Examining the Paradigm Shifts and Challenges of British New Towns

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I. Introduction

'New Town' refers predominately to towns which were developed after the Second World War (Carmona, 2013). The New Towns Act of 1946 allowed the government to designate 32 British New Towns which were all developed within the years of 1946 to 1970. The main purpose of New Towns was built as a remedy to relieve the surplus population living in overcrowded, congested, and industrialized inner London by scattering the over-spilling population settlements (Heraud, 1966).

New Towns have played an important role in achieving and establishing new settlements in a very short period of time providing houses, jobs, and facilities to over two million people. It attracted the most talented and creative professionals, but also inspired similar urban development models around the world. During that time, it was highly celebrated for its innovative achievement (Alexander, 2009).

New Towns are coming to their 60th and 80th anniversaries, meaning the towns are reaching the end of its design life. They are struggling to keep up with the changing society as they were built using experimental design with non-standard methods which have not endured the test of age. Since they were all built at similar time periods, deterioration is occurring simultaneously meaning they now require vast amounts of new investment and redevelopment. Unlike other urban areas, massive refurbishment is needed at once, rather than small pockets of areas. This paper attempts to identify the problems have occurred and lessons that can be learned to be applied to the designs and re-development of New Towns of the future.

II. Methodology

The primary objective of this research is to question the existing representation of the New Towns and to provide an overview of the paradigm shifts to identify the challenges faced by the British New Towns. Having a thorough understanding of the history and political changes is crucial for this research to understand the reasoning behind the current declining state of the New Towns.

A research trip was carried out to the New Towns in the UK. Information was obtained through site visits as well as interviews with professors and professionals in this field of study. A qualitative field study was conducted in 3 different New Towns, Stevenage, Milton Keynes, and Warrington as well as statistics obtained from the National Institute of Statistics to perform comparative charts to look at the evolution of these towns. The data of multiple deprivation levels, occupation structure changes, employment, age, housing types and price, annual income, as well as commuting patterns will be utilized to provide evidence for identifying challenges of the New Towns.

III. Results

New Towns were sold as Utopian towns for an ideal life providing homes and jobs. It was an economic success, but realistically, it was an efficient and inexpensive solution for the government at the time to resolve the overcrowding problems and worked successfully in that sense. Unfortunately, the emphasis was on cheap, and the residents now have to live with the consequences of poor quality and poorly aged infrastructure, low opportunities for education and employment, experimental housing designs, and insufficient financial support to maintain the 'non-standard' towns.

The New Towns were built on the basis of continuous massive financial support, with the previously wealthy Development Corporation. However, with the end of the Development Corporation and the New Town Movement, the responsibilities were transferred to the local authority with no provision made

for future funding for improvements.

Therefore, lacked the considerations of the future and predicting the shifts in character which resulted in the current problems of the ageing new towns. The intentions when planning were obviously for the good as the social criteria for New Towns were good quality affordable housing, provision of community social capital and community facilities, and creation of socially mixed and balanced communities (Reith Committee, 1946).

However, the twentieth century was a time of industrialization, where there was a massive social change due to technological advancement which changed the way we live. Yet, the New Towns were not planned to be able to adapt to change because it was planned in the way people were expected to live rather than the way the people wanted to live. New Towns now struggle because they were mostly products of the state's decision and from a single urban planning period. Compared to historic grown towns, New Towns lack the ability to adapt to change.

As for low opportunities for education and employment, the primary source of employment at the time was limited to the industrial sector. Initially, what drew people to New Towns were the opportunity to live in a spacious house with a beautiful green garden away from the overcrowded London was the predominate pull. Since the development was centred around housing and employment, this meant a house and a job was guaranteed as you moved to the New Towns.

In today's society, individuals are more geographically mobile than before. Therefore, it is increasingly difficult to establish an 'integrated community' as people identify less with their local community or neighbourhood (DCLG, 2006). Without the sense of identity and integration, the New towns are at risk of becoming a commuter town and creating more serious problems of urban decay. Due to the negative perceptions, attracting sufficient educational institutions and attracting businesses have failed in many instances. Therefore have caused a considerable gap between businesses needed in terms of jobs and skills available locally, and difficulties finding and retaining highly skilled workers.

They are being perceived as an unpleasant place to live due to out-of-date infrastructure, deteriorating areas, and ageing houses. Economic is essential for a town to attract inhabitant and generate wealth. With the economic and social changes, the structure of the original intentions of the town of a balanced and self-sustaining has become vulnerable.

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