

REPORT OF URBAN SALON – JUST SPACE

EVENT 24 January 2011 at UCL Geography

60-70 people attended. The plenary session was facilitated by Jenny Robinson with Loretta Lees as discussant. Presentations by Richard Lee (Just Space), Peter Eversden (London Forum Civic and Amenity Societies), Sharon Hayward (London Tenants Federation) and Michael Edwards (UCL and Just Space) were followed by a Q + A. The plenary session was recorded and is available on the Just Space website. <http://justspace2010.wordpress.com>

Notes from the 4 workshops follow below.

WORKSHOP: PROCESS AND PARTICIPATION AND WAYS FORWARD FOR COLLABORATION

1. Ron Hollis (LTF) discussed the value of the democratic and consultative process which JS has represented through the EiP, as opposed to narrow and technocratic interests concerned with managing or making a profit. However, the challenges of preparing a metropolitan-wide view of planning issues, as opposed to local concerns was mentioned. The potential benefits of academic review and critique and rigour in the evidence process was mentioned. One possible use for academic work was in doing ethnographic research to articulate and ground the needs and aspirations of communities.
2. Robin Brown (Hayes and Harlington) mentioned some areas where research might be undertaken eg on social cohesion related to trends in social segregation and areal differentiation. What are the implications of the entrenchment of segregation for social cohesion? The importance of communities being invited to seminars and the delivery of accessible presentations of academic work was discussed. Census analysis was potentially important – what about a workshop on this? The question was posed as to what relevance specific pieces of academic work might have for the average tenant? The value of ‘grounded research’ linked to community concerns, was stressed.
3. Jayaraj Sundaresan (LSE PhD on India and London borough planner) Raised some questions about the various actors and interests associated with processes of participation and its institutionalisation eg the project team, the political team, the general public; and also questioned the politics of resistance in relation to participation. He asked whether one could

assume that what people want is in their interests? Or whether organised neighbourhoods were pushing away development as opposed to seeking opportunities for collaboration.

4. Pushpa Arabindoo (Geography/DPU, UCL) mentioned a session at the RGS/IBG conference which focused on case studies of academics and researchers working together e.g Friends of Brixton Market. She supported the idea of looking at alternatives to the London Plan, and at examples of good practice in participation elsewhere. And agreed that ethnographical evidence might help to ensure communities reach out to less resourced people rather than the middle class voices which might predominate.
5. The idea was proposed of a student internship in community organisations
6. Also that young people might engage in activities across the city with a wider geography, as opposed to locally based community groups with perhaps different kinds of mobilisation.
7. The value of reporting different community initiatives through civic journalism, as well as research.
8. The concern was discussed that engaging in the London Plan needed to start earlier on in the process than the EiP - the politics of the next plan starts now.... How can we set about shifting the terms of the "conversation" over time. The possibility of an Alternative London Plan was discussed again and the idea of creating an interactive Wiki Map where people could upload their data and research for sharing and exchanging information. UCL had a community mapping service, although this might be fee based. An information gateway might be a good idea, to help community activists access good info eg in litigation processes.
9. Research ideas included, how could planning make London less expensive?
10. Bob Caterall discussed the City Journal having money to develop its website, perhaps to build on local narratives, professionally expressed. www.city-analysis.net. The issues of barriers to access information were discussed. Eg the EiP made it hard to access information; academic research is published in fee charging journals. There should be more public output of academic work eg in newspapers, and making research papers available for free via the free access services which most universities have
<http://www.rin.ac.uk/resources/publishing/open-access>

11. However, it was discussed that access to research output was not enough, and community involvement in shaping research was important.

REGENERATION workshop

Evidence base – EiP Draft Replacement London Plan: When questioned at the EiP of the DRLP on what evidence the GLA had of benefit to existing 'deprived' (working class) communities of regeneration / mixed tenure developments, at worst question was ignored and instead responses were made on evidence of need, or at best the response was that the jury was 'still out' on the benefits of mixed tenure communities.

Community engagement:

- 'Engagement' has become institutionalised – designed to enable the authorities and developers to do the 'consultation' and support current political ideology
- Engagement is often carried out by developer paid organisations.
- Many see working class communities are seen as lacking in aspiration. New Deal for Communities were keen to push communities to 'dream' - of bigger and better schemes – some relating to professionals disrespect of working class communities' ideas – and / or cynically aimed at pushing residents into supporting schemes that would inevitably require the involvement of private finance (with strings attached).
- NDCs are more or less finished as a model of area-based planning.
- The language changed from 'community led' to 'community engaged' – with tensions around who was making the decisions and on behalf of whom.
- Regarding the community response, it may well depend on how well people are mobilised on the ground.
- Coming up with an alternative plan offers up possibilities.
- It is difficult to know at this stage what kind of resources there may be for local communities to develop alternative plans.
- Having been professionally trained, planners do tend to feel they know better. The idea that communities might come up with alternative plans is probably quite scary for them.

- Community plans would be required to fit with local plans and the London Plan.
- Wards corner (community campaign) challenged the evidence-base of the proposed development at a Judicial Review – failures to carry out impact assessments. The local community is now involved in the second stage of the battle – the council has come up with an impact assessment and a developers plans - but there will be challenges.
- A key issue is the impact that the schemes may have on the community and particularly where there is disproportionate detrimental impact. This may be the case in relation to ethnic communities – as raised by the Spitalfields Community organisation.
- The authorities have legal teams to advise them how to get away with what they plan to do.
- The costs of a challenge can be raised through the local community (as Ward’s Corner have shown) – showing how resourceful they are (selling cakes was mentioned).
- The problem in winning one battle of a war is that the authorities keep coming back with revised plans – second time around, the community is exhausted – and often people don’t feel they can get up and fight again.
- Wards Corner rep suggested that in fact you don’t need to have so many activists – but you do need to show wide support.
- It’s important to analyse the words being used by the authorities / developers and either appropriate them or use them to challenge what they are actually doing.
- A lot of negative assumptions are made about social-housing tenants.
- It’s amazing that there has been no wide ‘anti-gentrification’ movement in London – such as there have been in other countries.
- The issue of whether the very existence of council / social housing has had some (negative) impact – in terms of building wider solidarity amongst communities of other tenures – particularly the private-rented sector. Differences in the US were noted, where there is rent control in the private rented sector.
- Having good documentation of community accounts would be very valuable.

Relationship with Universities:

- The issue of academics as gentrifiers was raised. There is much evidence from the US on this – not just ‘studentification’ – but of academics engaged in providing academic justification.
- Some are partners in regeneration schemes.
- There are issues of universities as educators and also as profit-makers.
- The issue of engagement being seen as a tick-boxing exercise was raised – (in terms of the emphasis / weight given to community engagement by the universities).
- Universities could adopt projects and assist in engaging in a different way.
- If LTF or the London Civic Forum for example had a live project and needed help, that may be an easier way for Universities to support.
- It would be good if Universities went first to Just Space, if they were looking for community groups that are engaged in the areas of research they are interested in.
- Many have their own networks of contacts.
- The issue of getting ‘free’ student labour to assist in challenging the system could potentially be problematic.
- The structure of University courses is an issue – in finding mutually beneficial projects. Where students may provide support, it would probably need to fit into a 10 week period.
- Displacement in regeneration schemes is worthy of research, but a very difficult areas – some may occur immediately, (for example with estate renewal / demolition of council housing) but may also occur over longer periods of time as a result of general gentrification / loss of ‘working class’ community networks / local shops / amenities and facilities.
- Help with mapping opportunity areas and areas of intensification would be good.
- Failures to address local employment needs in regeneration schemes and the impact of using previous industrial sites for housing in London are worthy of in depth research. There is much talk of provision of training and skills in regeneration schemes – but how much is there and how much of it provides long-term benefit to existing ‘deprived communities’?

HOUSING workshop

Paul Watt, Senior Lecturer Urban Studies Birkbeck
Duncan Bowie, Senior Lecturer Spatial Planning, Westminster
Judith Allen, recently retired from Westminster
Bernard Bourdillon, London Gypsy and Traveller Unit and very part-time lecturer at Kingston (introductory planning course for geographers)
Victor Adegbuyi, London Tenants Federation
Richard Lee, Just Space

Birkbeck

Paul described opportunities on courses and seminars for which he is responsible, namely

- 3rd Year BSc Geographies of the City module October 2011 - March 2012.
Guest speakers + considerable discretion to make this course fit with what would be useful for Just Space (will put this programme together during summer so plenty of time).
- Raphael Samuel History Centre (joint Birkbeck + UEL) - Urban Studies seminar series (twice a term). Forthcoming on community participation in Haringey and community struggles on Housing PFI.

It was also pointed out that contacts could be made with the following courses:-

- Final year BSc Geography and Environment students
- MSc Voluntary and Community Sector Studies
- Housing and Participation foundation degree

Westminster

MA Urban and Regional Planning, MA Urban Design MA International Planning and Sustainable Development, and MA Housing.

Modules include Society, Economics, Diversity and Planning; Community Development and Involvement; Sustainable Development and Regeneration; Urban Regeneration; Housing Policy and Strategy; Sustainable Communities and Regeneration

Those taught by Duncan, which may be useful for Just Space are: Planning project module over 2 terms. Currently on sites in Camden, drawing up development proposals. Brief look at consultation issues.

Regeneration module has outreach potential. Since module is only 12 lectures, these can't cover much detail and need to rely on research projects and dissertations.

London Gypsy and Traveller Unit

Interested in funded research on London's minorities. For example:-

- a) academic analysis of the evidence base presented on Gypsy and Traveller issues at the London Plan EiP.
- b) research project tracking the fate of Gypsies and Travellers over a 5 year period.

General

- Dissertations for Masters and final year degree students could potentially have a basis in particular neighbourhoods or boroughs
- Important that Universities offer a holistic approach and are sensitive to local variability.
- Just Space should develop and put forward proposals for particular student research projects, which lecturers can then "allocate".
- Concern that housing might be a neglected issue within Geography/Planning since no students came to this workshop.
- Courses will need to move into neighbourhood planning and this is a good time for Just Space to build up contacts with lecturers so they are able to do this.
- Universities won't prescribe terms of engagement for interface between student researchers and community. Whilst it is quite reasonable for community groups who have been interviewed to see a draft and to have a copy of the final version, it was felt it is up to community groups to insist on this.

ECONOMY workshop group

Michael Edwards
Ian Gordon LSE

Cllr Anthony Wilson LB Greenwich
Myfanwy Taylor exUCL now LSE
Tim Iveson
x ?
y ?
Andrew Harris, prof UCL geog
Dave Roberts, research asst House of Commons
robertsd@parliament.uk
Sarah Gibby UCL
Celine Kuklowski, LSE
Matthew Gandy, UCL prof geog
Elena Besussi, UCL Bartlett

The main focus was on the need for a serious conference by JSN with researchers. It could work topic-by-topic through the issues of the plan and look at

- what the draft Plan said
- what research perspectives / interpretations there are
- what the key objections/ changes / alternatives were, coming from community groups
- what changes if any were conceded by Mayor's team
- what the Panel report proposed
- what to do next (research, campaigns, implementation etc)

There was also some support for further work on concerted alternatives, even utopias.

The absence of people from Queen Mary was noted/regretted. They would be especially helpful on labour market issues.