

LEARNING POINT 26:

how do we change the way people feel and think about places?

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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Funding

Details of the Seeing is Believing and the New Ideas funds are available at www.scr.communitiescotland.gov.uk

Other formats

You can also ask for this publication in large print, Braille or on audio cassette, and we can also provide translations into other languages. Please contact Janette Campbell on 0131 479 5162 or email her at janette.campbell@communitiescotland.gsi.gov.uk
The Scottish Centre for Regeneration is part of Communities Scotland, the Executive's housing and regeneration agency.



What are learning points?

Learning Points share what people have learned from their experience in regeneration. They share the lessons from people working or talking together, or from research into issues and evaluation of what is happening. Learning Points are one of the ways that help people and organisations identify what works and what doesn't work to improve their practice.

What is this learning point about?

At the Scottish Centre for Regeneration, we believe that changing peoples' perceptions of places is an important part of regeneration. At a neighbourhood level it can help improve community well-being, sustainability, economic opportunities and increase social cohesion.

This Learning Point looks at what action can be taken to change negative perceptions into positive ones as part of the wider regeneration of neighbourhoods. It captures the key lessons from:

- Our Masterclass 'How can we change the way people think and feel about places', which was led by Angus Kennedy, previously chief executive of Castle Vale Housing Action Trust (HAT). For ten years HAT worked on changing peoples' perceptions as part of the regeneration of Birmingham's largest post-war housing estate.
- Practice workshops on Scottish examples, including Linthouse in Govan, Raploch in Stirling, and the Merchant City in Glasgow where direct action is being taken to change perceptions as part of area regeneration.

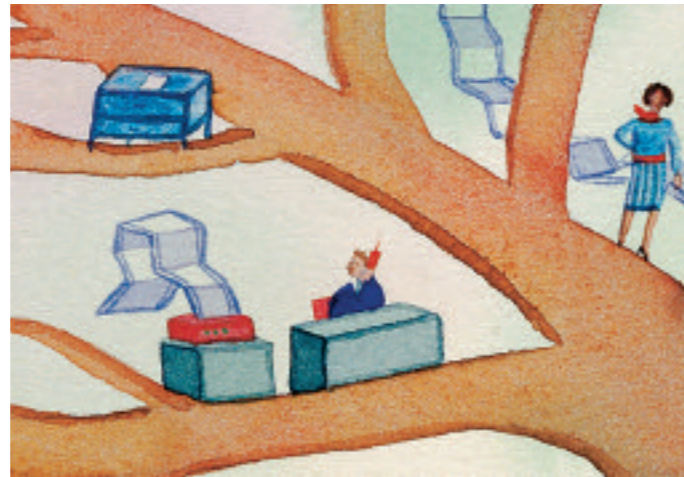
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What are the important issues?

- Does the way people think and feel about places change as a result of regeneration activity?
- How does work on changing perceptions of places fit alongside work on regeneration?
- What activities can help change perceptions, and is it necessary to do different things to change the perceptions of those inside and outside of the communities concerned?
- How is the impact of activities measured in changing perceptions?
- What is the role of the community in changing perceptions, and what is the responsibility of organisations working in the community?
- How are aspirations raised in neighbourhoods without raising unrealistic expectations?

What is known already?

- Perceptions will only change when residents experience real improvements in their community.
- When changes take place it may take some time for people to change their views.
- Internal and external perceptions do not always match. People living outside a neighbourhood may have a negative opinion while the people who live there may be more positive.
- People understand the need for physical regeneration. The need to change perceptions can be seen as less important.
- That there are specific problems and barriers to be overcome:
 - scepticism about the value of communications and promotional activity
 - lack of creativity
 - lack of joint working
 - short timeframes – perceptions can't be changed overnight.
- Changing how people feel and think about where they live is important for creating



sustainable communities. Developing residents' pride in their area increases a sense of belonging and encourages them to be more involved.

What did people learn from this?

From the start it's important to:

- Work with the community to create a clear vision for the place.
- Consider the physical and visual image, identity and the way a place is connected to a wider geographic area.
- Make a change in perceptions a key outcome for regeneration work. This will help make sure action is planned both strategically and operationally.
- Monitor changes in perceptions. Perception surveys can provide baseline information and can help to measure impact.
- Understand the current situation and why a place and community has become stigmatised. Focus on the current negative perceptions to provide ideas for activity to turn them around. Look at past and present press coverage as part of this process.
- Use the community and its history as a source for ideas.

Work on changing perceptions has to be planned to fit with work on regeneration:

- Before any physical changes have taken place, work on changing perceptions will need to be carefully judged and paced.

- The focus should be on engaging local people with the vision and the possibility that things can improve. Work to build their confidence and capacity to take part.
- As physical changes start to happen, focus on promoting real improvements and getting out good news stories about the area.
- In the later stages of regeneration prioritise media work. Encourage people to visit the area to see for themselves the changes that have happened.
- Keep the vision in mind. Help all those involved to understand how each piece of work, no matter how small, contributes to achieving it.
- Invest time and effort to make sure both new staff and people who move into the area understand the vision and the wider picture.
- Make sure all communication activities emphasise the vision.
- Don't promote change before it has happened, or over promote what is happening. This is likely to undermine the process and create cynicism.

Thinking about the audience is important:

- Different audiences need different information presented in different ways.
- Think why each audience might have a negative perception. Use this to decide what communication methods to use to help change this.
- The community is both a participant and an audience. Effective community engagement is key in both circumstances.

Some practical ideas are:

- Think about appointing a communications or public relations professional who can work as part of a regeneration team.
- Professionals can help produce a community newsletter, annual reports, a website, press and media work encompassing all types of stories, events and community visits.
- Changing the name of an area is sometimes effective but can provoke a cynical response. Listen to what the community want.

- Use local champions. Identify people such as local elected officials or celebrities who are supportive and willing to promote positive changes to an area.
- Use a design-led approach and make the area's visual identity the centre of the planning. Be creative and try different approaches such as logos, signs and public art. These can build pride and help create an identity for a place.
- Make the most of public spaces to help improve the community's image.
- Improve the environment.
- Think boldly about what will attract people to see the changes that have been made. It could be public art, or somewhere for people to come for cultural events, sport, leisure or to shop

What next?

Use all possible resources to support work on changing perceptions:

- Build a knowledge bank about changing perceptions – what works and what doesn't and examples of good practice.
- Improve relevant skills, such as working with the media or engaging with artists and designers.
- Support projects which have successfully changed perceptions to share their knowledge and expertise with others.

