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Regeneration in Vulnerable Communities: Resident and Stakeholder Perspectives

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Abstract

This article assesses the implementation of a regeneration programme in a disadvantaged area in the south of Ireland, with particular focus on how residents in vulnerable circumstances have been supported in the face of multiple crises including economic recession and austerity, service reductions and cutbacks, risk of poverty and social exclusion, and neighbourhood change. The article draws on longitudinal qualitative and quantitative data generated over the time frame of a decade through research with residents, community organisations, and the municipal authority. Drawing on the principles of sustainable regeneration, i.e., physical, social, economic, and environmental dimensions, the article explores the effectiveness and outcomes of regeneration strategies on improving estate liveability and the quality of life of residents across multiple themes and indicators. The key themes explored include supports across the life course, community safety and public realm, education and opportunity, and well-being and resilience. Through this analysis, the article aims to better understand the experiences of residents in vulnerable circumstances and the impacts, both positive and negative, of a major regeneration programme on their lives.

Keywords

community-based research; estate liveability; regeneration; social impact; vulnerable communities

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1. Introduction

1.1. Urban Regeneration and Liveability

In recent decades, concurrent with the declining availability of social housing across Europe (Dewilde, 2022), policymakers, social housing providers, and communities in many European countries have been concerned about the deterioration of social housing estates. Concerns include the standard of housing stock, layout of estates and quality of the public realm, social problems and deprivation, and the strength of the local economy. These features can impact the "liveability" of estates, the quality of life of residents, and whether an area can attract and retain residents. Liveability has been connected to notions of the "desirable city," as areas that are "fit to live in" or "inhabitable" (Ruth & Franklin, 2014, p. 18). For van Gent (2009, p. 77), "livability is a subjective notion among residents that refers to place-based elements which are related to the daily living environment." Ruth and Franklin (2014) propose that liveability comprises two aspects: the characteristics of the population (their needs and wants) and the city's environment (i.e., the physical and biological characteristics). However, given that people's wants, needs, and perceptions can change depending on their stage in the life course, Ruth and Franklin (2014) also state that liveability may be defined differently at different points of people's lives.

Van Gent (2009, p. 77) details a number of features that can influence the liveability of estates, which "may include the quality of the housing stock, urban design, physical appearances, cleanliness, quality of public space, safety and perhaps some degree of social interaction between neighbours." Fahey et al. (2014, p. 4) find that social factors are of more significance than physical factors in determining liveability, in particular social order, criminality, and antisocial behaviour by "disruptive minorities." When these physical, environmental, and social order aspects are combined with socio-economic problems such as long-term unemployment, lack of economic activity and investment, higher than average reliance on social welfare payments, early school leaving and low levels of educational qualification, and low income and high risk of poverty among residents, extensive interventions may be required.

While high levels of deprivation do not necessarily lead to poor liveability as research by Norris and O'Connell (2013) has shown, estate regeneration programmes have been implemented in many jurisdictions as a strategy that can address issues of poor housing and deprivation through a variety of interventions to improve the lives of residents. Regeneration has been defined by Roberts et al. (2017, p. 18) as a holistic and multi-stranded set of interventions:

> A comprehensive and integrated vision and action which leads to the resolution of urban problems and which seeks to bring about a lasting improvement in the economic, physical, social, and environmental condition of an area that has been subject to change.

Along with physical interventions, regeneration is also concerned with social cohesion and "the community development and amenity needs of the population that are life-long and life-wide" (O'Connell et al., 2024, p. 326). Thus, regeneration can include initiatives in community health, education, employment, child and family support, and arts and culture. Leary and McCarthy (2013, p. 9) define regeneration as an "area-based intervention which is public sector initiated, funded, supported or inspired, aimed at producing significant sustainable improvements in the conditions of local people, communities and places suffering from aspects of deprivation, often multiple in nature."

However, research also draws attention to potential negative impacts of regeneration. This includes the risk that a focus on large-scale capital infrastructure may result in the neglect of social investment to tackle the needs of the community. Hence, "over time the depth of social problems can undermine the progress arising from capital investment" (O'Connell et al., 2024, p. 326). Regeneration programmes have furthermore been critiqued for contributing to both neoliberal urban restructuring and state-led gentrification, which generate new socio-spatial inequalities and insecurities through displacement and exclusion processes, for their role in compounding the stigmatisation of estates, and for disruptive effects that can break up neighbourhoods (Bissett, 2009; Imbroscio, 2016; Paton, 2018; Slater, 2018; Wacquant, 2008; Watt & Smets, 2017). Also of concern is the extent of resident participation in regeneration planning and implementation. Consultation with residents can be limited, narrow in scope, and subject to power inequalities (Bissett, 2009), resulting in top-down regeneration that follows the functional logics of institutions (Parés et al., 2012) rather than the empowerment of the local community (Hearne, 2013).

This article focuses on the effectiveness and outcomes of regeneration strategies on improving estate liveability and the quality of life of residents in vulnerable circumstances from the perspectives of residents and stakeholders through a case study of the Knocknaheeny estate in the south of Ireland.

1.2. Regeneration and the Knocknaheeny Estate, Cork City, Ireland

The Knocknaheeny social housing estate, comprising approximately 600 housing units, is located in the northwest of Cork City, Ireland. It was built using a pre-fabricated method in the late 1960s and 1970s in response to the industrial expansion of the city economy and the demand for affordable housing from workers employed in industries such as motor car assembly, tyre making, textile manufacturing, dockyards, and food processing. In 2011 the estate was designated by the local authority, Cork City Council, for a major regeneration masterplan of five phases, over a 10-year implementation period (Housing Agency, 2011).

According to national deprivation indicators, it is one of the most deprived areas within the city. Since the 1980s, with the closure of many industries, rising numbers of households in the area became reliant on long-term social welfare payments. Falling state investment in social housing from the late 1980s onwards also resulted in a changing household profile emerging in the area, with greater propensity to house more marginalised households. The residualisation of the social housing sector has been occurring in many other countries, leading to an increase in "the spatial concentration of disadvantaged population groups" (van Gent & Hochstenbach, 2020, p. 168). The economic crisis of 2008/2009, which became known as the Great Recession, also caused significant unemployment in the estate with 24 percent of the population unemployed according to Census 2011 figures, due in particular to the collapse of employment in building and construction, and significant declines in employment in commerce and trade and manufacturing industries. Over time, the reputation of the estate declined and increases in anti-social behaviour and crime have been ongoing concerns of residents, along with the deteriorating quality of housing and the local environment. This resulted in a decline in liveability for tenants and challenges to attracting and retaining owner-occupiers, tenants, and businesses.

Knocknaheeny also has an extensive network of non-governmental, community-based, and statutory organisations that provide a wide range of citizen, community development, youth, and family services. It is a resilient community with high levels of reciprocity (neighbours helping neighbours) that are similar to

national levels (75 percent and 74 percent; Barnardos, 2010). However, the experience of the Knocknaheeny estate is also reminiscent of Wacquant's concept of "advanced marginality" (Wacquant, 2008), with many residents living in vulnerable circumstances. According to Census 2022, the estate continues to be characterised by higher rates of long-term unemployment with nine percent of the estate population unemployed. Although this is much lower than the rates during the Great Recession and Covid-19, it remains almost double the city and national averages. There are also significantly lower levels of education, with only eight percent of the estate population holding a higher education degree compared to 38 percent of the city population. The estate also has much higher numbers of lone parent households (23 percent of households, more than double city and national rates), as well as a higher proportion of Irish Travellers than other areas, and a greater than average risk of poverty among households. In recent years, the age profile of the estate has matured, and now the proportion of residents aged 65 and over matches the city and the state at 15 percent. However, in the regeneration phases, 22 percent of residents are aged 65 and over, and the old age dependency ratio (36 percent) has surpassed the national average (23 percent). In contrast, some areas within the estate continue to have particularly high levels of children and young people with one neighbourhood recording over double the proportion of 0–14-year-olds (35 percent) compared to Cork City as a whole (16 percent).

1.2.1. The Regeneration Masterplan

For more than a decade, Knocknaheeny has been undergoing a multi-million-euro regeneration programme led by the local authority, Cork City Council, which involves the demolition of 450 houses and their replacement with 656 new energy-efficient homes (including houses and apartments) on a phased basis. Guided by a masterplan prepared by the National Housing Agency, and approved by the Cork City Council in 2011, the vision is to "create better homes…enhance social and economic opportunities…improve transport links…and create better and safer streets, squares, and parks" (Housing Agency, 2011, p. 24). The masterplan also proposes tenure mixing to expand private ownership and the management of homes by voluntary (non-state) housing associations. This phased approach can be seen as a form of balanced incremental development, which is defined by Rudlin and Falk (2009, pp. 241–242) as "a fine grain of development with large numbers of small sites being developed over time by different developers." The regeneration programme has not been characterised by high levels of displacement, which is characteristic of gentrification processes, as residents are offered the opportunity to return to the estate once their new homes are built and this has occurred in most cases. Furthermore, gentrification has not taken hold as the new dwellings are predominately social homes and mixed tenure schemes have not developed in the area. Community consultation by the architects, engineers, and planners in Cork City Council occurs on a periodic basis in each phase regarding the design of homes and the public realm.

Reflecting a broad understanding of regeneration as a multi-stranded concept, Cork City Council also makes annual submissions to the central government for investment and delivery of social and community support. These submissions are based on a Social, Economic and Environmental Plan (SEEP) that arose from consultation with community organisations, statutory bodies, service providers, and residents in Knocknaheeny. The original SEEP included 10 themes across family support and early childhood development; community safety; education, training, and lifelong learning; health; youth and sports; environment; balancing communities; social cohesion and capacity building; economic development; and transport and connectivity. Funds are disbursed to community and voluntary groups in the area through an

application process with projects and initiatives linked to the 10 SEEP thematic areas, mainly through large grants as well as through a small grants scheme, the "Community Chest," for community events and activities. In the initial years of the masterplan implementation, annual SEEP funding of just €65,000 was allocated and it took up to five years for meaningful resources to be committed. This low allocation occurred during the period of austerity following the 2008 economic crisis. The fiscal consolidation programme that was implemented between 2009 and 2015 resulted in reductions in state expenditure across health, education, and other sectors, as well as cuts in pay and levels of staffing in the public and community sector (Hardiman & MacCarthaigh, 2013; Kickert et al., 2015). This represented an anomaly in national regeneration policy, whereby millions of euros were directed into large-scale capital-spending projects at the same time as the frontline services needed by deprived communities were cut under austerity policies. Central government support increased to €320,000 in 2018, after research demonstrated the significant community impact of SEEP initiatives, and funding has continued to rise since then.

2. Methods

The School of Applied Social Studies, University College Cork, was engaged by the Cork City Council in 2014 to undertake research to enable the regeneration implementation to be informed by up-to-date data and on-going evaluation. The research involves a mixed-methods approach that incorporates quantitative, qualitative, and participatory methodologies. In terms of quantitative research, three socio-demographic reports have been conducted based on analysis of the small area population statistics of the national census across a number of indicators. This component of the research began with a baseline report on Census 2011 and two follow-up reports to ascertain social and demographic change in the estate based on Census 2016 and Census 2022.

The research was also committed to hearing the voices of residents in vulnerable circumstances. Two door-to-door surveys of residents living in the estate were conducted in 2015 and 2019. The first survey involved all residents of the estate at the time (482 households, targeted at those aged 18 and over) and aimed to ascertain resident aspirations and experiences of regeneration. Through a community-based participatory research approach, the survey was co-designed with 15 residents who were enrolled on a locally based Women's Studies Diploma run by the Adult Continuing Education Centre at University College Cork in collaboration with the Cork Education and Training Board, and the Cork City Partnership (a community development organisation). Community-based participatory research is "a collaborative, partnership approach that recognises the strengths of partners and engages their distinctive voice and ability in the research process" (O'Sullivan et al., 2023, p. 159). It is based on the perspective that research ought to involve people as "active participants or co-researchers and not simply construct them as sources of information" (Hugman et al., 2011, p. 1276) and that involving community members in research yields significant benefits including better understanding of issues. The 15 co-researchers worked with three academic researchers through a specially devised five-ECTS module on "Research in the Community" held in the local community hub. Over 10 weeks, the co-researchers co-designed the questionnaire and became field researchers whereby they conducted the door-to-door surveys. In recognition of their work, along with the academic credits they gained, they also received a small stipend. The academic research team analysed the survey data as the co-researchers declined the invitation to participate in the analysis due to the substantial time commitments they had already made to the project. The co-researchers later took part in a meeting with the Cork City Council regeneration team to collectively explore the survey findings.

A subsequent evaluation highlighted the benefits of the collaborative approach for the co-researchers, including the development of new skills, knowledge, and confidence (Cullinane & O'Sullivan, 2020).

Survey questions were mainly closed and used Likert scales (e.g., *strongly satisfied* to *strongly dissatisfied*; *strongly agree* to *strongly disagree*). Questions focused on satisfaction with the design and quality of people's home; liveability in terms of sense of community and satisfaction with the local environment, safety, amenities and infrastructure; and satisfaction with regeneration. The questionnaire also included two open questions, with one focused on general feedback on regeneration, and one focused on residents' priorities for regeneration. Specific questions were also asked to a subset of residents in an area of the estate that was affected by the closure of a lane, and about the demolition and moving process to those who had moved in the first two phases of the regeneration. The participatory process resulted in a very high response rate of 72 percent with 325 households participating.

A second smaller survey was undertaken in 2019 with 29 households who were recent movers to ascertain their experiences of moving under the regeneration programme. The questionnaire's design drew from the first survey and was also subject to input from the Cork City Council and feedback from the community researchers involved in the first survey. Twenty-one households participated in the second survey, reflecting an overall response rate of 75 percent of eligible households. A participatory project is also underway in 2024 with young people aged 18–30 in the estate regarding their education, training, and employment needs.

The research has also involved three reviews of the SEEP in 2018, 2021, and 2023, through consultation with community and statutory organisations in the area. Drawing on quantitative data from Cork City Council, and qualitative focus groups and interviews, the first two reviews assessed the alignment of funded projects with the SEEP priorities, and the outcomes and impacts of the projects. The first report involved a focus group with members of the group that formulated the original SEEP, a survey with 10 grant recipient organisations, and an in-depth interview with the manager of a major early-years programme in the area (Let's Grow Together) that had received seed funding through the SEEP. The second report was impacted by the Covid-19 public health restrictions, which necessitated primary research to be undertaken remotely by phone and online. Five focus groups were held for the second report involving 15 participants, who represented 14 discrete projects in local recipient community organisations. Following the significant increase in SEEP funding from 2018 onwards, the third report sought to determine the continuing relevance of the original SEEP themes, identify gaps, and capture other emerging specific community needs to inform future SEEP funding applications. Twenty-eight people participated in the third review in five qualitative focus group interviews and two one-to-one interviews. This included staff from voluntary and community groups, the Cork City Council regeneration office, and Cork City Council elected officials for the Cork City North West local electoral area.

3. Findings

3.1. Physical Factors in Liveability: Experiences, Perspectives, and Impacts of Physical Regeneration

The research identifies a number of positive resident and stakeholder perspectives arising from the regeneration programme and its constituent elements of infrastructural developments and SEEP initiatives. In terms of physical impacts, the quality of housing and the condition of the wider neighbourhood

environment and public realm have been enhanced. New houses are built to a building energy rating of A2 or A3. The 2015 household survey highlighted the poor condition of existing homes. Forty-three percent of respondents in Phases 2 to 5 stated that the condition of their homes was poor or very poor with a multiplicity of problems including poor insulation, window problems, dampness, poor ventilation, mildew, and cracks in walls and floors. Just under half of respondents (48 percent) said that housing problems contributed to ill health for them or their family members, in particular respiratory problems such as asthma. Respondents who had moved expressed high levels of satisfaction with the quality of their new homes with 95 percent agreeing or strongly agreeing that the quality is better. Due to the phasing of the regeneration programme, many of the respondents who had moved at that point were now living outside Knocknaheeny in a nearby neighbourhood, and 78 percent said they were satisfied or very satisfied to live in their new area.

Like the 2015 survey, the 2019 survey also found high levels of satisfaction with new homes (all within Knocknaheeny by this phase) with 95 percent of respondents satisfied or very satisfied. For many respondents, the benefits of the move extended to health improvements for them or members of their household. Sixty-five percent of respondents to the 2019 survey reported that the health and well-being of them and their family had improved as a result of the move (with 45 percent strongly agreeing). Respondents overwhelmingly reported agreement (84 percent) with the statement that moving had been a positive experience overall.

In relation to the public realm, the closure of an alley where anti-social behaviour had been high (and its reintegration into residents' gardens) was widely praised in the 2015 survey, with 76 percent of affected respondents expressing satisfaction with its closure and 79 percent expressing satisfaction with the process of closing it by the municipality. However, previous research with children and young people found dissatisfaction with the closure of the alley as it was a much-used shortcut and they had not been consulted about it (O'Sullivan et al., 2017).

Despite these positive aspects, residents identified significant problems in the area in relation to the environment and public realm. In both the 2015 and 2019 surveys, dumping, litter, vacant and boarded-up houses, and dog dirt were identified as big problems. There were especially low ratings of park amenities in the 2015 survey, with just 31 percent of respondents rating parks, playgrounds, and open spaces as good or very good. Interviews as part of the 2023 SEEP Review highlighted the importance of the local environment, which a city councillor stressed can have wide-ranging impacts on the well-being of individuals and the community:

> I'm always of the belief that if community looks well, you feel well yourself, if it looks down and dour and bad, then you'll feel, if you get up in the morning, you look out and your community looks, it's full of litter and it's, you know, there's no trees, there's no green, well you don't feel well, you immediately, your own mental health is affected by that.

The 2023 SEEP Review also documented concerns by a City Council staff member about the impact of fencing some areas for security and safety: "A number of people have come to me and said what about all the fencing, it's horrendous. People think that they're in a prison. It's constantly people being told to basically keep out of their own community."

Adult residents also felt that consultation and the provision of timely information were limited in the regeneration. Although there were high levels of satisfaction with the new houses and the social facilities delivered under regeneration, respondents would like to see a greater level of communication and consultation by the Council. Just 14 percent of respondents in the 2015 survey agreed that regeneration authorities listen to residents in their decision-making, compared to 45 percent in the 2019 survey, which is likely to reflect the phased delivery of the regeneration.

There was also a perception amongst respondents that there is a dearth of opportunities for participation in regeneration, despite the findings of the 2015 survey which reported a clear interest in resident involvement. Over one-third of respondents (35 percent) were interested in getting involved in the regeneration of their estate, including in resident associations and estate management committees, youth and community projects, a regeneration newsletter, environmental projects, and arts and cultural activities. To address this need, a commitment on the part of statutory and non-statutory organisations to develop and promote participation opportunities, and support capacity building for residents, is required.

3.2. Social Factors in Liveability: Experiences, Perspectives, and Impacts of Social Regeneration and the SEEPs

The multi-annual SEEPs provided evident benefits to residents from the regeneration. The purpose of the SEEPs was to provide scope for support and investment in what are essential strands of regeneration beyond the traditional "bricks and mortar" elements. While there are tangible benefits from new homes and hard infrastructure that in turn give rise to better health, reduced overcrowding, energy efficiency, and improved public amenities, the investment in social, economic, and environmental elements is often the glue that ensures the liveability of neighbourhoods, especially where households do not have the resources to access private market-based provision. The formulation of the SEEPs followed an inclusive, consensus-based process that asked residents and community organisations about their priorities based on a number of high-level themes. As well as supporting a range of local community projects, SEEP-funded infrastructure projects included the design and construction of a community garden, the refurbishment of the sports hall of the local community school, and the refurbishment of a cottage as a Scout Hall.

Evaluations of the successive SEEPs revealed significant, often exponential, value added and impact generated from modest schemes and initiatives. For instance, under the initial SEEP, seed funding was provided for a local health group to form a multi-agency consortium for an early intervention programme. According to the group, "we had everybody, schools, pre-schools, family support, health, community development, all working together, and the [SEEP] money was part of consolidating that pre-development process." The SEEP funding ultimately supported a successful bid for a multi-million-euro early-years area-based childhood programme (Let's Grow Together) which had measurable impacts over time (Buckley & Curtin, 2018).

Illustrating the thematic foci of projects across the SEEPs, many projects centred on initiatives in the areas of youth and sports and education, and training and lifelong learning. These included an area-wide, school-based sports participation initiative; a scheme to supply books to young children in the locality; the provision of music production workshops for local youth and young adults; educational supports for young Travellers and their families; and an environmentally focused social enterprise. Respondents reported that their projects had delivered substantial impacts to immediate beneficiaries and the wider community,

ranging from creative expression and enhanced literacy and numeracy skills to reductions in recidivism from employment opportunities and greater environmental awareness and household waste reductions. Regarding the Imagination Library, an initiative by Let's Grow Together, the SEEP funding played a pivotal role as a "launchpad" in getting the initiative off the ground. A staff member affirmed its impact, with 400 children registered at the time of interview:

> It's supporting family members who may not have literacy skills themselves, it's supporting them to share and explore books together, without having to read the words, but really using books to build that early relationship, for children to have that ownership of their own books with their name on it, coming through the door to them, and really inspiring that love of reading, that love of books, from as early as possible.

The positive perspectives reported of the impacts of the SEEP built upon and enhanced the strong sense of community already in existence in Knocknaheeny, thereby validating the aims of the SEEP and the strategies to strengthen engagement with the local authority, state and third sector agencies and service providers operating in the neighbourhood. However, despite their obvious necessity, interventions to tackle deprivation and address community needs were highly curtailed in the early years of the SEEP arising from the deep-seated impacts of the austerity programme implemented during the Great Recession. This resulted in a severe diminution of services and supports which the community relied on. Research undertaken by the evaluation team on the effects of austerity in the regeneration area showed that essential frontline staff had their hours cut, were laid off, or not replaced. Educational and training workshops and projects were curtailed or closed down, and operational budgets were reduced. In relative terms, despite their comparatively modest cost to public funds, the community and voluntary sector experienced disproportionate reductions in funding during austerity (Harvey, 2012). Many of these provided services for marginalised and vulnerable young people and families and there is clear evidence that they ultimately amounted to false economies as the support infrastructure which had been built up over many years deteriorated with severely negative consequences for those who relied on them. In addition to the material impacts, there also ensued a loss of trust in relationships between the community and services.

Post-austerity, SEEP funding was increased significantly and the evaluations, which confirmed the cumulative gains, contributed to these funding increases over successive SEEPs. In 2022, central government funding increased to almost €433,000, while in 2024 it increased to €870,000. This has enabled the SEEPs to be more agile in adapting to identified and emerging needs within the community. While the 2022 SEEP placed a focus on children and youth, in 2023 the emphasis, based on consultation with community groups, had shifted to the need to include older persons given the changing demographics of the area, the unique nature of their needs, and the desire for many older residents to age in place in accordance with national healthy ageing policies. The consultations and data also revealed a strong view that arts, culture, and creativity be added to the SEEP themes since the arts and creative expression have become an integral part of the life of the community, contributing to social cohesion, a place where young people can feel safe, and increasing the positive perception of the regeneration area.

While it is only in recent years that there has been sustained investment in the SEEP, a continuing issue respondents highlighted in the 2021 SEEP Review is the limitations on groups and projects imposed by single-year funding commitments. One interviewee spoke about how "every year it's a struggle to ensure

that their project could resume annually." Several outlined what they saw as an urgent need for the introduction of multi-annual funding packages to guarantee continuity and greater value from ongoing investment. One participant noted that for many projects "unless you can plan for the next two years then it's really hard because you almost lose the gains you achieve." This annualised funding model has meant that the evidence of long-term outcomes in terms of whether the SEEP has generated momentum around social inclusion—defined as participation in education, training, employment opportunities, and community development participation—is less clear-cut. The Census data shows that the area continues to have much higher unemployment and much lower educational attainment, although these indicators are improving. This affirms Fahey's observation:

> Public funding agencies are often more willing to provide one-off capital grants (which may be quite large) rather than commit to long-term annual services expenditure even where the latter is what is required to address key problems in disadvantaged areas. (Fahey et al., 2011, p. 100)

3.3. A Liveable Area? Resident Satisfaction With Living in the Area and With Regeneration as a Whole

Both the 2015 and 2019 surveys found high levels of satisfaction with living in the area and a strong sense of community in Knocknaheeny. Many services and amenities were rated highly; concurrent with the regeneration programme, there has also been a re-development of the neighbourhood library and learning campus, and a new health campus serving the northwest of the city, ensuring better accessibility to services locally. Sixty-three percent of respondents in the 2015 survey and 75 percent in the 2019 survey agreed or strongly agreed that they were proud to live in the area, while 65 percent of respondents in the 2015 survey and 75 percent in the 2019 survey expressed satisfaction with living in the area, as detailed in Table 1. A respondent in the 2015 survey said: "I'm proud to live in Knocknaheeny. The houses completed are a dream." Both surveys also found positive attributions of community solidarity. Sixty-seven percent of respondents in the 2015 survey and 80 percent in the 2019 survey agreed or strongly agreed that people in the area look out for each other.

However, despite these positive aspects, residents identified significant concerns about security and public order with the extent of drug use, drug dealing, drinking in public, and anti-social behaviour highlighted as big problems in the area. In the 2015 survey, 56 percent of respondents stated that they do not feel safe walking alone after dark and 66 percent stated that they avoid parts of the area because of concerns about crime. In the 2019 survey, many respondents expressed concern about persistent anti-social behaviour in the immediate vicinity of their houses involving public drinking, burning of fires, and threatening behaviours. While respondents agreed that, overall, regeneration is making the area a better place to live, just 20 percent of respondents in the 2015 survey agreed or strongly agreed that safety and security have improved under

Table 1. Satisfaction, pride, and community solidarity.

	2015 Survey	2019 Survey
I am proud to live in the area (proportion who agree or strongly agree)	63%	75%
I am satisfied to live in the area (proportion who are satisfied or very satisfied)	65%	75%
People in the area look out for each other (proportion who agree or strongly agree)	67%	80%

regeneration. Residents said they would like to see greater responsiveness of the local authority and the Garda Síochána to tackling anti-social behaviour and crime as well as preventative measures to be put in place. Arising from these experiences are far-reaching reputational consequences for the community, which impact on sense of identity, self-confidence, and opportunities due to stigmatisation. Although most people are proud to live in the area, there is concern that the area has a bad name externally; 60 percent of respondents in 2015 and 42 percent in 2019 said that this was a big or a very big problem.

On the whole, respondents' views on regeneration suggest a broadly positive evaluation of its impact to date. While, in the 2015 survey, just over half of respondents (51 percent) would like to be living in the area in more than 10 years, almost three-quarters of respondents (74 percent) in the 2019 survey reported that they wanted to be living in the area in more than 10 years. A higher proportion of respondents in the 2019 survey took the view that, over the long-term, regeneration was improving the area compared to the 2015 survey (71 percent compared to 50 percent who agreed or strongly agreed). A respondent in the 2015 survey who held a positive view said: "I think it's fantastic the work they're doing. It's going to make the area better." In overall terms, in the period between the two surveys, resident perspectives on the liveability arising from the regeneration of the area had improved.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, the regeneration programme has contributed to improvements in liveability for residents in vulnerable circumstances through the provision of new housing, enhancements to the public realm and estate design, and retaining the integrity of community and neighbourhood networks. The SEEP initiatives have resulted in tangible impacts on the lived experiences of residents. The growth in the annual budgets over successive years illustrates the value contributed by the SEEPs. However, liveability continues to be impacted by negative experiences relating to community safety and social order, environmental degradation in the estate, and limited opportunities for resident participation. As identified by Fahey (1999) and Norris (2014), and shown in the findings, social order problems can be major drivers of estate decline and one of the principal factors which separate liveable estates from declining ones. The complexity of this challenge cannot be underestimated and requires extensive interagency coordination and cooperation from multiple service providers including the local authority, policing and probation, education, and family and youth support. Furthermore, it is essential that regeneration programmes support, sustain, and draw on community strengths and capacity to facilitate meaningful participation. This requires recognising power imbalances, developing appropriate mechanisms and structures for community engagement, and hearing and acting on residents' voices. As Hearne (2013, p. 176) outlines:

> Best practice social regeneration requires the adequate participation of local authority tenants and residents for the negotiating process inherent in any development of the built environment…. A well-planned and effective regeneration project should create and support sustainable community development.

If a primary objective of tackling the deterioration of social housing estates is to ensure liveability, then a multi-stranded commitment to regeneration is essential. This includes not only housing where existing stock has met the end of its lifespan or no longer meets basic standards in terms of space, heating, insulation, public realm, and capital investment, but also sustained investment in socio-economic and community measures

which benefit the population in the estate. In addition to community safety, services for families and young people, accessible education, training and employment opportunities, and affordable and flexible childcare are essential elements of successful regeneration and ensuring liveability, as asserted by Fahey et al. (2011, p. 100), who concluded:

> [The concept of estate regeneration needs to be redefined] so that it gives central place to the development and provision of appropriate services for acutely disadvantaged families and individuals. Plans for the delivery and long-term funding of these services should be placed at the centre of regeneration schemes and should not be left as additions to be tacked on as regeneration schemes get under way.

However, such services in Ireland are the responsibility of a myriad of agencies which makes the project of regeneration for the local authority complex and challenging. The distinctive model of local government structures and public policy formulation and implementation in Ireland has particular significance in achieving sustainable regeneration. In the first instance, there is a highly centralised governance system for resource allocation and the local government sector lacks autonomy and independence, especially in relation to revenue-raising powers and decision-making (O'Malley & MacCarthaigh, 2012). Secondly, there is fragmentation in the delivery of services and local government in Ireland does not have responsibility for key services including health, education, and social services. The impact of economic policy can also influence the effectiveness of regeneration. A key learning of the Knocknaheeny experience has been the necessity for regeneration areas to have the security of ring-fenced, multi-annual funding commitments to ensure essential projects and services continue to operate, especially in counter-cyclical environments—when economic decline occurs is when holistic regeneration strategies are most needed. A long-term lesson for public policy formation is that austerity invariably leads to false economies, especially when applied to disadvantaged neighbourhoods such as regeneration areas.

It must also be recognized that regeneration is not a panacea for structural factors (whether regional, national, or international) that can drive social exclusion and socio-economic inequality. While there can be substantial benefits from regeneration that ensure better liveability, areas can remain disadvantaged in comparison to their wider city and nation-state, highlighting the need to address social justice, deprivation, and poverty (McCarthy, 2010). A realistic understanding of what regeneration can achieve as a locally based response within the context of deeper structural factors is warranted, while recognizing that "area-based approaches may form a valuable component of more broadly-based regeneration policy, since such approaches can address problems of decline in spatially located phenomena such as housing, infrastructure and services" (McCarthy, 2010, p. 252). Hence, regeneration cannot be a "one size fits all" strategy and needs to be nuanced to local circumstances and devised accordingly.

The contributions to liveability of the regeneration case study explored in this article, although qualified by the limitations explored above, can be attributed to a number of factors inherent to its original design and its ongoing development. These include a protected capital budget, an implementation masterplan, an inclusive and responsive SEEP, and an independent evaluation programme to inform policy and practice. For broader applicability, regeneration must be understood as a holistic concept with multiple strands that must be pursued on an integrated basis to tackle the problems faced by communities. As van Bortel (2009, pp. 49–50) states:

> [Sustainable regeneration should] deliver long term solutions on a wide range of issues. This does not only include housing, but also the participation and empowerment of residents in urban regeneration, increased trust between the actors involved in this process, better neighbourhood services, more social cohesion between resident groups, increased quality of the public realm and a confidence among residents in the future of the neighbourhood and the wish to remain living in the area.

If any of these essential strands are lacking, there is a risk that the challenges regeneration schemes set out to address will remain unresolved.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

Data Availability

Census of Ireland 2011, 2016, 2022.

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