
ARTICLE

Putting Sustainable Development into Practice? The role of local policy partnership networks

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ABSTRACT *This paper examines how the concept of sustainable development is being put into practice by local policy partnership networks. We suggest that due to the highly contested nature of the concept, these networks are facing problems in trying to unravel what sustainable development actually means. Few organisations are grappling with the more fundamental implications of the concept and, as a result, policies for sustainability are being developed cheek by jowl with those of economic growth and competitiveness. Moreover, established local policy networks play a dominant role in defining a vision of sustainable development to the detriment of groups outside the policy process. Mechanisms and institutions need to be established to widen participation and debate on the issue and to draw upon lessons and ideas from organisations outside established networks, such as environmental and campaign groups, third sector organisations, community associations and socially responsible businesses.*

PAUL CHATTERTON & SOPHIE STYLE, ¿Poner el desarrollo sostenible en practica? La funcion de las 'redes de sociedades normativas' locales. *Este documento examina como el concepto de desarrollo sostenible esta siendo puesto en práctica por redes de sociedades normativas locales. Nosotros sugerimos que debido a la alta naturaleza competitiva del concepto, estas redes estan enfrentando problemas al tratar de desenredar lo que significa realmente desarrollo sostenible. Pocas organizaciones están intentando resolver las implicaciones mas fundamentals del concepto y como resultado las políticas para la sostenibilidad estan siendo desarrolladas lado a lado con esas de crecimiento económico y competitividad. Además, las redes normativas locales establecidas juegan un papel predominante en definir una visión de desarrollo sostenible para el detrimento de grupos por fuera del proceso regulador. Los mecanismos y las instituciones necesitan ser establecidos para ampliar la participación y debatir sobre el asunto y para deducir sobre lecciones e ideas tomadas de organizaciones por fuera de las redes establecidas tales como grupos ambientales y de campaña, organizaciones del tercer sector, asociaciones comunitarias y negocios socialmente responsables.*

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Introduction

Sustainable development continues to gain widespread popularity in policy debates. Much of this popularity stems from an expectation that it can reconcile economic development with the need to conserve natural resources, protect the environment and meet social objectives (Gibbs, 1996). However, by blending policies for economic growth and industrial competitiveness with those for environmental protection and social inclusion, confusion has been generated over the precise meaning of the term. Local and national governments have contributed to this confusion, as they have lacked the ability to provide in-depth definitional guidance on sustainable development.

Such confusion is understandable, considering that sustainable development remains such a contested idea. In particular, while a 'green tinge' is now widespread throughout society, the depth of that green colour varies considerably (O'Riordan, 1992), with technocratic or weak positions contrasted with ecocentric or strong positions on sustainable development (Pearce *et al.*, 1989; Turner, 1993; Gibbs, 1997; Pearce & Barber, 2000; Pepper, 2000). While there is a spectrum of opinion on the issue, there remain fundamental differences between the largely reformist approach of 'environmentalism', "a managerial approach to environmental problems, secure in the belief that they can be solved without fundamental changes in present values or patterns of production and consumption" and the more radical ideology of 'ecologism', which "presupposes radical changes in our relationship with the non-human natural world, and in our mode of social and political life" (Dobson, 2000, p. 2). This latter approach is in general highly critical of economic globalisation and encourages the reorganisation of social and economic activity around the meeting of basic needs at a local level (Schumacher, 1973; Douthwaite, 1996; Robertson, 1998).

This paper explores how established local policy partnership networks are coming to terms with these contested notions in their attempts to put sustainable development into practice at the local level. The context for the paper is Newcastle upon Tyne, a city in the north of England experiencing painful transition from its industrial past and which, for reasons that will be explored, faces a number of barriers to implementing sustainable development. The findings are based upon interviews which were undertaken with organisations and individuals involved in, or with an interest in, sustainable development, ranging from statutory bodies to non-governmental organisations, campaign and community groups and individual projects.

Our starting point is that established partnership networks in this locality currently play a dominant role in defining policy on sustainable development to the detriment of a range of groups outside the policy process. We highlight the various definitions of sustainable development emerging from organisations within this network and suggest that, due to the highly contested nature of the term, local policy networks face a number of tensions as they try to unravel what sustainable development means in practice. We conclude by suggesting that sustainable development depends upon broad participation which goes beyond established partnership networks and engages a much wider range of organisations and individuals.

Institutionalising Sustainable Development through Partnership Networks

Because of the breadth of the term, a patchwork of sectors, organisations and individuals contribute to, or have an interest in, policies for sustainable development. These include groups within established policy networks, including environmental regulatory bodies, charities, non-governmental organisations, public sector bodies, the business sector, business representative organisations and the higher education sector. However, a much wider range of groups are engaged with sustainability issues, such as third sector organisations, the voluntary or co-operative sector, community groups, individual sustainability projects, co-operatives, campaign groups and radical protest groups. Yet what is evident is that the first group of organisations are able to influence policy discourses on sustainable development because of their established position within existing policy networks.

These local policy partnership networks are generally understood as part of a broader restructuring of institutional arrangements over the last few decades as a response to the perceived inadequacies of both excessive market-based and state-dependent strategies and demands from citizens for more active involvement in policy making (Garmise & Rees, 1997). However, the effectiveness of these local partnership arrangements has come under scrutiny as to whether they represent a reinvigoration of local governance or whether they are a form of local crisis management. In particular, Imrie *et al.* (1995, p. 32) suggest that such networks signify a “politics of closure” within UK policy making, as they are invested with power to speak on behalf of localities, while Geddes (2000) questions the extent to which they actually increase the capacity of local governance to tackle problems such as poverty and social exclusion. Moreover, it is also suggested that such network arrangements signify attempts by central government to reassert control over the local–regional economic development process (Jacobs, 1997). Finally, it is important to emphasise the extent to which these partnerships marginalise more radical possibilities by setting the agenda of what the public can “think is possible” (Atkinson, 1999).

Such criticisms have much resonance with regard to a policy-making process as vague and contradictory as that of sustainable development:

As a term, it [sustainable development] is something of a chameleon, and as such it becomes a powerful tool in the hands of those who have the financial and political power and the media connections to manipulate and insert their definitions of it into mainstream thought. (Williers, 1994, p. 1147)

These problems are confounded in an old industrial city, such as Newcastle upon Tyne, in which a strong legacy of paternalism, industrial labourism and parochialism reinforces the role of established power blocs and inhibits the spread of new ideas. What is evident in Newcastle upon Tyne is that local policy networks are struggling to develop a coherent approach to the issue of sustainable development. In particular, they are interpreting sustainable development by blending priorities from a variety of different policy areas, such as community development and regeneration, economic growth, inward investment and com-

petitiveness and environmental protection (Friends of the Earth, 1998). The following quotations, derived from asking various organisations within the local policy network in Newcastle upon Tyne what sustainable development meant to them, highlight this lack of coherence.

It is a distinct ideology which puts the environment first.

Where we can make a change is the environmental, leading into the economic. We haven't come to terms with the social side.

For a business, it's hard to define what it means to be sustainable.

The bottom line is, can we make a profit, and in the process help the environment and create jobs? The region has to promote economic growth before it can tackle social inclusion and sustainable development.

It is an add-on rather than a fresh approach.

It is a political necessity to say 'yes' to sustainable development.

It is about practical changes that we can all sign up to.

Ethical values and spirituality are not on the agenda but are key to the process.

Sustainable development is about ethical consumption, good working conditions, efficient use of natural resources, equality, community involvement and social exclusion.

The rest of this section explores in more detail the evolving approach towards sustainable development of organisations within this established policy network in Newcastle upon Tyne.

The Business Community

While there is some formal interest in the concept of sustainable development from the business community, businesses have largely adopted a reactive approach to it. Business representative organisations such as the Confederation of British Industry and the Regional Chamber engage with the debate only to protect the interests of their members from what they see as intrusive environmental legislation. As one member of the business community commented, "the one word which turns businesses off is 'green' ". The recent lukewarm response by businesses to the UK government's Climate Change Levy, which proposes to tax energy use to enable the UK to meet its commitments to reducing greenhouse gas emissions, is evidence of this.

However, numerous 'green' business initiatives have been developed by the business sector, such as the Environmental Industries Federation, which was established to promote the local environmental sector and which undertakes networking and training activities for its members, and Newcastle upon Tyne City Council's 'Greening the supply chain' initiative. While such initiatives are

useful in terms of reducing the environmental impact of certain business practices, they are less engaged with the social and ethical aspects of sustainable development. Further, while many businesses appreciate the economic rationales for protecting the environment, there needs to be a stronger recognition of the need to protect it for its intrinsic value.

The Environment Sector

The environment sector is largely regarded as the watchdog of the environment and the implementer of regulations and restrictive legislation. Because of this remit, it has provided some leadership on sustainable development. In particular, the Environment Agency, the main environmental regulatory body in the UK, has had input into thinking on sustainable development, and Northumbrian Water has taken a lead in developing biodiversity action plans. However, because of its particular set of concerns, the environment sector has been limited to rather narrow definitions of sustainable development and in general is not receptive to local initiatives which fall outside centralised utility provision and regulatory frameworks.

The University Sector

The university sector has shown growing interest in the sustainable development agenda, although most engagement has come from the post-1992 university sector. A number of think tanks have emerged from universities, such as the Centre for Sustainable Development, a not-for-profit organisation based at and managed by the University of Sunderland, and the Sustainable Cities Research Institute at the University of Northumbria. However, it is difficult for the region's university sector to take a lead on sustainable development due to the diversity of interests within individual institutions and the priorities of funding regimes, which often engage them in diverging agendas such as those of economic competitiveness and environmental protection.

The Public Sector

The public sector has provided some of the main impetus on sustainable development policy. In particular, regional development agencies (RDAs), established in 1999 in all the English regions, have been charged with the statutory purpose of pursuing sustainable development. Although the language of sustainability is now mainstream in RDAs, it has been progressively watered down in the move from policy formulation to implementation (Gibbs, 2000). For example, the regional economic strategy produced by the North-east's RDA gives low priority to sustainable development and its general focus is to improve the supply side of the economy to promote economic growth. Where sustainability is referred to, there is frequent confusion between the terms 'sustainable development', 'sustain' and 'sustainability', which exacerbates the already confusing interpretation of its meaning (Friends of the Earth North East, 1999).

Moreover, it is only asked to “take account of sustainable development where appropriate” (One North East, 1999, p. 107), which raises the question: when is it *inappropriate* to take account of sustainable development? In general, the document rests heavily on the jargon of cluster-based, high-skilled, world-class, knowledge-driven activity in a globalised economy.

RDAs, then, have few statutory duties to promote sustainable development or monitor environmental practices and there is little room for experimenting with alternative forms of development:

The problem with the RDA proposals is that they simply recycle the same kinds of regional and local economic development policies which have not markedly reduced regional inequality in the past. (Gibbs, 1998, p. 367)

Considering the continued dominance of established interests on the boards of RDAs, it is likely that sustainable development will remain subsidiary to the overall aim of economic growth.

Parallel to the RDA, the Environment and Sustainability Team (EST) within the Government Office for the North East (GONE) plays a key role in defining the agenda for sustainable development. Yet the EST is limited by the service agreement set out between government offices in the regions and the UK government and by its obligation to deliver policy from two central government departments—the Department of Environment, Transport and the Regions (DETR) and the Department for Trade and Industry (DTI). It is not surprising that policy on sustainable development is watered down, as it is conflated with policy on competitiveness from the DTI.

Progress towards unravelling the precise meanings of sustainable development has been greater through Local Agenda 21 (LA21) strategies within local authorities. However, the LA21 process is under-resourced and marginal and remains the ‘poor relation’ in local authority structures (Hams & Christie, 1998). In the context of a declining council tax base and block grants in many large urban areas, its priority as a policy area is under threat. In many cases, LA21 receives little mainstream support amongst senior officers and is undermined by corporate strategic plans within local authorities. Moreover, statutory indicators and national and regional auditing already set the policy framework for LA21 and so there is little room for independent movement. In its present guise, LA21 is little more than a platform for existing policies, especially area-based strategies such as biodiversity action plans and health action zones which are effectively implementing LA21 objectives at the local level. What remains is little more than a public relations exercise rather than an innovative policy tool. The challenge for LA21 is to maintain a degree of autonomy to develop critical and radical ideas and mainstream these into the corporate centre.

Moving towards a Regional Sustainability Framework

In Newcastle upon Tyne and the North-east, the dominant strands of thinking behind sustainable development have been brought together through the establishment of a Regional Sustainable Development Round Table (RSDRT) in

1998, which, co-ordinated by the EST, represents about 30 organisations. The regional vision of the RSDRT reflects a similar juggling between competitiveness and sustainability:

A region with a high and sustainable quality of life for all its people. A world class globally competitive region. A region in which everyone has the opportunity to participate and excel. A region proud of our environment and of our management and enhancement of it. (RSDRT, 1999, p. 1)

While the RSDRT initially functioned as a ‘talking shop’, following guidance from the UK White Paper on Sustainable Development (DETR, 1999), a scaled down round table, *Sustaine*, was formed and developed a sustainable development framework for the North-east during the beginning of 2001. *Sustaine* consists of a 10-member board (comprised of one representative from GONE, the Regional Assembly, the RDA and the social/voluntary sector and two from the environmental, business and local authority sectors), with a secretariat provided by the new university sector to undertake basic research and give the process some credence. A stakeholder forum comprised of wider interest groups acts as a sounding board for *Sustaine*.

However, there are several shortcomings to this process, such as the restricted membership of the board, which largely comprises those in the established partnership network, a lack of a high-profile chairperson who could command the support of all sectors, a significant funding shortfall and a ‘watering down’ of policy as the principles of sustainable development and economic competitiveness are blended. In spite of this emerging framework for sustainable development, at present there is no clear agreement about what the concept means for policy at the local and regional levels. The dominant partnership network outlined above articulates sustainability alongside competitiveness and, as a result, policy is more about weak interpretations of sustainability which reinforce current models of economic development (Gibbs *et al.*, 1998) than about strong interpretations which promote new ways of organising economic and social life that are sensitive to local needs within the constraints of the natural environment. Reconciling these two tendencies will require “every organisation (and every individual) to reinvent itself in the light of new objectives, constraints and opportunities” (Tuxworth, 1996, pp. 294–295).

Some Problems Facing Local Policy Partnership Networks

The contested nature of sustainable development between stronger/ecological and weaker/technocratic positions creates serious problems for policy making. In Newcastle upon Tyne, as in most other places, policy partnership networks face a number of inherent tensions as they try to unravel what sustainable development means at the local level. Some of these are unique to Newcastle upon Tyne and its region, while some of them are more general, and they are outlined below.

Economic Development Is Not Sustainable Development

The traditional ground for local policy networks has been economic development in which environmental concerns and sustainable development play a peripheral part. While it is widely understood within the green movement that 'sustainable development' implies different priorities from conventional 'economic development', faced with a lack of guidance, experience or expertise it is understandable that many established policy networks are experiencing difficulties putting sustainable development at the centre of their strategies. As a result, moves toward sustainable development generally only occur when change is possible and practicable.

A dilemma for local policy networks, then, is that sustainable development "poses a far more serious challenge to many of society's most basic beliefs and analytical concepts than most mainstream planners and policy makers have been prepared to contemplate so far" (Rees, 1995, p. 28). In this sense, policy makers on sustainable development need to come to terms with the need for a 'paradigm shift':

The shift to sustainable development is primarily an ethical shift. It is not a technological fix, nor a matter of new financial investment. It is a shift in values such that nature is valued in itself and for its life support functions, not merely for how it can be converted into resources and commodities to feed the engine of economic growth. (Kothari, 1995, p. 250)

However, while sustainable development remains low down on the list of international, national and local priorities, there are few incentives to encourage ethical or lifestyle shifts or to confront powerful vested interests.

Speaking the Same Tongue?

Organisations with a stake in sustainable development are diverse and can be characterised by significant ideological differences and different priorities between, for example, the business, non-profit and environmental sectors. While these differences are to be expected, the challenge for formulating meaningful policy on sustainable development would be to create ways in which these different priorities and worldviews could, at the minimum, be explored and hopefully mutually understood. Many international examples exist where ideologically marginalised groups have entered into dialogue with the 'mainstream' to try to work towards meaningful resolutions. These include People's Global Action, which has brought attention to the injustices wrought by global institutions such as the World Trade Organization, and indigenous groups such as the Zapatistas in the Chiapas region of Mexico, who have forcefully made their case for greater economic, social and cultural self-determination.

In the case of Newcastle upon Tyne and the North-east there are few institutions or mechanisms to encourage debate on the whole spectrum of sustainable development, which results in a lowest common denominator approach to the issue and a sidelining of many of its central messages, especially

ethical ones. Having said that, it is important to ensure that where debate is generated it does ultimately enhance rather than detract from the understanding process. On a final note, Miller (1999) has outlined the longstanding problems of integrating the non-profit sector into local partnerships due to a clash of cultures with established organisations. There is also the further danger that incorporating marginal groups into established policy networks can often dilute some of their more radical aims and views.

Lack of Clarity

One of the few agreements within the sustainable development debate is that there is no clear agreement on what the term means and, as highlighted at the beginning of the paper, the term contains a number of opposing worldviews. Some groups are at the beginning of an understanding process and for them the term is new, complex and abstract, while others may have a clear and nuanced idea of what the term means for their life or work. However, many attempts to develop policy on sustainable development often render it more vague, contradictory and simplistic, which for many groups is part of its appeal.

While some views may never be reconciled, for example between deep greens and ecologists and planners and economic developers, there needs to be some framework which allows us to explore why these differences exist and to think through difficult questions facing each locality and region. Inevitably, this may involve some trade-offs and compromises, but at least it needs to go beyond using sustainable development as 'greenwash' for existing forms of economic development. Again, Newcastle upon Tyne and the North-east lack a culture of debate, which stems, in part, from the dependency culture associated with the region's industrial history and its marginalisation within the political, intellectual and social life of the nation.

Jobs at All Costs

Not surprisingly, many organisations within established policy networks have a 'jobs at all costs' outlook, which reduces debate on sustainable development to environmental issues. For instance, in relation to the Council for the Protection of Rural England's criticism of the erosion of the green belt, one council spokesperson commented: "they would have us go back to thatched cottages. We can't all have two acres and a cow. Jobs are a critical factor" (*The Journal*, 22 September 1999).

In this context, there is a need for a greater recognition that encouraging sustainable forms of development and providing jobs is not a zero-sum game; in fact they are increasingly interdependent. As long as sustainable development remains peripheral to front-line economic development issues, such a recognition remains difficult. Again, what are required are mechanisms and frameworks through which the interconnections between welfare provision, job creation, environmental and resource protection and quality of life can be explored and understood. However, this type of understanding is easier where tangible links can be made, in areas such as renewable energy, recycling and organic agricul-

ture. Serious problems arise when trying to square sustainable development with sectors which provide larger amounts of employment around the globe, such as petrochemicals, automobile manufacture, labour-intensive garment manufacture, extensive agriculture and electronics. However, organisations such as the New Economics Foundation (1999) have suggested a plethora of ways in which local economies can begin to be rebuilt through, for example, community enterprise schemes, credit unions, community trusts and banks, food co-operatives and vegetable box schemes, local renewable energy schemes, local exchange and trading society (LETS) schemes, community land trusts, managed workspaces, self-build housing, community gardens and allotments and socially responsible businesses.

Lack of Participation

Current policy on sustainable development is largely formulated by established partnership networks which follow guidance from central government. This process results in limited participation in policy formulation and the institutionalisation of certain versions of sustainable development. However, sustainable development is more than a set of policy levers; it implies a process which has wide-ranging implications for the 'how' and the 'who' of policy making. In this sense, it is a deeply political, as well as an economic and environmental, concept which is defined through broad participation, consultation and debate. However, the centralised nature of decision making in England has stifled broad participation and has created a democratic deficit in the English regions which is undermining the basis of sustainable development.

Various mechanisms do exist which could overcome such deficits and widen participation and debate, including: 'civic forums', as seen in Northern Ireland, Scotland and London; elected mayors; regional assemblies; round tables and commissions on sustainable development; and Local Agenda 21 structures. All of these examples have their limitations and could go further. For instance, some localities in the UK have drawn upon an iconoclastic figure or strong institutions for guidance and inspiration on sustainable development, such as Lord Thomas of Macclesfield in the North-west and Jonathon Porritt in the South-west. However, bearing in mind that a key aspect of sustainability is collective rather than individual decision making, over-dependency on key institutions and individuals may erode rather than reinforce broad participation. Further, considering the current low priority of sustainable development within local authorities and regional assemblies and development agencies, there is little reason to expect that policy making on sustainable development will be either given centre stage or extensively widened. For meaningful debate, established policy makers would have to take the step of drawing in groups outside established networks, such as third sector organisations, community associations and lobby, protest and campaign groups. Such broad participation and debate would have to be closely managed in order to translate it into meaningful outcomes.

Governance Structures

There is much talk of 'joined up' government as a way of overcoming the

problems of fragmentation and duplication and of implementing integrated planning. The need for 'joined up' thinking is increased in a broad-ranging policy arena like sustainable development, whose main aspects straddle three separate government departments; the DTI (the economy), the DETR (the environment) and the Department for Education and Employment (the social agenda) (Coulson, 1999). Implementing sustainable development requires going beyond the 'departmentalist' thinking of central government, in which resources and policies are channelled from Whitehall to localities and regions in the UK, by taking greater steps to integrate several areas of policy across, for example, economic development, transport and the environment.

Such problems are confounded by a diversity of messages sent out about sustainable development from different parts of the UK planning system, such as the single programming document, regional economic strategies, regional planning guidance, regional sustainable development frameworks and Local Agenda 21 strategies. Moreover, many parts of the planning system reflect a 'one size fits all' approach and remain vehicles for implementing national policy at the local or regional level rather than making policy sensitive to variations in local circumstances (Marquand & Tomaney, 2000). As public faith in current governance mechanisms continues to decrease in many quarters, directly elected regional assemblies could provide an effective way to implement accountable and effective policies for sustainable development. However, close scrutiny would be required to ensure that they prioritise rather than pay lip service to sustainable development.

Conclusions

The emergence of sustainable development within policy frameworks has opened up new possibilities to tackle a range of established problems, such as environmental degradation, under-employment and a lack of democratic participation. Moreover, round tables on sustainability, Local Agenda 21 initiatives, citizens' forums and the prospect of elected assemblies and mayors have created the potential for renewed dialogue and the exchange of ideas. Yet the prospects for developing a deeper understanding of sustainability remain unclear. The example of Newcastle upon Tyne shows that, due to the locality's marginalisation in the nation's social and political life, its legacy of industrial dependency and paternalism, its entrenched political culture of labourism and the precariousness of the region's economic fortunes, the potential for furthering such an understanding is not promising. Established policy networks are particularly entrenched and retain responsibility for putting into place policy on sustainable development. Moreover, such networks continue to be restricted by central government guidelines and as a result have limited scope for developing innovative and locally sensitive policy.

Although there has been some debate in the form of consultations on Local Agenda 21 strategies and regional sustainability frameworks, participation remains limited. For example, *Sustaine's* recent consultation exercise was limited to predefined 'stakeholder organisations'. In sum, the agenda for sustainable development remains largely set by central government and executed by

government representatives in regions and localities with little take up of new ideas, little recourse to groups outside established networks and little scope for rewriting the terms of the agenda. Moreover, emerging policy on sustainable development rests cheek by jowl with the policy imperatives of economic growth and competitiveness, is used to legitimate past models of economic development (Gibbs *et al.*, 1998) and so remains shorthand for 'business as usual'.

Developing mechanisms and institutions within localities and regions to actively engage a wider cross-section of the population in sustainable development is an important step in overcoming such limitations. As already mentioned, the prospect of devolution for the English regions may provide new resources for widening participation in decision making. Beyond this, though, a great deal of untapped skill and knowledge already exists and important lessons can be learnt from organisations and individuals involved in sustainability and regeneration at the local level. To name a few, these include residents' associations, parish councils, youth, ethnic and women's groups, church groups, credit unions, socially responsible businesses, alternative currency schemes, Local Agenda 21 groups, workers' and housing co-operatives, community forums and councils and environmental campaign groups such as Friends of the Earth and Greenpeace. Moreover, marginalised and dissenting voices from radical protest groups such as Earth First!, Reclaim the Streets and the Genetic Engineering Network, which use campaigning and direct action to raise awareness of ecological destruction, corporate domination and global inequality, can provide insightful and provocative visions well beyond current policy frameworks.

It is important that such groups establish wider networks across cities and regions to give a stronger voice to many marginal voices within the sustainability agenda. Many networks of this kind already exist in Newcastle upon Tyne and the North-east, such as the Campaign for a Regional Assembly, Voluntary Organisations Network North East, the Transport Activists Roundtable, North-East Environmental Link and subregional networks of LETS schemes, time banks and credit unions. Further, citizens' groups catalysed through local regeneration programmes such as New Deal for Communities are giving voices to many poor communities.

We have illustrated that there is much more to putting sustainable development into practice than is currently occurring within existing policy frameworks and the activities of established partnership networks. Localities are awash with individuals and organisations pioneering new understandings of the relationship between economy, environment and society, but these rarely get taken up by the established policy process. At the heart of sustainable development is the necessity to rethink governance and the 'how' and the 'who' of decision making. However, the extent to which established local policy networks are rising to the challenge and opening up to traditionally marginalised groups awaits to be seen.

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