guiding and achieving high quality design and environmental improvements to improve security and safety, to maximise Sunniside's historic character and to create a unique, memorable, comfortable, high quality urban environment
Strategic Objective 4 – Improving access and car parking	Optimising access, ensuring public safety while balancing the needs of all road users and pedestrians
Strategic Objective 5 – Accelerating business development	The expansion of the existing business base to achieve an environment that can sustain a stable commercial economy
Strategic Objective 6 – Raising awareness and interest	A strong image as an integral part of promoting the area

Some public sector-led key projects included spatial quality interventions, including a property upgrade initiative, commercial property grant scheme, and the creation of a digital media and arts centre. In addition, the delivery of the River Quarter, a private sector-led mixed-use development project, was promoted as the regeneration of Sunniside being a definitive success (see Table 2). However, as noted earlier, success is a multidimensional concept. It is relative, subjective and depends on the problems that a project seeks to address. Indeed, problems, or more precisely the process of problematization, selectively identifies, crafts, and socially constructs issues. Thus, problems are discursive productions as much as empirical realities (Kisby, 2011).

Therefore, the ideological basis of indicators devised to measure the achievement of outcomes via recorded outputs is significant. This may help to explain why during the period that the regeneration of Sunniside was promoted as a success, the city of Sunderland's population continued to decline (by 3.2 per cent or 9,100 between 2001 and 2011) with little indication that there had been a substantial improvement in the socioeconomic conditions of Sunniside's (and its surroundings) indigenous communities.

Table 2. Major regeneration projects.

Major regeneration projects	Funding partners	Total capital cost
Mowbray Park and Winter Gardens and Museum	**Main funder:** Heritage Lottery **Others:** City Council, Northumbrian Water, Wolfson Foundation, Friends of Sunderland Museums	£13.3 million
Sunniside Commercial Property Grant Scheme	**Main funder:** Regional Development Agency **Others:** Tyne and Wear Sub-Regional Partnership	£2 million
Property conversations and redevelopments	**Main funders:** Regional Development Agency, English Partnerships **Others:** City Council, Tyne and Wear Sub-Regional Partnership, Sunderland Housing Group/Gentoo, private sector partners	£15 million plus
The River Quarter	**Main funder:** Helios Properties **Others:** Emperor Property Management, City Council, Regional Development Agency	£6 million £8 million
Sunniside Gardens	**Main funder:** Regional Development Agency **Others:** English Partnerships	£2.2 million
Manor Hotel/ West Sunniside: the Place	**Main funder:** Regional Development Agency **Others:** Tyne and Wear Sub-Regional Partnership, City Council, European Regional Development Fund, Heritage Lottery Fund	£6 million
Public realm improvement works	**Main funder:** Regional Development Agency **Others:** Tyne and Wear Sub-Regional Partnership, City Council	£2.2 million

According to Lefebvre (2003 [1970]), setting (growth) targets in the form of strategic objectives only serves to construe development means as ends in themselves. Exposing some of the "myths and realities of regeneration," Glynn argues that "[s]uccess is measured in the opportunities created for private developers to reap large profits" (2006, p. 4). In accordance with such a perspective, it is argued that the success of the SARI, and through association, the partnership, was ultimately determined in the eyes of the state by how much private sector

investment was leveraged and the number of businesses enticed to the area (see Sunniside Partnership, 2004). This is clearly evident in "the partnership's raison-*d'etre*" analyzed above.

A dominant economic logic is explicit in the East Sunniside Masterplan project application, which received substantial public sector funding from the Regional Development Agency. It states that "[t]he critical success factor is to ensure a momentum of private sector investment is maintained" and "[t]he long term benefits … will be measurable from the successful regeneration of the Sunniside area and the attraction of firms and developers into the area by upgrading the urban landscape" (Sunderland ARC, 2007, p. 13 & 24). In a policy terrain that conceives of regeneration as a means of delivering economic growth beyond all else (Pugalis & McGuinness, 2013), Sunniside's approach to regeneration should not be a great surprise.

Output narratives are prevalent in regeneration discourse where places – and consequently place-based projects – are framed as directly competing in spatial contests for finite inputs including consumers. Regeneration schemes are also positioned to compete for finite public sector resources, as highlighted above in relation to the prevalence of challenge funds since the 1990s. Table 3, below, describes the key output targets set for the SARI over its 14-year business planning period and the proportion of these targets achieved after year 4.

Table 3. SARI's initial anticipated outputs and achieved targets.

Indicator	14-yr target	Year 3 2005/6 (outputs)	Year 4 2006/7 (outputs)	Total	Achieved target by year 4
Private sector investment £m	100	23.4	30.38	53.78	54%
Public sector investment £m	20	1.2	4.4	7.51	38%
Total public and private sector investment £m	130	24.6	34.78	61.35	47%
New jobs created	500	200	39	39	48%
Brownfield land redeveloped (acres)	7	1.20	1.22	2.42	35%
New residential dwellings	900	77	140	217	24%

Indicator	14-yr target	Year 3 2005/6 (outputs)	Year 4 2006/7 (outputs)	Total	Achieved target by year 4
New/improved commercial space (sq. m.)	5,000	3,732	694	4,246	85%
New/improved retail space	na	na	214	214	na
New/improved leisure space	na	2,757	5.074	7,831	na
Total floo rspace additions	na	6,489	5.982	12,471	na
Construction jobs	700	50	58	108	15%

Source: Sunniside Annual Review 06-07

Notice that private sector investment occupies the first row of SP's expected outputs table, demonstrating the importance in which it was held by the partners of Sunniside. Indeed, the Regional Development Agency's capital investment criteria also stressed the significance of private sector "leverage." The indicator with potentially the most direct benefit for local inhabitants – construction jobs (occupying the bottom row) – arguably "makes the list because they are easy enough to record, but what we're really bothered about is private investment and businesses attracted to the area." (Development Agency Advisor, personal communication, 29 October 2007).

Moreover, the level of public sector investment was considered an output in itself (see above critique by Lefebvre, 2003 [1970]). Again, this is due to national and European funding bodies who seek public sector match funding when committing to invest in a project. Thus, in some circumstances securing funding for regeneration is viewed by some professionals as the "main prize" – how such funds are dispersed and utilized can often be a secondary concern.

Hard targets, the hierarchy of outputs and negotiations

Evaluating the outcomes of regeneration in the Bay area of Cardiff, Punter (2007) found that hard targetry outputs sideline design ambitions and qualitative attributes (see the earlier methodological distinction between accuracy and precision). Some members of Sunniside's

institutional jigsaw drew attention to the "over-emphasis on the physical and the harder aspects of the economic," with one community regeneration manager "plead[ing] a case that there's more thought given to the social."

Other research participants were also critical of such "short-sightedness," but drew attention to the difficulties of utilizing alternative targets and measurement procedures. Such situated perspectives help to highlight how the "softer" side of regeneration tends to be displaced by "harder" outputs (Lefebvre, 2003 [1970]). Hence, things that can be counted (the quantifiable) tend to count most in measuring project success. This explains why some of Sunniside's six strategic objectives do not attempt to devise a single output target to help monitor and measure whether these objectives are being achieved (see Table 1 and 2).

More positively, such criticisms prompted the Regional Development Agency to introduce a design checklist, with which all capital projects seeking funding support were expected to comply. But even so, a member of the senior management team who was responsible for "policing" the design checklist and agreeing projects "in principle" openly declared (during a meeting between regeneration officers) that "so long as we are happy with the overall economic impact and can establish the links between the strategic narrative and project-level outputs" securing funding "will not be a problem." This would imply that there is an unwritten hierarchy of outputs, whereby economic indicators of success reign supreme. The importance of economic facets to the regeneration of Sunniside (see Strategic Objective 5, Table 1), and regeneration schemes more broadly, is indisputable, but the partners of Sunniside devised five other strategic objectives, which related to social and environmental components of regeneration consistent with holistic notions of regeneration.

What is also interesting about the official output targets which the SARI, and therefore the partnership, was charged with delivering, was not only the heightened presence of hard outputs such as leverage, but also the absence of softer measures. In recalling the six

strategic objectives for the regeneration of Sunniside, shown in Table 1, what becomes apparent is a gap in the logic chain between achieving these and delivering the quantitative outputs shown in Table 3. One would assume that the six strategic objectives guided the overall regeneration of Sunniside. If this is so, then one would have expected the hard outputs to flow from each of the strategic objectives, but this was obviously not the case. Examining strategic objective 3, "enhancing the public realm," as an example, it is worrying to see that none of the expected outputs was aligned with addressing this objective.

Consistent with a NPM ethos, a target could have been constructed relating to the physical area of public realm enhanced (e.g. sq. m. of pavement improved or quantity of new street furniture). Alternatively, both positivist and post-positivist ex-ante and ex-post studies may have helped to demonstrate the extent to which this strategic objective had been achieved. This could have involved visual surveys as well as surveying user perceptions. Appreciative forms of enquiry may also help some community groups make visible what is valued or considered to work well, rather than other diagnostic tools that are more inclined to make visible the perceived problems. Measures of success need not be limited to a narrow range of quantifiable metrics (although these remain the favored tools of governmental and non-governmental funders). Several alternatives exist.[5]

During interviews with regenerators, discussions focused on capturing qualitative shifts in Sunniside's purported regeneration. Some actors were puzzled when asked how the creation of "a unique, memorable, comfortable, high quality environment" (Strategic Objective 3) would be recorded, monitored, and analyzed. Others responded that "so long as the main outputs are being achieved [and in many cases exceeded] there's not an issue" (Development Agency Surveyor, personal communication, 11 September 2007).

As Table 3 demonstrates, SP may well have been exceptional in hitting their output targets, but in doing so, did the partners of Sunniside miss the point?[6] If one agrees that the

outputs are an unsuitable proxy measure for the strategic objectives, then one must seriously question whether it was the latter guiding the former, as the official regeneration narrative would have one believe. If it was the reverse logic where selective outputs guided the more embracing strategic objectives, then there is a danger that such narrowly conceived outputs directed attention towards select issues (e.g. exchange value) at the expense of others (e.g. use value) (Lefebvre, 2003 [1970]; Molotch, 1976).

The argument, therefore, is not that regenerators may be intentionally subverting holistic regeneration visions and strategic objectives, but rather, that a limited range of output targets undermines attempts to work towards delivering anything that is not being officially measured, monitored, and assessed. In the case of Sunniside, many regenerators were well aware of the principles of holistic forms of regeneration and some actors passionately conveyed this. However, working under the constraints of time, finances, and other resources, coupled with management systems, reporting frameworks, and accountability processes, such principles and passion were undermined by the procedural factors of regeneration. In a more recent UK government development example, the national regeneration framework was deemed bureaucratic, and has since been replaced by a much more streamlined toolkit intended to support community-led regeneration (see Pugalis & McGuinness, 2013).

Table 4. SARI investment profile.

	2003/04	2004/05	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009+	Total
Private Investment	£15.1m	£21.4m	£8.0m	£9.0m	£11.0m	£41.0m	£111.0m
Public Investment	£2.0m	£4.0m	£3.0m	£2.0m	£2.0m	£11.5m	£24.5m
Total	£17.1m	£25.4m	£11.0m	£11.0m	£13.0m	£52.5m	£135.5m

Source: Sunniside Partnership (2006).

Over SARI's originally envisaged lifetime, public sector investment was expected to reach nearly £25m (£5m more than originally programmed), and in turn this was expected to

"lever in" a minimum of £100m of private investment (see Table 4).[7] The target set for the scale of private sector investment to be leveraged was increased to £111m in 2003, and then raised again in 2004/05 to £120m, although in 2008/09 it was then renegotiated and lowered in light of the credit crunch having a severe impact on the construction industry. However, an analysis shows that even the revised lower target was set with significant headroom. Factoring in a safety zone is common practice between funding bodies, such as Regional Development Agencies and delivery partners. This is where "consultants are worth their weight in gold," revealed one regeneration practitioner, whilst he recounted that he had "done the Agency out of a stack of outputs," which is consistent with the view that some "objective" projections are used to legitimize policy actions that are far-removed from everyday market and social conditions (Punter, 2007).

Participant observation supported by interviews helped to clarify that an extended "negotiation process" usually took place between the funding partner (e.g. Regional Development Agency) and the delivery partner (e.g. SP). It is unclear what role, if any, community interests and representatives performed in this process. However, based on the accounts of research participants and the Sunniside Forum, it could be inferred that their input was rather limited. During the negotiation process hard outputs were anxiously negotiated as softer outcomes generally were agreed in a less problematic fashion. This is because the targetry framework – which the Agency's performance was primarily judged against – exclusively focused on hard output measures. Softer outcomes are often "added to the melting pot … to 'pad out' the speculative benefits and appease other interest [groups]" (Development Agency Property Advisor, personal communication, 27 September 2007). This was primarily the only discursive space where community groups were permitted to influence the nature of outcomes. It amounted to little more than a technique of community persuasion (Lovering, 2011).

Interviews with SP officers – prior to the credit crunch – revealed a supreme confidence that they would not only exceed the 14-year targets set but "completely smash them," in the words of the project director. Another officer claimed that the partnership was likely to "double the outputs," but countered that targets "hadn't been officially adjusted as nobody wants to come unstuck." Such claims directly undermine NPM discourse that often claims to negotiate "stretching targets." Table 3 appears to justify officer confidence of exceeding targets, with over 50 percent of the initial private sector gearing ratio target being achieved by year 4. But does this directly infer that the SARI was making a substantial positive difference to the many businesses, inhabitants and users of Sunniside and the wider area? Do these outputs reveal anything about the success of SARI, or do they reveal more about the actors that negotiated these outputs? Little public attention was paid to the type and nature of many of these outputs (but may have been a conscious act by those negotiating targets); especially lacking was broad public debate.

Although strategic outcomes, output targets, and financial accounts were all transparent and publicly available, active and diverse community input was largely absent; the institutional jigsaw governing the regeneration of Sunniside involved some elite business actors and property interests but engaged with few residents. There were some forms of community resistance, for example from the displaced businesses and hostel dwellers, which were each deemed "unsightly," but this had little effect on shaping the official regeneration rationale. Hence, no relocation strategy was ever devised for these groups of Sunniside's community. This raises further questions about "regeneration for whom?" and the roles performed by targetry frameworks in this process.

It is the qualitative dimensions that are arguably crucial (Lefebvre, 2003 [1970]), because indices, datasets, and outputs can only go so far in helping one understand the social production of space. James Jones argues that professional experts use "mechanical language,"

whereby "milestones and outcomes are the impersonal results of the process of change." (2009, p. 283-284) Consequently, the "regeneration speak" of "quick wins", supported by a phraseology of "triggers, levers, buttons, targets and switches," loses sight of social justice ideals as the doxy of NPM takes hold: "The qualitative is worn down. Anything that cannot be quantified is eliminated. The generalized terrorism of the quantifiable accentuates the efficiency of repressive space, amplifies it without fear and without reproach, all the more so because of its self-justifying nature (ideo-logic), its apparent scientificity" (Lefebvre, 2003 [1970], p. 185).

Several findings of broader significance can be derived from the case of Sunniside. First, the official sanctioning or recognition of a regeneration project can help to galvanize broad stakeholder support, generate increased awareness and help maximize positive development impacts. It tends to set the course of future action. Nevertheless, the officialization of regeneration endeavors should not necessarily be automatically accepted as a good thing that can be left to the powerbrokers and professionals.

Second, the mere launch of a partnership structure does not always result in more enhanced community empowerment. Some partnerships are tasked with delivering the regeneration of a specific area in a manner that may not reflect and represent the wishes of place-based communities. Sadly, this remains a recurring criticism of area-based regeneration schemes.

Third, hard targets are likely to remain important in assessing the performance and overall "success" of area-based regeneration initiatives, and other forms of community development. They are often used in headline-grabbing success stories and lobbying campaigns. Yet, this research has revealed the limitations of a narrow range of outputs overriding strategic objectives: the tail should not be left to wag the dog.

Fourth, in recognition of the hegemonic target-based culture, the absence of particular targets, such as those relating to social or environmental goals, may warrant closer community scrutiny and, potentially, challenge. After all, absent targets can result in absent debate. Community visioning processes and engagement activities, therefore, appear crucial. Nevertheless, these alone are likely to be insufficient, especially if they do not influence the adoption of socio-environmental output targets or more radically lead to alternative forms of measuring "success."

Fifth, local development groups, individual community actors and activists face a continual struggle to centrally position the importance of local knowledge (and especially community insights) in a professionalized arena that remains dominated by supposedly objective new managerialist predispositions. This draws attention to the temporal aspects of regeneration and the requirement to refine or revise objectives and measurement systems as the need arises. Therefore, local knowledges could be utilized to help to monitor regeneration schemes, which are a significant departure from those projects that consider it necessary to consult communities only at the start of the process, typically involving periodic update activities.

Sixth, it is important that official outputs that perform the function of indicators of success are stretching so that public values are maximized rather than private profits. This principle would appear to be a prerequisite of all funding agencies in an era of fiscal austerity. If Sunniside had followed some of these principles, then its regeneration might have stood a better chance of being considered a success from a public and private sector and community perspective. The concern of this study has not been to examine whether the regeneration of Sunniside succeeded or failed, but how, under the guise of transparency, target-setting that focuses exclusively on output indicators can subvert holistic regeneration

objectives. Thus, the paper has sought to demonstrate how this neglected aspect of regeneration performs a decisive role in shaping the eventual outcomes.

Conclusion

Regeneration is not necessarily a "good thing," an a priori positive, although it can often appear that "everybody is a winner," based on a superficial assessment of strategic objectives, visions and official regeneration strategies. In response, Lefebvre calls for "radical critique," based on an understanding that "there is always some distance between elaboration and execution" (Lefebvre, 2003 [1970], p. 136).

Using a single case study as the urban laboratory to investigate the case of the "successful" Sunniside Area Regeneration Initiative, this paper has critically analyzed whether a regeneration scheme hitting all the official targets necessarily equates to hitting the point of regeneration. Through a critique of narrowly constructed (economic) targets and of NPM principles more broadly understood, the paper has utilized empirical research material to demonstrate that in the case of Sunniside the point of yielding broader (community) outcomes had been missed. Accepting that SARI was a good thing sought at the outset to limit a deeper debate of what the actual point of the regeneration scheme was. Therefore, the case study has revealed the distance between strategic objectives and the execution validated by a limited repertoire of hard outputs. By failing to put in place an adequate baseline position – including qualitative as well as quantitative measures – SP has perhaps protected itself from criticism. Achieving targets and surpassing official expectations recorded via a narrow range of hard outputs helped to secure political acceptability and normalize new managerialist ideological predispositions. This is not too dissimilar to thousands of other regeneration scenarios around the world, which have neglected to devise a locally responsive methodology that shapes future interventions and maximizes social outcomes. It also serves

as a caution against the effectiveness of output-driven regeneration strategies. Indeed, such an approach can significantly influence the design and direction of urban regeneration programmes, although this may not always be immediately apparent.

The main findings of the study support the argument that new managerialist targetry frameworks effectively work to make visible the economic success stories that are scripted to endorse regeneration schemes, whilst simultaneously working to make less visible (or even render invisible) the failure to strengthen community capacities. It is this form of hegemonic practice that conflates development means or targets, such as private sector investment, as the end point of regeneration in themselves. Challenging dominant regeneration discourses may help to activate debates involving both the espoused recipients of regeneration as well as the managerialist regenerators to consider questions, such as regeneration by whom and for whom?

Throughout this paper it has been contended that a greater onus should be placed on deliberating the point of regeneration, perhaps in advance of attempting to devise innovative methods for measuring community. There remains a critical need to challenge taken-for-granted facts and destabilize ideological presuppositions, after all success remains a relational and evolving multidimensional concept. A pragmatic start may be for community groups to perform a lead role in the regeneration diagnostic process and the construction of measures of success.

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[1] "Targetry frameworks" utilise quantitative and sometimes qualitative targets to guide the development of regeneration projects. They help to frame regeneration projects and play a decisive role in justifying whether a particular scheme has been successful or not.

[2] The author is grateful for the comments provided by one of the referees for helping to refine and clarify the scientific distinction between the "accuracy" and "precision" of regeneration targetry frameworks.

[3] Objectivity, for example, is conceptually impossible from an interpretive perspective: one cannot remain detached from the subject of study (Yanow, 2000).

[4] This trend can be linked with wider decentralisation efforts in the pursuit of greater economic and social development and also the management through targets ethos associated with NPM doctrines.

[5] Firstly "narratives of change" can be utilized to draw attention to diverse stakeholder accounts recorded at different phases of the regeneration process. These may help to generate multi-user perspectives that are temporally rich, which could help to reveal just as much about the regeneration process as they may about the outcomes achieved. Secondly there are numerous participatory appraisal methods that can generate a cycle of learning, reflection and empowerment. Thirdly "live" measures of success could be utilized. These could take on a more organic and dynamic form, which could adapt to changing circumstances, sensibilities and values.

[6] In operational terms, the "point" in the case of Sunniside is achieving the six strategic objectives set out in Table 3. More broadly and of greater general applicability, the "point" of regeneration is to improve intertwined social, environmental and economic conditions in an integrated and sustainable manner.

[7] Not originally considered a "priority project" by Sunderland ARC, by the end of 2010 Sunniside stood as the ARC's largest project in terms of public sector investment, despite its limited contribution to their targets: anticipated to generate only 500 "new" jobs from an ARC target of almost 12,000.