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Final Report: Waterfront Regeneration

Main objectives and context

This Knowledge Exchange programme brought together practitioners, policy makers and academics involved with regeneration processes in Glasgow, Dundee and Edinburgh, which account for a substantial part of overall urban regeneration activity currently under way in Scotland, and have the potential to make a huge impact on Scotland's future economic and social development. These three initiatives are evolving in parallel, developing their own independent approaches to city building and to shaping the new places where people will live and work.

The programme aimed to explore the potential of waterfront regeneration to contribute to socially, economically and environmentally sustainable development of Scotland, creating new places and transforming existing places in order to improve quality of life. In order to meet this overarching aim, the programme has the following objectives:

- To share experience in approaches to waterfront development and identify areas in which the three waterfront developments would benefit from cross-collaboration.
- To explore the reasons for the differences in approach and outcomes to date in the three waterfront developments, and identify unique points and characteristics in their approaches that may contribute to individual success.
- To learn from international experience in waterfront regeneration, de-contextualising from elsewhere and re-contextualising in the Scottish context.
- To develop a forum for continuing cooperation and knowledge exchange that will support regeneration in the participating waterfronts as well as for other waterfront development throughout Scotland and internationally.

The programme included 5 workshops from October 2014 to July 2015, each of the first three exploring an aspect of development from each city (and including a field trip), with two follow-up workshops providing the opportunity to draw together conclusions and identify next steps for an ongoing knowledge exchange network of policy-makers, practitioners and academics. A total of six waterfront areas were visited across the three cities, nine guest speakers delivered presentations (national and international), and break-out discussion groups addressed the issues of: environmental concerns in waterfront development; urban life, public space and the role of urban design in waterfront development; and socio-economic impact and equity in waterfront regeneration.

An account of the insights resulting from the programme

The programme provided the basis to identify key findings from three sets of information:

- presentations and visits to the three Scottish waterfront city case studies;
- presentations on, and discussions of, international experiences and theme-based presentations;
- discussions in break-out groups on key themes structured according to a common theoretical framework.



Key findings from the experience of the three case study Scottish waterfronts

Within the small geographic area of central Scotland, there is a range of scenarios and approaches, and varying degrees of completion and types of outcome. This variety can be summarised as follows:

- Market-driven regeneration of land with no (or few) residents or buildings by one private sector landowner (e.g. Glasgow Harbour, Western Harbour in Leith).
- Public sector-driven regeneration with large public sector investment in land preparation and infrastructure and strongly masterplanned approach to guide private investment, under direct local authority control (Dundee Central Waterfront).
- Public sector-driven regeneration via arms-length company owned by the local authority, using masterplans to guide public sector infrastructure provision and creation of development sites to offer to private developers (Waterfront Edinburgh Limited in Granton, Edinburgh).
- Public and community sector-driven regeneration of built-up and densely populated waterfront neighbourhood facing high levels of deprivation due to deindustrialisation, with involvement of a range of stakeholders from housing associations to regional transport body (Govan in Glasgow).
- Regeneration focused on new and reinvigorated uses of water (Scottish Canals projects, e.g. in Port Dundas), linked to heritage and arts, linear parks, and involvement of local communities and businesses including social enterprise.

A common issue across all these scenarios was the challenge presented by different processes happening simultaneously (or overlapping in time) in different areas, with the connections in between these areas being left temporarily as empty or partially developed spaces, or as boundaries between areas with different character and function. Connections between the regeneration areas and the rest of the city and beyond were also a common issue.

A preliminary conclusion from comparison across these waterfront regeneration types is that private sector-led initiatives have generally resulted in more mono-functional urban development, while public sector-led initiatives have attempted or promise more mixed use and finer grain development. Regeneration in consolidated areas, on the other hand, necessitates strong public and community sector involvement because of its characteristics. The ongoing experience across these waterfronts in Central Scotland would appear to suggest a stronger intent to create 'urban fabric' in public sector-led initiatives, with private sector-led initiatives being more focused on producing 'properties' for sale.

Key findings from experience in waterfront regeneration beyond Scotland

Of the nine guest presentations, four focused on specific waterfronts (Malmo's Western Harbour, HafenCity Hamburg, Oslo Harbour and Bristol Harbour) and five on broader themes. All four specific case studies had in common that they had achieved high levels of urban quality in their developments, and were seen as successes on many counts. There were some similarities between the Malmo and Hamburg cases in particular, which may hold lessons for waterfront regeneration elsewhere, including Scotland. In both cases: the land was publicly owned; the area were not used by city dwellers prior to regeneration (no strong sense of community and the area had to be 're-imagined' as part of the city); both areas were physically close but disconnected from the city centre; a strong vision and masterplan was developed for the area; achieving diversity (functional and in design terms) was a key aim; providing for employment-generating uses is as important as providing housing; there is a strong focus on sustainability, ranging from solutions that address effects from climate change (flooding) to renewable energy, which helped the initiative access funding opportunities at national and European levels; strong leadership was established through governance structures; the public authority (via an arm's length company in the case of HafenCity



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Hamburg) carefully managed plot preparation and release to the market, in a highly controlled and phased way; strong relationships have been established between the local authority (and development company in the case of HafenCity) and developers, in order to facilitate the flow of information (both ways) and to facilitate the collaboration that is required to put in place district heating systems, etc.; and the planning and implementing authorities have established mechanisms to learn from the process, adjusting and adapting in subsequent phases.

The presentations using examples from elsewhere in the UK and abroad focused on five themes: water sensitive urban design, public life and public space on the waterfront, lessons from urban design around the UK, participatory approaches to waterfront regeneration, and making connections in waterfront regeneration. Key lessons from these presentations included a wide range of points, from the increasing importance of water management to the existence of strong community views on what the waterfront is.

Key issues identified by break-out group discussions among key stakeholders

The use of three key themes – resources, rules and organisations, and ideas and mindsets – in the break-out group discussions allowed identification of key issues that were identified across the three workshops. The ten issues that were most discussed are briefly presented here, in three groups that roughly correspond to the above three themes:

Land / Water / Place / Infrastructure

Land: Various characteristics of land typically involved in waterfront regeneration emerged:

- The edge condition of this land in relation to bodies of water (sea, estuary, river, etc.) was seen as a key characteristic. In addition, it tends to be land that has previously been inaccessible to the general public, and opening up such access is seen as a key benefit of waterfront regeneration.
- It is often constituted by large areas which are ‘cheap’, offering value for money, but also often requiring remediation and de-risking.
- The key point that emerged across all three workshops however, normally in response to the examples presented by guest speakers and to the site visits, was that control and regulation of the land is essential to achieve a good standard of development. And such control was seen as fundamentally affected by land ownership.

Water: Discussion underlined the importance of water in developing ideas around waterfront regeneration:

- The value of water as an attractor was highlighted, based on its psychological draw on people as well as on its potential as a recreational resource – which raised the importance of visibility of, and accessibility to water in waterfront regeneration, including for temporary uses.
- Water was also identified as a catalyst to make things happen, bringing together different interests and responsibilities, for example through the preparation of a water edge plan (blue plan).

The importance of the sense of place, and the role of public space:

- There was a strong message that waterfront regeneration should provide a place, rather than creating simply a destination based on e.g. a single ‘flagship’ attractor building.
- It was suggested that the place needs to be created ahead of the development of buildings, and an enjoyment of this wider sense of place would be an attractor of people. This was seen to require a mix of uses and a strong role for public space, commercial use of which had to be treated with care. This has implications for investment priorities, which it was suggested should be seen not just in terms of ‘standalone projects’ but in relation to generating wider value (social cultural, etc.) which would contribute to the richness of how the place operates.



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- Examples were given that suggested public sector developers went further than private developers in providing good quality public space, and it was proposed that any new organisation that may try to take a more integrated place-based approach to waterfront regeneration (rather than simply developing properties) should have a much greater concern for public space and the sense of place.
- The next most discussed issue related back to physical aspects.

Connectivity and infrastructure:

- These areas tend to be well connected because of their previous functions, as they were connected to regional and national transport networks for transportation of goods mostly.
- But somewhat paradoxically, waterfront areas tend to be cut off from the rest of the city, and therefore need to be reconnected.
- The very infrastructures that connect waterfront areas to regional and national networks (railways, major roads) are often the barriers to their connection to the adjacent city or city centre. New infrastructure is therefore often needed to overcome such barriers and provide new transport routes for a variety of users, and what might be termed 'soft' infrastructure is also important, i.e. the establishment and strengthening of social networks that allow connectivity at a social level.

Management structures / Leadership / Dealing with change

Management structures were considered focusing on three aspects: overall management of the regeneration process, internal management structures within organisations, and management of public open space. In terms of overall management, comparisons were made between the separation between (local) state as regulator and market as provider in the UK, and the complex range of 'structures' between market and state seen in the examples from Hamburg and Scandinavia. Models such as direct local authority intervention or use of arm's length companies were also compared. The latter model provides an independent organisation that is able to do things, but is still very dependent on local authority actions without having any influence on these. Advantages were identified in cross-departmental coordination within the local authority and in continuity in key posts.

Leadership was discussed mostly as a resource, and often linked to the notion of championing a vision, as explained above. Qualities linked to leadership in waterfront regeneration (or 'place leadership') included taking a risk, investing in the future of the city, and not only saying the right things but also following this through with joined-up action. Leadership was seen as essential to realise the scale of opportunity. Finally, leadership was seen as not only political, but also including entrepreneurial vision.

Dealing with change was identified as a key issue.

- Much of the discussion focused on change of mindsets so as to: recognise the wider benefits, including intangibles, that may arise from the regeneration and the roles that different stakeholders may have in this; move away from over-regulated environments and standards-based approaches; break down silo mentality; break through what was described as 'conservative' local authority mindset.
- The second area of focus of this type of discussion was on how change is managed by the agencies involved in the regeneration, particularly by local authorities, with it being recognised that there was a need to develop capacity to deal with such change. It was suggested that the agencies implementing waterfront regeneration need to be in a position to deal with the complexity of the process of urban change, through recognising neither market nor state alone, and developing special arrangements. In dealing with this complexity, it was also suggested that these agencies should act with continuity and belief, being flexible to respond to change, but holding fast to the desired outcomes – i.e. not wavering with changing market conditions for example.



Vision / Masterplanning / Participation

Vision: The importance of developing a long term vision (e.g. over 30 years) became clear.

- Waterfronts were identified as opportunities to implement new ideas and innovative visions.
- Vision was often discussed together with leadership, i.e. the development of a clear vision through a process of effective consultation allowing all voices to be heard and the identification of joint goals was seen to be important, but so was the championing of this vision to implement it. Political support, inclusion of entrepreneurial vision, championing of the vision by a designated person with cross-departmental responsibility, and continuity in senior development policy and management roles were seen as factors contributing to successful implementation of a vision.
- Communication and promotion of the vision were also seen to be important, e.g. through having a well-staffed and resourced information venue and activities promoting the vision.

Masterplanning:

- In their current use, the terms 'masterplan' and 'masterplanning' are rather broad, as they can be used to refer to 'visioning' processes involving many stakeholders, or to physical planning tools, and can range from the broad strategic scale to the level of an area to be developed. Dundee Waterfront was described as an example of moving away from blueprint masterplanning to the masterplan as a process over 30 years.
- Masterplans were identified in the discussions as being essential resources in waterfront regeneration, linked to design coding, to achieve good urban design. These required to be prepared in conjunction with a more strategic city view, considering the broader conditions for investment and the broader context for regulation, involving landowners and developers, and being deliverable.
- A balance was to be achieved between defining a vision through the masterplan and following this through to delivery, and at the same time being flexible in its implementation. Masterplans were seen as being useful for the strategic approach to developing a waterfront, but facing challenges in implementation at the finer grain, e.g. to achieve a particular mix of shops. Developing such masterplans requires a committed team and time (2 to 3 years). The process can be used as an opportunity to 'educate' stakeholders in what is possible in the regeneration of a waterfront area. It was suggested that briefs for masterplans should include social and cultural aspects that derive from the anticipated developments.

Participation, consultation and community involvement:

- Community-led regeneration was seen as more directly leading to community ownership of the process and outcomes and therefore more sustainable development. Such community-led regeneration could be equipped with devolved power through, e.g., participatory budgeting.
- Strong community involvement is possible in places where there is a large established community with whom the local authority is working closely, and where joint work over a period of time can ensure real involvement. In other waterfront areas where there is no or little resident community the process needs to reach out to adjacent and wider communities, seeking inclusion of their ideas.
- In either case, time should be factored in to develop community capacity to engage, whether this is a pre-existing community or a community that settles as the waterfront is regenerated. Interactions between project leaders and the community are very important, e.g. during the preparation of a masterplan and in subsequent phases, and these can benefit from a committed team dealing with consultations. Early consultation has been shown to greatly reduce objections to master plans. The existing community can contribute valuable inputs such as knowledge of the local history.



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Summary of findings

The presentations, visits and discussions in the first three workshops evidenced that waterfront regeneration and development has certain particularities that make it distinctive in terms of both process and place. They also highlighted that there is scope to reflect and focus more on how waterfront regeneration is being delivered in Scotland and seek to achieve better outcomes of this process on the ground where these may offer opportunities for improvement. The higher success of some international cases in producing extensions to the city fabric which have relatively quickly become recognised 'places' that are well used, attractive, connected and more environmentally sustainable, offers inspiration and practical lessons to Scottish waterfronts based on critical analysis of such experiences and consideration of how similar mechanisms and approaches may be implemented in Scotland. Such international practices have evolved in different legal, institutional and social contexts to that of Scotland, so it could be argued that their relevance to the Scottish context is limited, and their experience can certainly not be transferred wholesale, but they do tend to illustrate processes that were innovative even within their own context, and as such they can offer inspiration to innovation in waterfront regeneration in Scotland as well.

The visits to local waterfronts and the discussions also showed that within Scotland there is a variety of approaches to waterfront regeneration, with very different processes and outcomes (most still evolving), which reinforce the point that it is possible to set different goals and processes even within the single national context of a small country such as Scotland, albeit also having to respond to local contexts. There is also therefore scope to learn further from each other's experiences operating within this Scottish context. The identification of key issues in the preceding sections offers a potential focus for such learning to be expanded and deepened, and for policy and practice to evolve in tandem with such learning.

Main outcomes and (expected) impact

The key outcomes have been: (1) greater understanding of the current state of waterfront regeneration in Scotland and of issues and potential in this kind of regeneration as demonstrated in examples from around the world; (2) closer collaboration among a range of participants in the programme, cutting across policy-maker, practitioner and academics, as well as within each of these groupings; and (3) the establishment of a network around waterfront regeneration centred on the Scottish experience, which has attracted interest from beyond Scotland. As a result of these outcomes, and through the continuing work of the network (see final section in this report), in the medium and long term the programme is expected to have an impact on the capacity of those involved (and their colleagues, through follow-on activities) and improved decision-making around waterfront regeneration in the three cities involved. In addition, it is anticipated that the programme, through its follow-on activities, will raise awareness of the challenges and potential of waterfront regeneration in Scotland within higher levels of decision-making at both local and national levels.



Key recommendations for end user / policy communities

Main recommendations for policy communities include:

- To develop their interest in generating more interaction across members of different city councils and between these and other stakeholders in the development of waterfront areas, i.e. economic development departments, developers, communities.
- To access and analyse data on different cases of waterfront regeneration in the UK and across Europe, which could offer information on the 'story' of these cases in order to gain wider understanding of 'why' successes and failures might occur in different contexts.
- To generate knowledge on the three waterfront regeneration examples in Scotland that the network focused on, in order to construct a thorough history of these places and contribute to developing a vision for the future of these areas.
- To continue developing the network created through this project seeking more collaborative approaches to waterfront regeneration in Scotland where necessary and more informed decisions in the specific case of each city.

Planned follow up activities

The fourth and fifth workshops in this programme were used to develop an action plan. This action plan (which is recorded in a document called 'Waterfront Regeneration: Sustainable waterfronts of the future in Scotland – The way forward') has identified a few key questions the waterfront network wishes to address in more depth (e.g. what's the story of the waterfront in each city, how can water be used, examples of leadership, etc.), and a sequence of actions which can be summarised as follows:

Production of occasional paper for the Scottish Universities Insight Institute, which will constitute a final dissemination document for the programme;

1. Research into specific questions (led mostly by academic partners with involvement from policy-makers and practitioners);
2. Creation of a knowledge sharing platform within the network (though also externally accessible) such as e.g. through a blog;
3. Dissemination of research and other information generated by the network using a variety of online and other methods including e.g. short video interviews;
4. Use of above material to improve knowledge and skills among relevant stakeholders involved in waterfront regeneration;
5. Awareness-raising and raising the profile of waterfront regeneration in Scotland through face-to-face events/meetings to share the above material with key decision-makers in local authorities and at Scottish Parliament level;
6. Eventually, possible development of a toolkit on waterfront regeneration.

All of these activities are dependent on accessing funding and other necessary resources.