

The Future of Planning: beyond growth dependence

Summary

Planning of our towns and cities has become too dependent on high rates of economic growth

community-based approach

a set of reforms

Introduction

The planning of our towns and cities has become too dependent on high rates of economic growth. It predominantly works by encouraging market-led development and then negotiating for a share of the development profits to be used for local community and broader social benefits. This can work well in certain locations, where there is buoyant market demand and the local community are in agreement with the proposed project.

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KEYWORDS

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Fiscal measures

In addition to transferring land and property rights, there will often be a need for financial resources to fulfil the aspirations of community-based approaches. There is a need for the following fiscal measures:

- Funding the purchase of land for community development and assets for community management;
- Considering innovative ways to raise such finance;
- Funding the reuse of empty homes, through both subsidies for necessary works and loans to enable their ownership to be transferred;
- Extending subsidies for energy efficiency measures for those in fuel poverty;
- Reinstating grants for area improvement under community guidance for existing residential and SME needs; and
- Considering changes to tax and grant regimes to incentivise the reuse of empty property, such as the removal of VAT on refurbishment; this may require specific investigation to identify the barriers posed by the complexities of current fiscal measures.

Reformed community engagement

All community-based approaches make considerable demands on local communities – to lead and even manage the processes of change – and also on local planners – to engage more effectively with local communities. Current community engagement processes are often unfit for any purpose other than tokenism in the face of market-led development. The following reforms to local community engagement are therefore needed:

- Ensuring that community engagement provides full, supported opportunities for the voices of lower-income and vulnerable communities to be heard, alongside those representing the just sustainability agenda;
- Utilising and supporting social capital to enable community-based development projects;
- Utilising existing social capital for the management of community assets, providing support through appropriate management structures for collective decision-making and conflict resolution; and
- Using social capital existing within local business communities to support town centre enhancement.

Conclusion: Creating the conditions for local choice

If these reforms were implemented, then

GUIDING QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERING WHETHER GROWTH-DEPENDENT PLANNING IS APPROPRIATE :

- Are the economic conditions right for this mode to be effective?
- Are the social and environmental benefits that will be generated, sufficient to contribute to sustainability?
- Will these be equitably distributed?
- Does the proposed development, together with these benefits, command the support of the local communities?

If the answers to these questions are 'no' and if the more vulnerable groups in the area, who already have a lesser share of society's benefits, losing out through the change that is occurring then an alternative, community-based approach to planning should be considered.