

# CONNECTIONS

## PARTNERSHIP RESPONSES TO WORKLESSNESS

Post review report of Peer Review in Newcastle 19-20 January 2009



# PARTNERSHIP RESPONSES TO WORKLESSNESS

Post review report of Peer Review in Newcastle 19-20 January 2009

25 October 2009

Mikael Stigendal

Malmö University

Introduction .....	2
Organisation of the Review .....	2
Methodology of the Peer Review visit .....	4
1. Peer review subject .....	4
2. Background .....	5
3. Actors .....	7
4. Implementation, cooperation and coordination .....	9
5. Resources .....	10
6. Outcomes/results .....	10
7. Evaluation mechanisms .....	12
8. Future development and sustainability .....	12

## **Introduction**

Connections (Organisational approaches to the complexities of multiple deprivation at the city level) is a mutual learning project financed under the European Community Programme for Employment and Social Solidarity – PROGRESS (2007-2013). According to the project description, the project “focuses on reviewing successful governance structures in European cities and developing an innovative assessment model for peer reviewing organisational approaches to the complexities of multiple deprivation.” Hence, the first objective concerns reviewing governance structures. In order to succeed with that, the project aims to develop an innovative assessment model for peer reviewing and that constitutes the second objective.

The Connections project is lead by the City of Rotterdam. The other cities that participate are Leeds (UK), Vienna (A), Newcastle (UK), Malmö (S), Munich (D), Budapest (HU) and Oslo (NOR). Each city has appointed a team of three members, representing the local city administration, NGOs and the research community. Each city is also responsible for arranging a peer review. The review is carried out during a two days stay by team members (the peers) from the other cities. In order for the Peer Review Team (PRT) members to be able to prepare themselves, the host city writes a report on the subject of the review, called City Profile. One of the researchers is appointed to write a report of the review, also called the post review report. This is one of the post review reports and it deals with the Peer Review in Newcastle 19-20 January 2009.

## **Organisation of the Review**

The members of the Peer Review Team (PRT) for Newcastle are listed below:

<b>Name</b>	<b>City</b>	<b>Admini- stration</b>	<b>NGO</b>	<b>Research</b>	<b>Others</b>
Jos Maaskant	Rotterdam				Project management
Kris Luijsterburg	Rotterdam				Project management
Loenieke Schouwenburg	Rotterdam		x		
Tom Tudjman	Rotterdam			x	
Wiebe de Jong	Rotterdam			x	
Frans Moors	Rotterdam				Internal evaluator
Brit Håland	Oslo	x			
Fruzsina Baumann	Budapest		x		
Rosza Sajgal	Budapest	x			
Pia Hellberg-Lannerheim	Malmö	x			
Pernilla Lindörn Prabert	Malmö		x		
Mikael Stigendal	Malmö			x	
Angela Zeilinger	Munich	x			
Dianne Lyons	Leeds		x		
Gerhard Eitel	Vienna	x			
<b>Total</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>

The PRT consisted of 15 members, representing seven European cities. As the Connections project is made up of representatives for each local city administrations, NGOs and research community, the table contains information about the presence of these representatives as well.

The Newcastle Hosts:

- Abby Holder (Newcastle City Council), below referred to as the admin host.
- Keith Shaw (Researcher), below referred to as the research host.
- Heidi Jobling (NGO), below referred to as the NGO host.

The Peer Review Team (PRT) had the opportunity to meet the interviewees listed in the table below. Besides names and organisation, the table indicates to the left if the full team was present or only one of three groups. This division between full team and group sessions is explained in the next chapter on the review methodology. To the right, the table indicates what kind of partnership the person represents. The different kinds of partnership are presented in the chapter on the peer review subject and explained under “Actors”. A special indication is made in the table for the NGO representatives:

<b>PRT</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Organisation</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2a</b>	<b>2b</b>
Full team	Seth Pearson	Newcastle City Council	x		
Groups	Kerry Corbett	Newcastle City Council	x		
Groups	Simon Underwood	Newcastle City Council	x		
Full team	Neil Munslow	Newcastle City Council	x		
Groups	Greg Stone	Newcastle City Council – Councillor	x		
Groups	Shona Duncan	City Region	x		
Full team	Kehri Ellis	Newcastle Partnership	x		
Full team	Gillian Hewitson	Newcastle Futures	x		
Groups	Paul West	Jobcentre Plus	x		
Groups	Howard Forrest	North East Employer Coalition	x		
Groups	Roger Mould	Voluntary Service	NGO		
Full team	Hazel Lapidaki	Newcastle Futures		x	
Full team	Lesley Widdowson	Newcastle Futures		x	
Groups	Anthony Woods	Building Futures East		NGO	
Groups	?	Learning Links		NGO	
Groups	Janet Hunter	Northern Learning Trust		NGO	
Groups	Dawn Bolam and Gill Watson	Sure Start Children’s Centre			NGO
<b>Total</b>		<b>17</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>1</b>

## **Methodology of the Peer Review visit**

The Pre-Peer Review Report, below called City Profile, was provided by the Newcastle host five weeks before the visit. It should be praised for all the substantial amount of information about not only the peer review subject itself but also the context at different levels. The approach adopted during the two-day review included presentations from the research host and a number of representatives, semi-structured interviews with a range of representatives, planning as well as review meetings of the peer review team (PRT) and feed back to the Newcastle Hosts at the end of the review visit. Before it all started, short biographies were also provided by the admin host of all the interviewees. The full team attended the presentations, but the semi-structured interviews were made by groups of the PRT.

Prior to the peer review, the management of the Connections project had prepared a division of the PRT in three groups with a member of the Dutch team responsible for taking minutes in each group. In this way, the management wanted to make sure that minutes were taken. Hence, the author of this report has benefitted from three sets of comprehensive notes.<sup>1</sup>

A drawback in the Newcastle approach was that the PRT didn't get the opportunity to discuss the design of the peer review, including the group divisions, at the outset. Only 30 minutes were left at the disposal for the PRT as preparation time and not at the outset but after the two first presentations from representatives. This shortage of preparation time led to a certain randomness in the choice of questions during the interviews.

In contrast to the previous peer review in Malmö, the approach in Newcastle contained not only group interviews but also presentations for the full team. In that way, the approach in Newcastle combined the two previous ones in Malmö and Leeds, where in the latter the PRT were kept together for all of the sessions. This combination was one of the merits in Newcastle. Moreover, the host had managed to assemble an impressive set of representatives for the presentations and interviews. The PRT had the privilege to meet with a variety of representatives.

### **1. Peer review subject**

In the City Profile, the Peer Review Team (PRT) was asked to “consider Newcastle’s response to high levels of worklessness in the city.” “Specifically, the peer review will explore and focus upon a partnership approach to addressing gaps in mainstream service provision, focusing on those who are furthest from the labour market.” This partnership approach is called Newcastle Futures, a company limited by guarantee, established by the Newcastle Partnership.

The Peer Review Team had some difficulties to understand the subject, in particular the boundaries of it and some further questions were asked at the forum of the Connections web site, prior to the peer review. In a first response, the subject was specified by the admin host:

*I see this as a review of Newcastle’s approach to tackling worklessness and in particular, the role of Newcastle Futures in this. When the city profile says the review will ‘focus on a partnership approach’ we are asking you to look at the structures and relationships that have been established to address worklessness and which operate at a number of levels involving Newcastle Futures, the Newcastle Partnership, the City Council, statutory agencies, the voluntary and community sector and the private sector.*

In a second response at the Connections forum, ‘partnership responses’ was suggested by the host as an “overarching theme”. On the basis of the City Profile and these discussions at the Connections forum, the PRT agreed about the following definition of the subject: **The partnership responses to tackling worklessness and in particular, the role of Newcastle Futures in this.**

The definition raised questions about boundaries. The peer review subject in Newcastle is not a project. Nor is it an area-based initiative. While some other subjects reviewed by the Connections project have been targeted on a small spatial area and others has had organisational boundaries, how

---

<sup>1</sup> Notes from the group interviews were taken and sent by Loenieke Schouwenburg, Tom Tadjman and Jos Maaskant. In addition, notes have been sent from Brit Håland and Pia Hellberg-Lannerheim.

should the boundaries of the peer review subject in Newcastle be understood? What exactly should be included in the subject and what should not?

The main challenge with the definition of the peer review subject is its abstract character. We could understand that “partnership responses to tackling worklessness” exist but where and how? The definition doesn’t make the subject possible to point out. However, the City Profile contains a suggestion. It is suggested that “relationships between Newcastle Futures and the different actors can be seen as existing in three levels of partnership”:

- 1) Partners who have a strategic role in addressing worklessness.
- 2) Partners that Newcastle Futures commissions services from.
- 3) Partners that supports the work of Newcastle Futures.

Such a division seems consistent with the definition of the peer review subject. Firstly, it guides us of what to look at concretely in reviewing “partnership responses to tackling worklessness”. Secondly, it doesn’t put the boundaries around Newcastle Futures as a whole, but focuses more specifically on the partnerships included. Thus, we are not urged to look at Newcastle Futures as an organisation but the partnership responses to tackling worklessness that take concrete shape with Newcastle Futures as the driving force.

But is the division sufficient or should the peer review subject be regarded as consisting of more levels? The PRT did really struggle with that question and so has the author of this report done afterwards. This has resulted in a reconsideration of the three levels into three kinds of partnership. In order to facilitate the references to them throughout the report they have also been given names:

- 1) Strategic partnerships
- 2a) Delivery partnerships
- 2b) Supportive partnerships

These three kinds of partnership and the divisions between them will be further explained in the chapter on “Actors”. The division concretizes the abstract mentioning of partnership responses in the definition. However, partnership responses is only the first element in the definition. It’s not partnership responses in general we have been reviewing, but the ones to tackling worklessness. Thus, worklessness is the second element which has to be dealt with in this report.

## **2. Background**

According to the researcher host Keith Shaw, “Newcastle contains some of the most deprived and some of the most affluent neighbourhoods in England.” Shaw also related in his presentation some of the background to this social and economic polarisation. However, the existence of polarisation doesn’t explain why there is a focus on only one of the poles. It doesn’t follow inevitably from polarisation that only one of the poles has to be focused upon. The focus could just as well been widened to cover both poles. Instead, the focus on only one of the poles stems from a certain understanding which has its own background.

For that reason, there are two backgrounds. The City Profile contains a lot of information about the first background to “partnership responses to tackling worklessness”. It refers to the Index of Multiple Deprivation and presents figures on employment rate, claimants for out of work benefits, long-term claimants as well as children living in families where no one works. The PRT has taken the accuracy of these figures and facts for granted. Indeed, we haven’t had the time and opportunity to question them. It falls beyond the purpose of this report.

Instead, this report will deal with the second background to “partnership responses to tackling worklessness”. What is the background to this particular understanding of the problems? When was worklessness made an issue? By whom? Why tackling worklessness and not something else? The City Profile defines worklessness with regards to the International Labour Organisation (ILO) definition of the unemployed. In addition to the unemployed, “the count of workless individuals incorporates those

who are without work due to ill health or disability. Thus, the definition defines a person as workless if there is evidence from the benefit system that they are involuntarily out of work”.<sup>2</sup>

The City Profile relates the worklessness issue to Welfare to Work, the agenda which the Labour government has put at the basis of its initiatives. Welfare to Work is associated with the international tendency in social policy called workfare and which stems from US welfare policy. According to another ILO-report, one written by Nanna Kildal, workfare programmes, firstly, oblige able-bodied recipients, secondly, to work in return for their benefits, thirdly, on terms inferior to comparative work in the labour market and fourthly, are essentially linked to the lowest tier of public income maintenance systems.<sup>3</sup> The opposite pole to workfare is the traditional Scandinavian welfare policy with its emphasis on rights and opportunities rather than duties and sanctions.

According to the City Profile, worklessness was identified by the Newcastle Partnership in 2006 as its top priority. However, it seems to be a decision very much imposed from above by the Labour government. As the research host Keith Shaw put it in his presentation, there is a “strong central ‘steer’ for local authorities (such as Newcastle) to take action.” On the basis of the Welfare to Work agenda and through various programmes, including funding (which will be dealt with later), the government seems to have made the worklessness issue quite imperative to adopt. For example, worklessness is identified in the governments programme “The National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal”, launched in 2001, and further emphasised in “A new deal for welfare: Empowering people to work”, the paper published in 2006.

That applies to the approach with partnership responses as well. In the City Profile, the approach is explained against the background of competition between previous providers. No incentives existed for providers to work together, as one of the interviewees explained:

*Because there was a lot of competition between these organizations, there came a need for coordination. Also the competitive structure resulted in a focus on the upper level of worklessness and not the real tough group. That is why Newcastle Futures was created to work on a collaborative way and reaching for those far-away of the labourmarket.<sup>4</sup>*

However, although the need was felt at the local level of a collaborative approach, the UK Government has put pressure on local partners as well to adopt such approaches. The Government’s paper “A new deal for welfare: Empowering people to work”, published in 2006, “included a clear expectation that partnership responses would be developed at a local level to address worklessness”.<sup>5</sup> As the City Profile concludes, “the Newcastle Futures initiative was in part, a response to this”.

But the Government lies also behind the most powerful strategic partnership. Under the current Labour Government non-statutory bodies have been set up at local levels, called Local Strategic Partnership. The idea is to bring together the different parts of the public, private, voluntary and community sectors. In Newcastle this Local Strategic Partnership is called the Newcastle Partnership. Thus, in order to understand the background of the partnership approach, the national level has to be considered as well and not only the local level. That is made clear in the City Profile. However, the background goes further than that.

The partnership approach should be regarded as part of an international trend, usually conceptualized as governance. One of the other researchers in the Connections project, Evelyn Dyb, has suggested a definition of governance launched by Paul Hirst. He makes a distinction between five different aspects of governance. Dyb highlights the fourth aspect which concerns the increase of new public management strategies and the fifth where governance ...

*“... relates to the new practice of coordinating activities through networks, partnerships, and deliberative forums that have grown up on the ruins of the more centralised and hierarchical corporatist representation of the period of the 1970ies. Such negotiated social governance is growing in salience; typically it is to be found at micro – and meso – level in cities, regions and*

---

<sup>2</sup> City Profile p 3.

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/protection/ses/info/publ/workfare.htm>

<sup>4</sup> Notes by Jos Maaskant.

<sup>5</sup> City Profile p 8.

*industrial sectors. It embraces a diverse range of actors, labour unions, trade associations, firms, NGOs, local authority representatives, social entrepreneurs and community groups”.*

Dyb refers to other researchers who cautions against equating governance with the withdrawal of the central state. Governance could also be understood as an adaption of the central state. Concerning partnership responses in Newcastle, the PRT perceived the influence of the Government as strong. The pressure put on local partners by the UK Government to adopt partnership approaches, as referred to above, is an important background. It seems that the central state remains powerful although the way it exercises power has changed.

### 3. Actors

As mentioned in the chapter on the peer review subject, the City Profile suggests a division in three levels of partnership. The division is consistent with the definition but not sufficient. It doesn't reflect the divisions of power properly. Two reconsiderations have to be done. Firstly, no priority should be given to Newcastle Futures at the first level but it has to be regarded as comprising strategic actors in general. Secondly, the second and third level in the division above should be regarded as a second level, solely, but divided in two parts, called 2a and 2b. Thus, the two parts of level 2 have their foothold in Newcastle Futures, but that is not the case with level one. The figure below presents the kinds of partnership and how they are related to each other in terms of power:

Power level



The first kind of partnership, the strategic partnership, consists of partners who have a strategic role in addressing worklessness. Besides Newcastle Futures and according to the City Profile, that includes Jobcentre Plus, Learning and Skills Council, North East Employers Coalition (NEEC), The City Council and the Local Strategic Partnership (Newcastle Partnership). In the division suggested by the City Profile, all of them belong to the one and the same level of power.

However, such a compound could be questioned. At least on three occasions in the City Profile, the sovereignty of the City Council is highlighted. Firstly, the City Council is presented as the lead player in the Newcastle Partnership. Secondly, Newcastle Futures is chaired by a councillor. Thirdly, the commissioning criteria that have been issued endow the City Council with a strategic oversight. For that reason, the partners at the level of strategic partnerships shouldn't be understood as equals. One of the partners stands out in terms of power and that is the City Council.

Another important actor, however not mentioned in the enumeration above of strategic partners, is the "Tyne and Wear City Region". It's described by the City Profile as a partnership of all five Tyne and Wear local authorities, (Newcastle, Gateshead, Sunderland, North Tyneside and South Tyneside), together with Northumberland and Durham. Its mission is to tackle worklessness across a wider geography. According to notes taken from one of the interviews, "though the City Region has some funds of its own to distribute to the 13 local authorities in the region, its main focus is to build bridges between different partners in the region and between the region and the national level."<sup>6</sup> Both Newcastle Partnership and Newcastle Futures are partners for the City Region which has an expertise to grasp opportunities from the national level. Besides helping local authorities to get money from national funding, it works on setting up partnerships but also on evaluating existing ones and new

---

<sup>6</sup> Notes by Jos Maaskant.

policies as well as the ways in which these policies are implemented. The City Region itself gets funded from the national Department of Work and Pensions.

The City Region has to be seen as a strategic partner, belonging to the first kind of partnership. The other kinds of partnership belong to a second level of power. The delivery partnerships include “mostly Voluntary and Community Sector organisations who provide services via a contract with Newcastle Futures”, while the supportive partnerships consists of partners “who have a remit which is wider than the employability agenda but who can support the delivery of this work”.<sup>7</sup> At the first level of power, Newcastle Futures operates as a partner among partners. But at the second level of power, Newcastle Futures could be described as a foothold to both these kinds of partnership.

Groups of the PRT got the opportunity to visit three delivery partners and one supportive partner. One of the delivery partners is Northern Learning Trust, an NGO with a staff of 25 which started out 8 years ago as an organization to improve literacy.

*Now they offer a wider service off different employment trainings. They work with the hardest to reach people to support them in their first steps back to learning and in the future working. They work on one to one bases and in small groups. The organization finds its clients via hear so, from other partners, through the customer coordinators and because most people know the organization.<sup>8</sup>*

Another one of the delivery partners is Learning Links, based in the West End of Newcastle, which started 10 years ago to support the minorities in the neighbourhoods. Later on they were reorganized to address problems regarding “all negative things in life” and to support people with learning opportunities, for example how to apply for jobs. Learning Links gives a lot of attention to the wellbeing of clients and their health. They get funded for bringing people closer to the labour market. Learning Links is a well known organization which reaches many clients through personal contacts. Also, they get referred to by the job agencies. Moreover, they meet clients on job fare or on the coffee mornings they organize in the neighbourhoods.

Building Futures East is also a delivery partner to Newcastle Futures. It’s situated in a deprived area called Walker on the east of Newcastle. It works in the neighbourhood at what the interviewee describes as “below the local level .... young people living in these neighbourhoods come from families where, for generations, nobody has worked.”<sup>9</sup> Building Futures East offers them important skills such as some basic education and employment training. However, the young people have to be motivated to work upon themselves. Also, Building Futures East brings employers and community together. The employers are asked what skills they need and Building Futures East then works with their clients on those skills. Educational programs are tailor-made which normally starts with a practical experience, such as going kayaking. “They see it as a sports day, but implicit they learn about work ethics, such as being there on time etc.”<sup>10</sup>

One of the supportive partners is the Sure Start Children’s Centre Cowgate and Blakelaw. It’s run by the NCH, a national children’s charity, where the staff is employed but the money comes from the national Educational Department, though mediated by the local government. Sure Start Children’s Centre offers a wide range of services:

*They offer child care (nursery), Ante Natal groups (before birth), breastfeeding training, as well as other services. For example, they provide a training called ‘Positive parenting’ to support (young) parents to build up a relationship with their child(ren). Furthermore, there are other services such as confidence building, all kinds of support for parents and their children, learning skills to qualify for education or work. All services are voluntarily and free of charge (except for child care). People can walk into the SSCC and ask for them. Often customers are referred to the SSCC by health visitors, but most walk in from the streets themselves without being referred. There are 15 SSCC’s in Newcastle, with 4 more to come by 2010.<sup>11</sup>*

---

<sup>7</sup> City Profile p 18.

<sup>8</sup> Notes by Loenieke Schouwenburg.

<sup>9</sup> Notes by Tom Tudjman.

<sup>10</sup> Notes by Tom Tudjman.

<sup>11</sup> Notes by Jos Maaskant.

#### **4. Implementation, cooperation and coordination**

The decision to establish Newcastle Futures, also as a company limited by guarantee, was taken in 2006 by Newcastle partnership, thus at the first level of power. According to the contribution in the City Profile by the NGO host, “the decision to make Newcastle Futures a limited company was questioned and raised as a concern by the Council for Voluntary Service but it went ahead”.<sup>12</sup> Obviously, this decision has been controversial.

Why was Newcastle Futures made a limited company? On what grounds were that decision questioned? What other alternatives were there? Why weren't any of them chosen? Those questions had to remain unanswered, mainly due to the lack of NGO representatives among the interviewees. Regarding strategic partnerships, only one interviewee represented the NGO sector:

*On paper we are equal but we have no influence on for example setting the agenda. We don't have any money so there is not really a power balance. Our work comes down to reacting on the decisions that are being made, but most of the things that matter are discussed outside of the meetings. Sometimes they will listen to us and sometimes not. But still here it is better than in other regions.*<sup>13</sup>

What we do know from the City Profile is that organisations at the second level of power have to accept subordination to Newcastle Futures and Newcastle City Council:

*All successful organisations will be expected to work closely with, and accept strategic oversight from, Newcastle Futures and Newcastle City Council. All are expected to collaborate with other organisations pursuing the employability agenda within Newcastle. Commissioned activity will need to be evidence based.*

But what about the other way around? Who are Newcastle Futures accountable to and how? This question stems from the NGO host and it appears in the City Profile. Similarly and also in the City Profile, the research host wants to know how Newcastle City Council ensures the political accountability of Newcastle Futures. Unfortunately, these are questions that remain to be answered.

Important to mention is the difficulties the PRT had to grasp the peer review subject. It hasn't been easy to understand. That is also an important aspect of how power may operate. If it is difficult to understand it certainly becomes difficult to do something about. Another related aspect is the lacking definition of partnership, yet one of the core concepts. One of the interviewees described a partnership as “basically every form of collaboration to a certain, not necessarily predefined purpose.”<sup>14</sup> As a member of the PRT wrote, “the concept of partnership is defined differently by different partners and contains everything from cooperation to formal agreements. Also, some defines the concept differently due to what partner they talk about.”<sup>15</sup>

Accordingly, the lacking definition of partnership is a point which needs critical attention, but obviously this hasn't prevented partnership building at the second level of power. The PRT was impressed by the scope of partnership solutions developed. In general, the partnerships set up by Newcastle Futures addresses clients who other agencies find it hard to reach. Another characteristic is the holistic view. Although getting people into work is the main objective, the partnerships also help people on other terrains, such as housing, homelessness, drugs, health etc. The policy behind Newcastle Futures partnership is described by one of the interviewees as “working on multiple deprivations at the same time”.

An example is the supportive partnership with the Sure Start Children's Centre (SSCC). The SSCC is not directed primarily by the employability agenda, but it provides several services to support the employability of people in the area, especially lone parents and families. This is how they feed into the efforts of Newcastle Futures.

---

<sup>12</sup> City Profile p 7.

<sup>13</sup> Notes by Loenieke Schouwenburg.

<sup>14</sup> Notes by Jos Maaskant.

<sup>15</sup> Notes by Brit Håland.

*Therefore, NF tries to deliver its services 'through' the SSCC's clientele and network. NF caseworkers go out to the SSCC and offer their services 'on location', mostly to young parents. Often these mothers come from families with generations of unemployment. They have no (hope for) education, no job (opportunities). It's this group NF tries to reach by working together with the SSCC.<sup>16</sup>*

## **5. Resources**

As mentioned in the previous chapters, the national government has put a strong pressure on local actors to tackle worklessness as well as to develop partnership responses. Indeed, funding conditions seems to be the most powerful tool for the national government to deploy. This has to be understood against the background of weak local governments in the UK, in particular compared to the strong municipal autonomy in the Scandinavian countries where the welfare state traditionally has been characterised as redistributive and general. In contrast, the much more centralised rule in the UK is associated with a welfare state traditionally characterised as residual and selective.

For this reason, vigorous and extraordinary efforts are dependent on national funding to a higher extent in the UK than for example in the Scandinavian countries. Following that, a local council like Newcastle has to adapt to the funding conditions set by the national government. According to the City Profile and interviews, these funding conditions have been tighten up with the introduction of the Working Neighbourhoods Fund (WNF), launched in December 2007 and replacing the previous Neighbourhood Renewal Fund. As mentioned in the City Profile, "with the fund comes a recognition that worklessness needs to be tackled on a community wide basis and should help not only those claiming Jobseeker's Allowance but other workless groups including those on Incapacity Benefit and lone parents."<sup>17</sup>

According to one of the interviewees, the WNF has implied a shift from policy fields to priority groups, clearly defined by the national government. That includes the homeless, lone parents, workless families and people on incapacity benefits. Although the WNF has its main focus on worklessness and low levels of skill, the fact is also recognized that this requires support in other areas of life as well. While Newcastle Partnership was responsible for overseeing the allocation of the previous fund, the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund, the decisions about how to allocate the WNF rests with the City Council. This seems to have strengthened the power of the City Council on behalf of the NGO organisations. As one of the NGO representatives said, "everything is going into the Working Neighbourhoods Fund. The council likes to have a lot to say in the funding they give. We cannot make any changing in the spending without consulting them. It is almost like you have to beg them for money."<sup>18</sup>

## **6. Outcomes/results**

According to the City Profile, "since Newcastle Futures launched in April 2007, it has made considerable progress in moving unemployed people into work".<sup>19</sup> This statement is sustained by reference to a number of figures. As in the case of the background, the peer review and this report won't question the figures. We haven't had the time and opportunity. Nor do we regard it as part of our mission. Instead and in accordance with the second background referred to earlier, this report will focus on the understanding of the results and the deficiencies it reveals.

The figures presented seem convincing. Newcastle Futures has obviously been successful in moving unemployed people into work. However, the presentation also indicates the narrow understanding of the problems. Consequently, nothing is said about what kind of jobs the unemployed get or for how long they remain employed. The reality behind the figures remains absent. And yet, according to the

---

<sup>16</sup> Notes by Jos Maaskant.

<sup>17</sup> City Profile, p 21.

<sup>18</sup> Notes by Loenieke Schouwenburg.

<sup>19</sup> City Profile p 22.

latest *Monitoring poverty and social exclusion* by the Joseph Rowntree foundation, working poverty has increased:

*The number of working age adults in low-income working families – ‘in-work’ adult poverty – has jumped in the last two years, now fully one million above where it was in the mid-1990s and also, probably for the first time, higher than ‘out-of-work’ adult poverty.<sup>20</sup>*

The City Profile quotes the evaluation report which mentions that “Newcastle Futures Limited has in place access to a data base by which it can see if those going through its programmes have retained their jobs and if their wage levels are increasing.” Unfortunately, no questions were asked by the PRT about this. It would have been very interesting to know whether the Newcastle Futures uses this information, to what extent and how.

However, in the City Profile it seems that success is only measured on the basis of job placements. But what if the measures lead to an even worse poverty, in accordance with the findings of the Rowntree foundation? One could perhaps expect that such a prospect would lead to some rethinking concerning how to define the problems. However, the PRT didn’t notice any signs of such a rethinking.

Another shortage concerns the partnership issue. As mentioned in the City Profile and quoted above, Newcastle Futures represents a fundamental shift from a competitive to a collaborative approach. Moreover, in the chapter on problem identification, the City Profile emphasises the lack of a partnership approach as the second of two major problems, the first one being worklessness. Yet, nothing is mentioned in the City Profile about results in this respect and it didn’t belong to what the consultants Rocket Science was asked to evaluate.

The approach in Newcastle certainly represents a forceful response but how could it be sustained that partnerships bear the responsibility for it when no attention has been paid to how the partnerships have worked? How do we know that the use of the word partnership doesn’t serve just as a concealing label for a response which strictly speaking has a top-down essence? Indeed, this is difficult to know due to the lack of results presented about how the partnerships have worked. For that reason, it has been an important task for the PRT to have an opinion about it on the basis of the interviews and the field visits.

Indeed, the PRT sensed confiding and mutually rewarding relations. One of the NGO representatives referred to a lot of benefits, described as a “joined up approach to move people through the system back to work. It is a strong network which works in the best interest of the client. The customer coordinator helps the client find the right organisation to support them. The organisations in the partnership will refer clients to each other if they will be helped better there.”<sup>21</sup> Instead of working separately to meet their targets, the organisations now work together which takes the pressure away and enables them to concentrate on the best interest of the client. Also other NGO partners praise the approach and the cooperation with Newcastle Futures.

*NF-advisors are really helpful. They do outreaching work at a time people need them. This is new, compared to for example Jobcentre Plus, where people have to go to them to get a service, which is a higher threshold.<sup>22</sup>*

According to several of the interviewees, the success depends on the shift from a competitive to a collaborative approach.

*In the past all the partners worked separately and everybody was working to make their own targets. Now we work together to make the overall targets. This takes the pressure away off the separate organizations and we all concentrate on the client’s best interest.<sup>23</sup>*

The collaborative approach has enabled partners involved to meet on regular bases. The project managers meet to discuss how to work together and to make changes while the staff shares practical information and experiences. It’s taken a while for the partners to learn to work together but according

---

<sup>20</sup> Joseph Rowntree Foundation (December 2008) Findings, p 4.

<sup>21</sup> Notes by Loenieke Schouwenburg.

<sup>22</sup> Notes by Jos Maaskant.

<sup>23</sup> Notes by Jos Maaskant.

to a interviewee, it's constantly improving. According to another one of the NGO representatives, Newcastle Futures serves as the kind of umbrella organization which NGO organizations have asked for in the past. Clients no longer have to go from one organization to another, as in the past.

On the basis of the interviews, the PRT got the impression that the partners feel equal. This is an important point but it's also important to highlight the boundaries of this equality. The influence and equality is confined to the second level of power, among the delivery and supportive partnerships. It doesn't stretch out to the strategic issues and the basic framework. Within this framework, the partners are allowed to have an influence, but the decisions about the framework itself are taken top-down. As one of the NGO representatives puts it, "conflicts exit between the strategic and local level. Funding does not always get where it is needed, because policy makers are not aware of things happening on the local and below local level."<sup>24</sup> To local actors it may seem that the City Council is at the top of the hierarchy but one of councillor points further up in the hierarchy, as "'power' and 'freedom' is still decided by national level. The way to decentralization is slowly started."<sup>25</sup>

## **7. Evaluation mechanisms**

According to the City Profile, an evaluation has been made by a limited company called Rocket Science. The author of this report has been given access to a draft version of the evaluation report, finalised in June 2008. It's not particularly encompassing, indicated by for example its number of words which falls far below of this report and each one of the other reports in the Connections project as well.

According to the City Profile, approximately £10,000,000 (more than 11 million Euro) will be allocated from the Working Neighbourhoods Fund to spend on employability activity within the Newcastle Futures model over the three years, 2008-11. The report from Rocket Science indicates that just a tiny share has been spent on evaluation. For example, in-depth interviews were made with present and past directors of Newcastle Futures, staff, delivery partners and key stakeholders, but not with users.

The PRT finds it surprising that the users haven't been listened to in the evaluation. According to the City Profile "Newcastle Futures also use a variety of ongoing feedback mechanisms such as telephone/postal surveys for customers and partners, exit interview with customers, recording and reviewing of compliments and complaints. Following completion of surveys, results are collated and reviewed by a review group lead by the Coordinator Manager and Partnership Manager. Depending upon the nature of the feedback it is used to influence service design or policy development."

Fair enough and the PRT did get the impression that Newcastle Futures listens to the users, but such internal feedback mechanisms can't fully replace an external evaluator. Some issues need to be dealt with on an independent basis, for example regarding the rights of the users. How are such rights protected? To what extent are the users forced to accept the offers? How does the balance sheet look like between carrots and sticks? The neglect of user interest in the evaluation makes it difficult to know.

## **8. Future development and sustainability**

Future development and sustainability – but of what? As shown by this report, the subject could be described as a top-down initiative. The definition of the issue, the targets, how it should be tackled and the funding of it, is decided from the top, though not in all its details. As one of the interviewees said, "the national government more or less decides what to do, whereas local authorities are free to decide how to do it." Obviously, such a characteristic applies to all the levels from top to down. Most of the partners are not allowed to have an influence on what to do, but only how to do it.

---

<sup>24</sup> Notes by Tom Tudjman.

<sup>25</sup> Notes by Tom Tudjman.

*The fact is that the local government now thinks that partnerships can handle every problem. But they have not thought it over what a good partnership is: what works as partnerships and what do not? This is what we have to learn. Important elements in a good partnership are: power and responsibility. These elements have to be in balance. In the national policy you see a slightly shift to a more decentralization. But that is a long process and firstly it results on the local level in getting more responsibility. But what to do with a lot of responsibility and less power?*<sup>26</sup>

These concerns stem from one of the interviewees who highlights appropriately the issue at stake. A good partnership has to consist of balances between power and responsibility. Obviously, such a balance doesn't exist between the national and local level. Nor does such a balance exist between the first and second level of power within the initiative in Newcastle.

However, in the final assessment of the peer review subject, the distinction between levels of power seems crucial to rely on because at the second level of power, the partnerships seem to work generally well. This was also a general conclusion drawn by the PRT members in the final discussion. Indeed, a group of PRT members described it as a "fascinating partnership that seems to work excellent" and given this restriction to the second level of power, all the PRT members would probably subscribed to that.

In order to make the initiative as a whole sustainable, the partners involved in these partnerships should be carefully nurtured and also empowered, strictly speaking. It is a matter of democracy, but also of efficiency, because it would make the voices of the users better heard and thus enable more effective decisions about how to tackle the causes of the problems. As Claude Jacquier puts it in a recently published article on urban governance,

*it is a question of finding a form of democracy which is fit for purpose, effective, and able to take on board the transformations at work in our societies, in order to give the players who occupy this frontier territory of new cities their rightful place.*<sup>27</sup>

What impact does the worklessness agenda have on the approach to the individuals? And what do the strategic partners know about that? Probably not much, because the users are weakly represented in the strategic partnerships and, furthermore, they haven't been listened to in the evaluation. A more powerful representation of the users would probably also put the social structures on the agenda, for example the way the council functions, attitudes and discrimination, the structure of the labour market etc. Basically, it would allow both poles in the polarisation to be taken into consideration.

*Millions of pounds have already gone into this initiative and have been earmarked for the next 3 years. In today's economic climate how realistic is it to have an emphasis on getting people back to work when the North East is still recovering from the loss of major industries – shipbuilding, mining. Where are the people going to be employed?*

The quote stems from the NGO host and is included in the City Profile. Her final question should be regarded as highly relevant and taken seriously. It urges on a broadened focus which includes the social structures of society.

---

<sup>26</sup> Notes by Tom Tudjman.

<sup>27</sup> Claude Jacquier, <http://urbact.eu/thematic-poles/social-inclusion-and-governance/pole-presentation/urban-governance-forging-a-path-between-complications-and-complexity.html>

**Disclaimer** This project has received funding from the European Community Programme for Employment and Social Solidarity – PROGRESS (2007-2013). The European Commission is not responsible for any use that may be made of the information contained herein. It does not necessarily reflect its view and in no way anticipates the Commission’s future policy in this area. The publishers of this document cannot accept responsibility for any errors or omissions, or for any damage or loss sustained as a result of information in this document or of use of information from their site.



Social protection &  
social inclusion: Activities



DG Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities

