REPORT FOR PLANNERS ON THE URBAN POLITICS OF DEPTFORD REGENERATION

By Daniel Lobo

Introduction

This report was developed to help the understanding of the power structure and discourse politics emergent from the Lewisham and Greenwich joint Local Development Framework (LDF) for the regeneration of Deptford district in London. As an urban politics case, the study of the power structure will highlight the relation between practices and policies in spatial planning and its outcomes.

I will explain the planning process hierarchy constituted by the planning framework from which the key visions and strategies for the regeneration of Deptford are devised. Focusing on a key discourse politics this study will analyse how the state, the market and the civil society influence the decision-making, consensus-making and agenda-setting of Deptford regeneration.

I will argue the existence of a 'subtle form of socialization' (Kearns and Philo 1993, 3) of regeneration initiatives, that create an agile source of economic gain, and a means for social and political consensus by cultural manipulation and the disguise of public participation, within an unjust process, to the detriment of the most socio-economic disadvantaged groups of civil society.
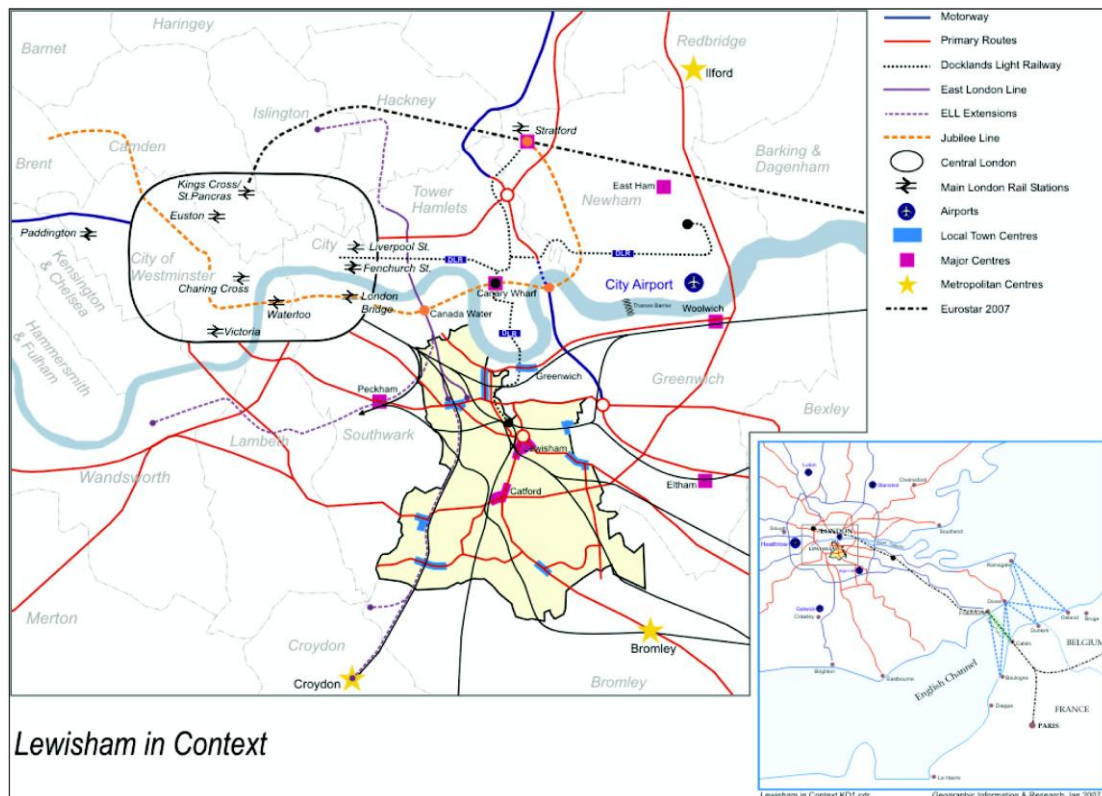

Figure 1. 'LDF: Spatial (Core) Strategy, Preferred Options Report'. London Borough Lewisham (LBL) 2007, 16.

Main Analysis

Deptford is part of Thames Gateway project, which is Europe's largest regeneration project. In 2005, the government made public its strategy for Thames Gateway, which included the delivery of 120,000 new homes and 180,000 new jobs by 2016 (LBL 2007, 10). Deptford is currently an under-developed area, with under-developed industrial, residential and recreational infrastructure. Major changes are currently being made, and a number of big impact schemes are about to be put in practice. This will result in approximately 6,400 new residents and 1,300 new jobs (Creative Process 2008, 7).

The draft Strategic Regional Development Framework for East London and the London Plan prepared by the Mayor of London required the Boroughs of Lewisham and Greenwich to propose a new policy allocation in their Local Development Frameworks (LDF). The development of the LDF comes as a new system of plan making, implemented in England according to the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act (2004). The LDF supports a portfolio of planning documents created by the Council that devises the planning strategy of Lewisham (LBL 2007, 8).

According to the hierarchy of planning policy, the policies set out at the national level should be taken into account by the regional planning authority (Mayor of London) and by the local planning authority when devising the various LDF documents. The Spatial (Core) Strategy is the most strategic of the LDFs and defines the spatial vision and policies of the Borough, and takes the London Development Agency's Economic Development Strategy into account. The Spatial Core Strategy establishes the spatial vision for Lewisham, and it is the Council's intention to 'adopt the same vision as the Community Strategy' (LBL 2007, 28). The latest Lewisham Community Strategy was devised in 2003, following consultation with the community, in which the Lewisham Strategic Partnership was instrumental. This Partnership is chaired by Lewisham's directly elected Mayor and brings together representatives from public, private, voluntary and community sectors. The main visions that the Partnership seeks to deliver are: a framework for improving life in Lewisham; Creative Lewisham; Community development; and public involvement and engagement (LBL 2007, 28).

One of the most 'agenda-setting' spatial visions is the local economy vision defined by the Spatial Core Strategy for the period of 2008-2020, which states the following:

> That Lewisham's local economy will be growing and diversifying by attracting inward investment, including tourism, meeting the range of needs in the community; with small and medium enterprises and the creative sector flourishing as its key drivers, providing local employment and investment opportunities. (LBL 2007, 28)

In fact, the interchangeable expressions 'creative sector' and 'creative industries' come up repeatedly in many sections of the document, and are represented as the driving force of the London Borough of Lewisham. They are present in the Economy and Retail Spatial Portrait as 'yet relatively small, but potentially important for the future economy of Lewisham' (LBL 2007, 19), are used to justify the chosen growth scenario, and are stated in many draft Core Policies as being supported by the Community Strategy Policy Documents through the 'Action Plan 4 (Foster enterprise and sustainable business growth, including creative industries)' (LBL 2007, 25). The Strategic Objectives for Sustainable Economy also refers to the expression "creative industry" as follows: 'To protect and increase the number, quality and range of local employment opportunities, promoting business clusters, mixed use development and the creative industries' (LBL 2007, 30). The expressions are also part of the strategic option for Sustainable Economy:

'3. Employment Cluster and Creative Industries - Lewisham wishes to build on the artistic and creative centres such as Goldsmiths College and the Laban Dance Centre by helping to create a network of cultural and artistic activities' (LBL 2007, 72). And they are specifically included as a Core Policy: 'CP29 Creative Industries - The Council will identify and support creative industries and promote and protect these uses to enhance and diversify the local economy' (LBL 2007, 73).

It is expected that this new emphasis on the creative industries will connect the local community with the network of creative institutions and enterprises existent in London, and therefore generate more jobs in the area. It is known that the borough has a 'relatively low number of jobs, with the majority of economically active residents commuting out of the borough for work', so it becomes important to 'protect land for jobs' (LBL 2007, 24). The main argument in the Spatial Core Strategy that gives evidence of the potential success of the 'creative sector' in the borough is the possibility that Lewisham's manufacturers have in drawing 'on London's creative industries using the world-class design skills of its colleges and universities' (LBL 2007, 73).

Over the last decade the area has seen an increase in public regeneration funds and private development pressure (Seetzen 2006). With high unemployment and crime rates, and from being among the 10% most deprived boroughs in England, it is now evolving as the site for a number of high-profile buildings and cultural projects. It is even seen by the media as 'Deptford Riviera' (Seetzen 2006), the area with the 'highest concentration of artists in the capital' (Blackwood 2007) and the 'new "hip" area of the capital' (Moore 2009).

For the last three decades, the political and economic restructuring of the most powerful cities around the world has been manifest in efforts for a unique identity through cultural and visual forms that make reference to spectacles of consumption and spaces of leisure (see Harvey 1989a, Harvey 1989b and Harvey 1990), culture and heritage (see Urry 1995) and gentrified residential areas (see Davis 1990). In the UK, regeneration strategies and projects have been adopting a particular cultural approach (see DCMS 2004) that focus not only on 'the arts' but also in 'architecture, heritage and cultural tourism' (see Evans and Shaw 2004 and 2006). It may be argued that, in Deptford, this trend emerged from the moment when a large number of young artists settled in the council in order to live and work at a cheap price and at a relatively close distance from the city centre. The current Goldsmiths College in New Cross and the construction of the Laban Centre, a conservatoire and centre for contemporary dance designed by the internationally awarded Swiss architects Herzog and de Meuron, are already visible products of Lewisham strategy to create a unified identity for the borough around 'the creative industries' as a way to attract public and private investment. But this representational process, referred to by Peter Hall as 'symbolic regionalisation' and by John Pløeger as 'discursive staging of place-identities', although read as a participated consensus between local government, private sector, and part of the civil society, and celebrated within planning policies as a key vision/strategy/objective for the success of Lewisham and its wider and diverse community, also facilitates an understated 'illusion emerging out of a variety of representational strategies' (Seetzen 2006, 31).

It may be argued that in this urban politics case, 'elite theory' is at stake. Elite theory proposes that a small economic and political elite group of people holds most of the power in a society. These elite groups, constituted by people from social upper classes, directors of corporations or trustees from policy-planning networks, are able to have significant control over policy decisions of corporations and governments (Harding 1995). Although the main actors of this group are not easily recognized here due to the vast power relations pinpointing the strategies defined for the London Plan, it often becomes clear that there is in operation a smooth manipulative action of London metropolitan power, which seeks to emphasize the cooperation of local government in delivering a vision of an allegedly 'creative London'.

One of the most relevant collaborative planning events, the 'Deptford Creekside Charrete', was held in 2008. In this event participated many urban experts, members of civil society and of local

government. Although, one of the conclusions reported that 'a strong feeling at the Charrette meetings was that people wanted Creekside to stay the same. However, change is already happening and more is on the way' (Creative Process 2008, 1). Considering how the community is allowed to get involved with the planning and actual consensus-making key visions in the London Borough of Lewisham (see Statement of Community Involvement 2006), it seems that public participation in the planning process was and continues to be a subtle form of social control, which proliferates the notion that participants have power over decision-making processes.

Deptford has a very strong tradition of voluntary organizations and community work (Potts 2008), but this does not seem to have been taken into account by the local government. Local authorities have in fact used public participation as the most effective way to convince local residents that the changes from these initiatives will benefit them, and thus reduce potential setbacks in the urban development process that might occur by social contestation.

Conclusion

Culture is in this case being deliberately manipulated in order to enhance the value and appeal of the place, which in turn will make it easier to "sell", mainly as a source of economic gain but also as a means for social and political consensus[1]. The overriding of local government by metropolitan powers shows how local government and policy-planning processes seem to be vehicles for consensus-making, and that regional and national private development forces will deliver the urban change expected by the elite groups. If elitist success is achieved, and the broad wave of place identity selling transforms itself into strong private land speculation movements, as happened in Hoxton (Lees 2000), the creative community as well as a plethora of other impoverished communities in the borough will be 'gentrified'. In fact, considering the diverse and sentimental quality of culture, these regeneration processes may easily turn out to be prejudicial to consensus-making politics.

Despite the many efforts from civil society organizations to be part of the planning process, it seems that a lack of support in promoting the integration of views of diverse organizations in the planning process has a parallel with the previously-sought planning agenda-setting by local and regional government, devised to maintain power among local state and its partnerships.

It is fair to say that the government took the role of mobilizer by setting a strong emphasis on the unified vision of place identity (creative sector, arts, culture) around which most of the intervening actors agreed to rely upon (even if unconsciously). It also took up the role of co-ordinator, by setting the parameters through which all the actors could intervene. Nevertheless, it allowed an unequal allocation of intervention power, which led mainly to the reinforcement of partnerships with the market sector for the sake of inward investment. Although the future of all this process seems yet uncertain, it is most certainly tending to the prejudice of the most socio-economically disadvantaged groups, and leading to processes of gentrification that ultimately contribute to greater inequalities and an unfair society.

If there is an alternative to the power circles here at stake, for which planners might have a role to play, it is to bring civil society to the centre of regeneration practices and policies, where its continuous support have the potential to genuinely be central for pluralist and equitable urban regeneration interventions. Planners are in a good position to work in this direction, either through the development of new expertise or in tandem with political activism. By setting an

---

[1] The growth machine thesis is a part of the elite theory, which explains how elites, by the organization, lobbying and manipulation of city space, achieve consensus with the sole purpose of gaining more political and economic power (Molotch 1976).

equality/justice agenda for the development of human capacities and environmental sustainability, the power structure would certainly tend toward a greater balance and fairness.

Figure 2. Power Relationship Diagram
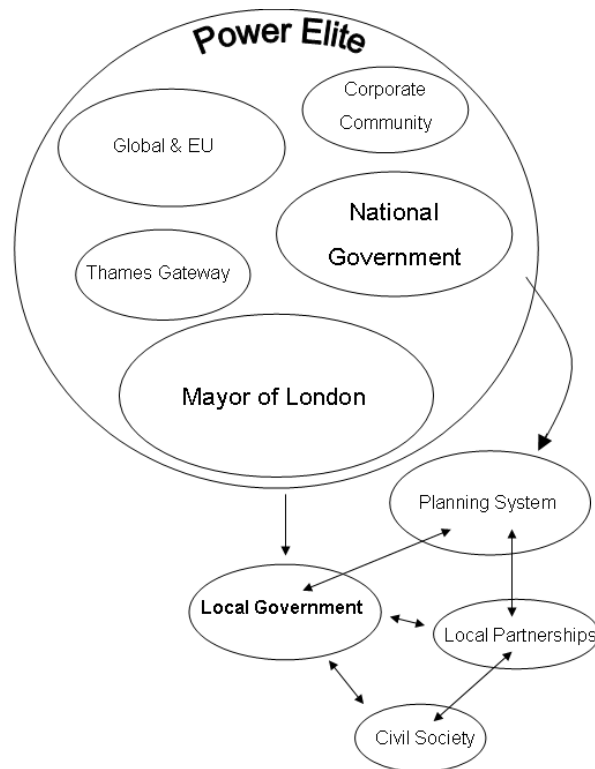
Bibliography

Blackwood, Lorna, 'Deptford's Cultural Development: Deptford is becoming the cultural hub of southeast London'. *The Times Online* (9 November 2007), <http://property.timesonline.co.uk/tol/life_and_style/property/new_homes/article2830789.ec> (Accessed 10 May 2010).

Creative Process, 'Deptford Creekside Charrette: the Proposals', *Creative Process*, 2008.

Davis, Mike. *City of Quartz.* London: Pimlico, 1990.

'Culture at the Heart of Regeneration', Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), London, 2004.

Evans, Graeme and Shaw, Phyllida. *Culture at the Heart of Regeneration.* London: Department for Culture Media and Sport, 2004.

Evans, Graeme and Shaw, Phyllida. *Literature Review: Culture and Regeneration.* Arts Research Digest, 2006. 37.

Harding, Alan, 'Elite Theory and Growth Machines', in Judge, David, Stoker, Garry and Wolman, Harrold, eds. *Theories of Urban Politics*. London: Sage,1995. 35-53.

Harvey, David, 'Foreword', in Zukin, Sharon. *Loft Living*. New Brunswick: Rutgers, 1989a.

Harvey, David. *The Urban Experience*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1989b.

Harvey, David. *The Condition of Postmodernity*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1990.

Kearns, Gerry and Philo, Chris. *Selling Places: The City as Cultural Capital, Past and Present.* 1st ed. Oxford; New York: Pergamon Press, 1993.

Lees, Loretta, 'A Reappraisal of Gentrification: Towards a 'Geography of Gentrification', *Progress in Human Geography*, 24.3, 2000. 389-408.

London Borough Lewisham (LBL), 'LDF: Spatial (Core) Strategy, Preferred Options Report', 2007.

Molotch, Harvey, 'The City as a Growth Machine: Toward a Political Economy of Place', *The American Journal of Sociology*, 82.2, 1976. 309-33.

Moore, Matthew, 'Deptford residents baffled by New York Times travel recommendation', *The Telegraph* (27 April 2009).
<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/newstopics/howaboutthat/5231086/Deptford-residents-baffled-by-New-York-Times-travel-recommendation.html> (Accessed 10 May 2010).

Potts, Gareth. *Regeneration in Deptford, London*. London: Bura, 2008.

Pløger, John, 'Millennium Urbanism – Discursive Planning', *European Urban and Regional Studies*, 8.1, 2001. 63-72.

Seetzen, Heidi. 'The Production of Place: The Renewal of Deptford Creekside', *Deptford. TV Diaries*. London: Deckspace, 2006.

Lewisham Council. "LDF – Statement of Community Involvement". London: Lewisham Council, 2006.

Urry, John. *The Tourist Gaze*. London: Sage, 1995.