

Evaluating Collaborative Strategy for Local Partnerships in Urban Regeneration in England

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Abstract

The main argument in this paper is that collaboration as a means of involving different agencies into a common purpose can be the main ‘*ingredient*’ for the formation of a framework of a strategy, the so-called ‘*collaborative strategy*’. The utility of such a framework is given through the action of Citywide and Local Strategic Partnerships, which are the recent formations of partnership arrangements within the local government context. In particular, the applicability of the framework is examined in the context of urban regeneration based on policy initiatives that have been introduced over the last years. The paper also introduces a type of evaluation of collaborative strategy that is based upon specific aspects of partnership action. Despite its lack of empirical evidence it could be argued that the paper sets the scene for a framework that would be the base for partnership functioning. In this respect the testing of its applicability becomes apparent either in relation to potential fruitful policy outcomes or from the point of view that recognises significant dysfunctional elements at the operational and implementation level.

Introduction

The debate on partnerships does in principle sit easily within the network context. Networks reflect the diversity and pluralism of modern society. In this respect partnership working with its implicit rhetoric of trust is said to be what has been called self-organising, inter-organisational networks (Rhodes, 1997). In this context collaboration as a means of ‘*a very positive form of working in association with others*’ (Huxham, 1996a: 7) can perhaps offer the vehicle appropriate for a fruitful partnership functioning. In the light of this collaboration is seen as an important activity in which different agencies are becoming increasingly involved although often struggle with (Huxham, 1996a). The purpose of this paper is to suggest a framework of collaborative strategy for local partnerships as a means of a *modus operandi* that can express the different attitudes and cultures appearing within the partnership context. It argues that partnerships are types of collaborative groups that can operate according to the elements of this framework no matter how successful they could be. In addition, it suggests that the action of local partnerships can be evaluated based on the aspects of this framework as it considers partnerships as ‘*live*’ organisations which always evolve during their life circle.

Conceptualising Collaborative Strategy in the Partnership Context

Collaboration and Partnership: Comparisons on Their Meaning

Rather like many similar terms there is no agreement around the definition of the terms ‘*collaboration*’ and ‘*partnership*’. According to Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary collaboration constitutes ‘*the act of working with another person or group of people to create or produce something*’ (Hornby, 2000: 231). In comparison partnership is concerned with ‘*the state of being a partner in business*’ or ‘*a relationship between two people, organisations, etc*’ (2000: 923). As it can be understood collaboration refers to the quality of the action of collaboration in order to get an outcome of potentially a fruitful nature, whereas partnership refers to actual type and organisational structure of the two or more groups coming together with the desire to collaborate. In attempting to define quality in the action of collaboration we rely on the distinction between classical and romantic approaches to quality. Pirsig (1974; cited by McAuley, 2001) argues that according to the classical approach quality is preoccupied with rationality, order, stability, accountability and system. In this light quality is defined by adherence to procedures and quantification. On the other hand, according to romantic approach quality is underpinned by attributes that are idiosyncratic, imaginative, original and personal emphasising on the process rather than the procedures. In this way

quality is about trusting the ability to make a qualitative judgement on matters. However, according to Pirsig, the division between the two approaches on quality are not absolute as form and pattern are important for both of them. The approach on quality that this paper follows is the romantic one. The reason for following this approach relies on its flexible character. This character applies to the type of organisation collaborative groups normally have. In addition, quality within romantic approach is '*a dynamic concept, changing over time and according to the various perspectives of the various participants in the process*' (Kemshall, 1996; cited by McAuley, 2001).

Moreover, both terms, (Glendinning, 2002), are implicitly infused with overtones of moral values, especially when compared with the marketing relationships which characterised governmental policies in recent years. In addition, Huxham emphasises on the role of '*morality*' and '*gentleness*', amongst others, as a means of a necessity that appears when collaborative groups come and start functioning together (1996b). The issue of morality can perhaps be of great importance throughout the whole cycle of existence of collaboration in a partnership or other type of collaborative schemes. This importance applies not only to the initial stage of partner selection but it goes as far as the delivery of strategies or even the end of life of the collaborative scheme with trust and probity to be the important '*ingredients*' that contribute to the establishment of fruitful collaboration.

However, according to Huxham (2000; cited by Glendinning, 2002) there is a wide range of terms used to describe cross-organisational and cross-sectoral working including alliance, collaboration, cooperation, networking, and joint working. In this respect there exists inconsistency between these terms used and the range of activities they encompass. Therefore, '*partnership*' or '*collaboration*' may both refer to a range of joint activities from simply exchanging information to integration of functions which involve a certain degree of trust.

Collaborative Strategy for Partnerships

After defining partnerships and collaboration it becomes apparent to also define collaborative strategy. The development of a strategic modus operandi for collaborative groups is a challenge because of its very difficult nature as an issue related to many organisations and individuals. However (Huxham, 1991) people see strategy as a good thing and something to be involved in although they cannot find enough time to spend on it. Mintzberg (2000) defines strategy as a plan, a direction or a course of action into the future. Moreover, he identifies it as a pattern that is consistency in behaviour overtime. As such then, the obvious solution would be to involve only organisations with a strategic orientation. But sometimes organisations concerned with the short term are needed to help with the organisations of the

strategy developed. This is often the case between the members of a collaborative scheme such as a partnership.

A strategy with effect to the action of collaborating groups is about to whether and how collaborative advantage can be best achieved. The meaning of collaborative advantage is not identified in this paper because of its complicated but so fascinating nature that would lead to the need of writing a particular paper on this notion. Simply, this paper identifies collaborative advantage as the means of an additional outcome that comes up as a consequence of collaboration that would not otherwise exist. This leads to a form of strategy that comes because of collaboration. Huxham and Macdonald refer to a form of meta-strategy as the type of strategy formulated after or about the formation of a collaborative. In this light, meta-strategy is a statement of strategy for the collaboration, consisting of meta-mission and meta-objectives (1992). The form of strategy suggested in the context of this paper refers not only to the first steps of collaboration i.e. selection of members and mission of the collaborative. It also refers to the stages of actual action of the collaborative scheme, the organisational operation and plan delivery of a collaborative. Because it constitutes a strategic framework for collaboration and its main theoretical dimension is about how to use collaborative advantage for the needs of the collaborative actors it is called framework of *collaborative strategy*.

In this light, the construction of the framework of collaborative strategy for partnership work is not an easy task considering the multi-organisational character of the collaborative groups and the multi-dimensional nature of the issues involved. Regarding this complication it could be argued that a '*holistic*' way of looking at these issues can perhaps offer a manner of sufficient functioning. Wilkinson and Appelbee argue that the holistic way of thinking and acting focuses on the '*middle ground*' – the gap between '*bottom-up*' and '*top-down*' and the horizontal divisions between communities and between agencies. The purpose is to put attention and resourcing into the gap and spaces between people in local communities, between local communities and neighbourhoods, between the local agencies enabling them to become better partners with citizens and local communities (1999). In addition, Perri 6 *et al* (1999) referring to governing in a holistic way argue that this is a distinctive agenda breaking out across the developed world, which can only be integrated with the participation of all the actors under consideration. The aspects of a collaborative strategy for partnership functioning suggested can be seen at Box 1.

Aspects	Added Value of Collaboration	Indicators in the Partnership Context
<i>Selection of Members</i>	The importance of collaborating expressed in patterns of involvement, trust, commitment (Collaborating action as an expression of purpose)	Strategy overcoming the differences in culture and approach and building trust and probity – Building the capacity of partners to operate effectively as one organisation
<i>Vision of Collaborative Groups</i>	Integration of the collaborative groups into the whole under a shared vision and integration of the whole with the broader environment (Collaborative action as an institutional framework)	Strategic vision that reflects the participation and expectations of all members through a process of dialogue and discussion – Establishing the common ground and work towards agreeing a vision and mission statement
<i>Organisational Operation of Collaborative Groups</i>	The ability of the collaborative groups to acting responsibly towards and within a collaborative relationship (Collaborating action as a model of conduct)	Strategy is realised as a plan in which the partners set specific goals, targets and objectives linked into the agenda of action – Creation of an organisational structure that could fit into the agenda of action
<i>Plan Delivery of Collaborative Groups</i>	The ability of the collaborative groups to acquire and organise resources to deliver activity against purpose	Implementation of the strategic plan with respect to the involvement of all partners into policy making ensuring the continuing accountability of the partnership – Adaptation to need

	or task (Collaborative action as capacity)	demands
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Box 1: The Assets of Collaborative Strategy in the Partnership Context

The framework identifies the strategic dimensions in relation to four aspects of function of a collaborative scheme. In the light of this the framework expresses all the strategic steps a collaborative scheme such as a partnership may follow in gaining potential successful action and outcomes. However, by indicating the potentially false steps of a collaborative scheme the framework attempts to guarantee the balance between a successful and a non-successful way of collaboration compatible with what may happen in real terms. Considering the application of the framework of collaborative strategy it could be argued that this is not something without serious difficulties. This is because a framework as such cannot be applicable in every partnership case. Every partnership creates its own character and culture thus different attitudes are apparent in comparison with other partnerships. In addition, difficulties can appear in every of the aspects suggested.

As it is defined in Box 1 the assets of collaborative strategy in the partnership context start with the overcoming of difficulties and creation of an atmosphere of trust and probity. According to Wilson and Charlton initially the links between the agencies involved in a partnership tend to be tentative because in many cases the individuals and organisations that come together have never met each other before (1997). This becomes more important considering the recent increasing participation of the community and voluntary sectors. With regard to criteria, which can apply towards the selection of partners, there are no universal rules on this matter. Perhaps the only criterion on this occasion can be the potential fulfilment of partnership aims (Wilson and Charlton, 1997). Trust and probity are two important parts for the development of this aspect of collaborative strategy. This is because although joint working is possible with little trust and probity between those involved, the development and maintenance of the two is basis for the closest and most enduring collaboration. At whatever stage and level of collaboration the more trust and probity, the better will be the chances for a successful partnership. Typical questions on clarity of purpose and objectives, power differences, effective leadership and so on have their common point on the building of trust and probity between the partnership members.

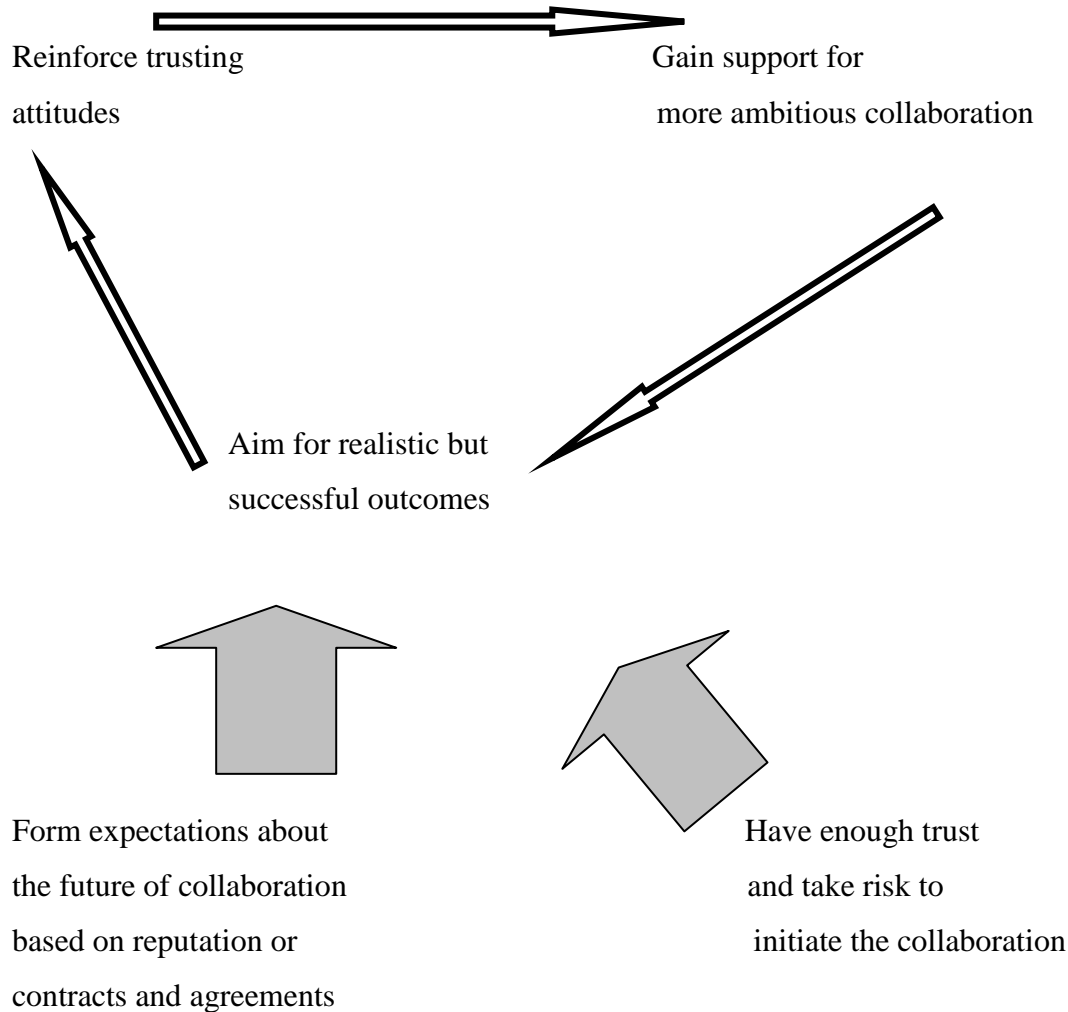


Figure 1: The trust-building loop

Source: Adapted from Huxham and Vagen (2000: 300)

As Huxham and Vagen (2000) argue sometimes the pragmatic solution is to move on without dealing with all issues about trust and probity. This perhaps means to aim for more modest achievable outcomes in the first place, becoming more ambitious if success in organisational structure and plan delivery comes along. The process is captured in Figure 1 taking into account that this small approach may be under change considering the pressure by external funding bodies for demonstrable outcomes. With respect to the organisational structure and plan delivery managing a partnership can be of great importance. Rather than pursuing, (Charlesworth et al, 1996), this Holy Grail of management by examining tasks, functions or techniques it seems more important to examine its social character in organisational ideology as a nexus of social and operational power. In this light, managing

organisations such as partnerships takes the form of not using any specific technique or technology of organisational control.

Furthermore, according to Hendry (2000), the most significant implication of conceptualising strategic decision making in cases which are likely to occur in collaboration environment e.g. in a partnership is that it allows for a sense of decision making in parallel. Consequently, decision making can address a wide range of issues that effectively escape narrow, partial perspectives.

Explaining Citywide and Local Strategic Partnerships in Urban Regeneration

From Local Economic Development to Urban Regeneration

Before attempting to explain about the formation of collaborative strategy for the work of partnerships at the local level a brief reference to the policy initiatives context that have emerged in the recent years is being given. The focus on policy initiatives implemented in the last five years does not restrict and undermine the existence of important partnership arrangements since even the 1970s and most importantly the early 1990s. It was then when the first ‘*umbrella*’, community-focus partnerships appear concentrating on local economic development such as the City Challenge initiative initiated by the Conservative government in 1994. When the Labour party came into office in 1997 they had already in mind to launch a rather ambitious programme for ‘*modernising local government*’. Partnerships have taken a very important part in this programme.

The government announced its intention to move from the contract culture, they argue there was explicit in conservative policies, to a partnership culture. For example, a national compact was agreed between government and the voluntary and community sectors in order to provide a framework for closer relationships between the sectors. Furthermore, a focus on social issues compared to the previous economic development focus became apparent (Balloch & Taylor, 2001). In addition, the government suggested that it wanted to develop new conditions for the ‘*community*’ to play a more prominent role for the creation of regeneration strategies in relation to employment, housing, health, crime prevention and education (Foley & Martin, 2000). To this direction initiatives were introduced such as the New Commitment to Regeneration, organised by the Local Government Association (LGA) and implemented by both the LGA and the government which ‘*build on the strengths of existing policy – in particular the emphasis on partnership and the recognition of the need for*

a comprehensive strategic approach' (Local Government Association, 1998:1). Through these initiatives the government made clear that regeneration would be of great importance for its policy agenda at the urban level (Miller, 2001).

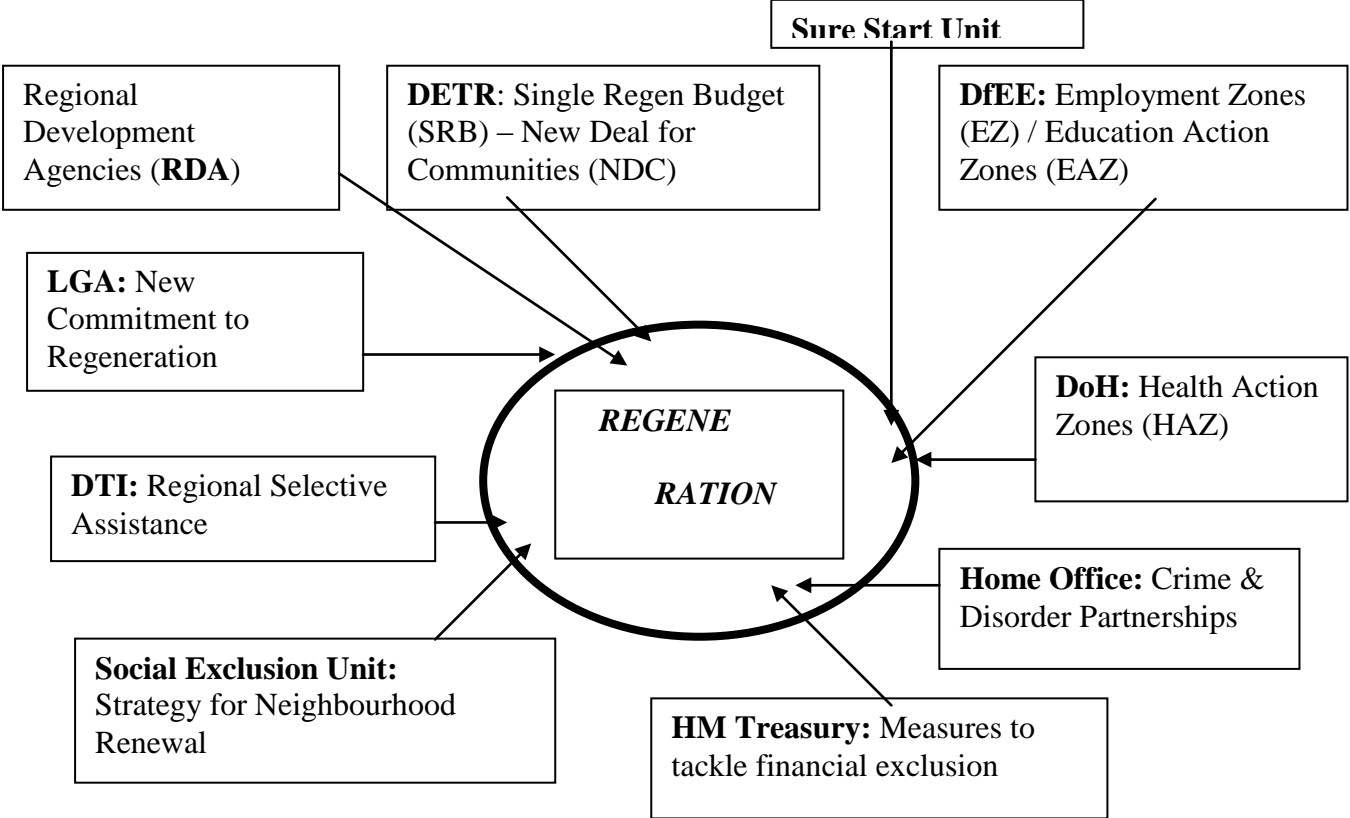


Figure 2: Programmes from different government departments related to urban regeneration

Source: Adapted from Westall and Foley, (2001:14)

All the regeneration programmes identified in figure 2 require the construction of partnerships for their potentially effective implementation. From these regeneration programmes the ones with a broader strategic focus are New Commitment to Regeneration (NCR) and Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal. Single Regeneration Budget (SRB), New Deal for Communities (NDC) could be considered as examples of both community regeneration and economic development. Starting with the New Commitment to Regeneration (NCR) it *‘seeks to establish a new relationship between central government and local partnerships, enhancing local accountability and transparency’* (Local Government Association, 1998: 1). It has been a policy commitment by the Local Government Association that offers a policy for *‘joining up’* regeneration programmes by matching national initiatives with local knowledge and expertise (Westall & Foley, 2001). The strategic focus of NCR relies on its central feature of

comprehensive regeneration strategy that includes the responsibility for all the regeneration issues in their area of implementation. Furthermore, because of its comprehensive focus it requires cross-sector, multi-agency policy-making and delivery (Local Government Association, 1998).

Second, Single Regeneration Budget Challenge Fund was set up to '*enhance the quality of life of local people in areas of need by reducing the gap between deprived and other areas, and between different groups*' (DETR, 1998; cited by Westall & Foley, 2001:12). In addition, New Deal for Communities was designed to tackle multiple-deprivation in the poorest neighbourhoods. In contrast to the SRB Challenge Fund, the NDC had a narrower geographical focus (neighbourhoods of 1,000 to 4,000 households) (Westall & Foley, 2001). Foley and Martin (2000) in an attempt to conclude about the impact of these initiatives on public participation and regeneration argue, that local partners will need to get used to different approaches of participation needed to embrace '*community involvement*' if they want it to have any real impact on policy making.

The Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal is one of latest initiatives - introduced in January 2001 - having a focus on solving the problems of deprivation, and social and economic decline in specific neighbourhoods in the country. The strategy is based on the vision for all these neighbourhoods to '*have common goals of lower workless ness and crime, and better health, skills, housing and physical environment*' as well as '*to narrow the gap on these measures between the most deprived neighbourhoods and the rest of the country*' (Social Exclusion Unit, 2001: 8).

However, there are certain problems that occur in relation to a fruitful urban regeneration in England considering a potentially effective collaboration between local agencies at the urban level. Looking first at culture attitudes it could be argued that people in England '*never really accepted that cities are at the heart of their economy, society and civilisation*' because they prefer '*the leafy suburb, ...[and] the rose-covered cottage*' (The Observer, 2002: 1). Moreover, in many instances irrespective of the openness of the new institutions at the local level, exclusion from a mainstream activity is not a bad thing if tied to a wider programme of change (North and Bruegel, 2001). Finally, according to Campbell, (2000), the fact that urban regeneration can make some communities to feel safer does not mean that it can deliver prosperity on a more permanent basis. Nevertheless, this has been the policy and management context in which local partnerships have emerged.

Citywide and Local Strategic Partnerships

Citywide and Local Strategic Partnerships refer to partnership arrangements that have emerged in the last five years or so reflecting the development of urban regeneration with a focus on the best possible delivery of public services (DETR, 2001). These partnerships have emerged from the City Challenge and Single Regeneration Budget Challenge Fund schemes that appeared in the early to mid-1990s to build upon the involvement of all sectors in partnership that had a wider focus on urban regeneration issues (Foley and Martin, 2000). After 1997, the New Labour government placed an emphasis on area-based programmes, combining them with inter-organisational collaboration in order to address sizeable issues such as employment, environmental sustainability and community safety. However, none of these partnership programmes included (Clarke et al, 1999; cited by Foley and Martin, 2000) offered the function of a wider strategic responsibility. This did not occur until the late 1990s with the evolution of a citywide perspective upon regeneration. In this respect Citywide Partnerships have been developed first. The tendency has been to have at best one or two Citywide Partnerships in each urban area, one focusing on regeneration and the other on general urban development. However, in cities like Glasgow and Manchester where tasks of urban development and regeneration overlapped there was no need for separate partnerships (Carley et al, 2000). In this sense, Citywide Partnerships have an overall strategic responsibility for certain issues of urban regeneration and development (on issues e.g. social inclusion, community safety, environment, employment) and can be considered as multi-organisational partnerships with a strategic focus. These partnerships are not the only type of this entity though. The Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions (DETR), has since 2000 introduced the Local Strategic Partnerships (LSP). The focus of these partnerships is to operate at a level, which enables strategic decisions to be taken, and is close to individual neighbourhoods in order to allow actions to be exercised at community level. Because the construction of Local Strategic Partnerships has been mandatory, there have been cases where LSP superseded previously established Citywide Partnerships (DETR, 2001). According to the definition given by the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions:

A local strategic partnership (LSP) is a single body that:

- *brings together at a local level the different parts of the public sector as well as the private, community and voluntary sectors so that different initiatives, programmes and services support each other and work together;*
- *is a non-statutory, non-executive organisation;*

- *operates at a level, which enables strategic decisions to be taken and is close to individual neighbourhoods to allow actions to be determined at community level; and*
- *should be aligned with local authority boundaries* (DETR, 2001; 15)

As the guidance given by the government for the construction of Local Strategic Partnerships points out '*partnerships need to operate at a level, which allows strategic choices and decisions to be made...*' (DETR, 2001: 21). Apart from LSP also Citywide Partnerships fulfil this primarily very important requirement and in this respect they can be seen from the same angle. From the governmental guidance it is clear that Local Strategic Partnerships have a community focus on looking at issues related to improvement of quality of life and governance in their locality (e.g. construction of community and neighbourhood renewal strategies).

Regarding the issue of policy initiatives, which promoted the creation of Citywide and Local Strategic Partnerships, it is widely recognised that the establishment of partnerships significantly depends on government financial support. Since the 1980s, under government legislation the establishment of partnership schemes has been a prerequisite in securing funding. As a result, (Carley et al, 2000), there exists a rather large number of policy initiatives that require the establishment of partnerships, consequently giving rise to an equally large number of them. However, it could be argued that where partnerships succeed they bring real added value to regeneration tasks. As the literature on partnerships notes it was not until the early 1990s when the first initiatives on partnerships appeared with an almost exclusive involvement in regeneration tasks. However, (Nevin and Shiner, 1995), the fact that at the time these partnerships did not have wide community representation was considered as disadvantage. This was reflected in schemes such as City Challenge and subsequently Single Regeneration Budget Challenge Fund where the engagement off all the sectors was a requirement for obtaining funding (Westall & Foley, 2001).

Collaborative Strategy for Citywide and Local Strategic Partnerships

The main concern then after defining Citywide and Local Strategic Partnerships as the partnership schemes that can be offered as objects of collaborative strategy is to identify and analyse the impact of collaborative strategy regarding the working of CP and LSP in urban regeneration. The primary aim of a strategy developed for a CP or/and LSP is to prepare its organisational structure and operation based on collaboration for achieving desirable operational outcomes. With regard to partnership formation, which this strategy can influence the selection of members that can offer the requisite skills and resources for collaboration within the partnership is an essential task. In terms of organisational structure, Carley et al,

(2000), argue that the quality of a partnership is substantially influenced by the quality of management and governance of the partner organisations. Hence, an effective strategy through collaboration must scrutinise the extent to which the organisational structure of the partnership is properly integrated with the relevant partner organisations, and if necessary reconfigure that degree of integration in order to achieve the partnership's collaborative advantage potential. In relation to delivery of the partnership action plan, it can be argued that taking full account of the peculiarities of the specific locality would contribute to the success of partnership operations. In the light of this, collaboration can act as a catalyst for bringing these peculiarities under scrutiny. For example, the City Forum, a multi-organisational partnership in Coventry ran an '*Area Co-ordination*' programme, that was based on the specific needs of the six more deprived areas of the city. The programme was a multi-agency planning and service co-ordination mechanism for effective social action delivery (City Forum, 1999). Finally, the role of reviewing and changing the partnership action appears as an important factor. Russell suggests the essential elements of this aspect of partnership functioning include identifying the added value of the particular partnership, reviewing policies and processes, identifying what works and what not, measuring the impact, feeding back into policy making, and making appropriate changes to programmes and organisational structures (2001: 14). According to Carley et al, (2000), a variety of elements appear relevant for success or failure of partnerships in striving for urban regeneration. These elements can take the form of a framework of criteria against which the partnership strategy reflecting the influence of collaboration can be assessed. These factors are as following:

- Breadth of membership;
- Use of visioning towards regeneration strategy;
- Translation of vision into applicable objectives;
- Role of political and executive leadership in fostering the partnership;
- Decision making process;
- Power balance;
- Role of human resources and financial resources;
- Achieving sustainability in regeneration.
- Harnessing mainstream policy to urban regeneration requirements;
- Identifying What Works,
- Feeding Back into Policy Making,
- Making Appropriate Changes to Programmes and Structure

However, as Carley et al (2000) further point out, establishing such criteria can be very difficult. This is because achievement is influenced not only by the endogenous quality of partnership working but also by the exogenous ‘base case’ - including for example the history of the area, educational attainment, and employment prospects - and the equally uncontrollable external influence of powerful political and economic factors.

An Evaluation Framework for Collaborative Strategy

Considering the different aspects of collaboration as they have being given above through the definition of collaborative strategy for Citywide and Local Strategic Partnerships the issue that emerges is to identify if there is any process of evaluating this strategy. This is due to the impact of partnership functioning to day-to-day life of people in their respective locality. Partnerships are ‘live’ organisations and as such need to be assessed in terms of their ability to contribute or not to local people’s ‘well being’. In this light an evaluation framework for collaborative strategy is set out below. It is based on the framework of collaborative strategy suggested above for a modus operandi for Citywide and Local Strategic Partnerships.

<i>Aspects</i>	<i>Features of Each Aspect</i>	<i>Approach</i>	<i>Outcome</i>	Contra-Outcome
<i>Selection of Members</i>	<i>-Breadth of Partnership Membership</i>	Factors that influence the collective character of the partnership	-The best and widest possible selection of partners	- Problems because of differentiated interests
<i>Vision of Partnership</i>	<i>- Use of Visioning towards Regeneration Strategy - Translation of Visioning into Applicable Objectives</i>	Defining the connection of the partnership vision to regeneration issues - Developing a list of key points with expected actions from	- Achieving to establish common goals regarding urban regeneration	- Problems in understanding the other partner’s participation

		each agency		
<i>Organisational Operation of Partnership</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Role of Political and Executive Leadership</i> - <i>Decision Making Process</i> - <i>Power Balance</i> - <i>Role of Human and Financial Resources</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Set up management groups to lead on specific issues - Establish clear lines of accountability - Developing a framework for participation into the executive board of the partnership - Set a budget for all the partners 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Clearly identified roles and circular participation in implementing the decisions taken - Clearly identified resources for the partnership 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Existence of conflicting issues that lead the partnership into organisational destruction
<i>Plan Delivery of Partnership</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Role of Sustainability in Urban Regeneration</i> - <i>Harnessing of Mainstream Policy to Urban Regeneration</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Arrangement of regular meetings in which decisions on comprehensive work plans are taken - Agreement on a strategy that attempts to apply policies to specific issues of urban 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Effective implementation of the partnership programmes through the help of core theme or other smaller partnerships 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ineffective implementation of the partnership plan due to political, logistical and other reasons that influence the day-to-day practice of the partnership

		regeneration for the area		
<i>Review and Change of Partnership</i>	- <i>Identifying What Works</i> - <i>Feeding Back into Policy Making</i> - <i>Making Appropriate Changes to Programmes and Structures</i>	- Carrying out annual reviews within a specified timescale	- Incorporating recommendations of the review in future plans	- Non – acceptance of the reviews by hierarchical and internally competitive partners

Box 2. The Evaluation Framework for Collaborative Strategy

Before establishing the framework identifying its parts it is necessary to address the issues of its utility, feasibility, propriety and accuracy. According to Robson (2000) these are the main issues that need to be considered. Beginning with utility it could be argued that the usefulness of the particular framework relies on the need to inform about the need of evaluation in collaboration and partnership work in such a way that the likelihood evaluation will be used is increased. Moreover, Feasibility, propriety and accuracy rely on a potential reflection to results that would come out based on empirical research.

The evaluation framework enables the consideration of both approach and outcome from the perspective of a variety of participant-stakeholders. Looking first at the selection of members the potential stakeholders can be identified based on the widely accepted categorisation according to sectors participating in Citywide and Local Strategic partnerships. In the light of this according to the government’s guidance on Local Strategic Partnerships a partnership as such ‘brings together at a local level the different parts of the public sector as well as the private, ...community and voluntary sectors’ (DETR, 2001: 7). As a consequence the different groups of participant-stakeholders come from the public sector such as local authorities or health trusts as well as from the private sector such as local businesses or local chambers of commerce. In addition they come from the community sector such as ethnic minority groups, and the voluntary sector such as charities. In terms of partnership vision the qualitative character of the task can perhaps provide serious difficulties in evaluation, as it is not easy to measure to what extent the vision of the stakeholders can become reality or not. However, it

may well be adequate to regard the task as one of categorisation, establishing different themes around it in the form different objectives that the partners try to achieve e.g. economic prosperity, community safety, environmental sustainability and so forth.

The aspects of organisational operation, plan delivery and, review and change of partnership could be considered as relatively easy to measure in the sense that there is field for taking feasible measurements such as to evaluate based on an agreed range of success criteria or to develop arrangements for monitoring and reviewing on how well the partnership's service aims and objectives are working. This is more feasible in terms of ensuring feedback to and from every partner.

Concluding Remarks

There is no empirical evidence within the context of this paper that could test and define the validity of the framework of collaborative strategy suggested as well as its evaluation. In this respect the applicability of the framework could be identified perhaps via the demonstration of specific examples in the content of a consequential piece of work. However, collaboration as a vehicle for potential effective working of partnerships is something that should not be underestimated because it can offer valuable insights on how local partnerships function and implement policies in their area of responsibility. This becomes apparent in the case of Citywide and Local Strategic Partnerships for three reasons. Firstly, CP and LSP can guarantee, if effective, the organisational ability for bringing together all the interested parties in a city and not only the groups specifically occupied in the activity the partnership has been constructed for. This can be possible regardless the political implications normally instigated by dominant political forces e.g. governing political party. Second, they operate at a level where strategic decisions can be taken related to future plans about particular neighbourhood and the city as a whole. They are also responsible for policy making and implementation and accountable to people they represent. At this level '*hot*' issues such as allocation of financial and other resources and, power can take a solvable nature. Third, subsequently the most important objectives of these partnerships are in line with the aim for achieving local people's '*well-being*'. However, the actual success of the partnership plan delivery and impact to local residents is a matter that applies to each individual case, as dysfunctional elements can always be a source of difficulties for partnership working.

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