

ABSTRACT for research seminar at the Department of Hospitality and Tourism Management, University of Strathclyde (21<sup>st</sup>. February 2007)

**Title: 'Spaces, Places and Faces: Tools for Participation in Urban Design'**

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Adjacent to many city centres, there are run-down and neglected areas that are rich in built heritage, but poor in most other respects. Urban authorities - sometimes with external support - select particular districts and invest in the public realm to create an attractive setting that will accommodate visitors that in some cases include international tourists. Thus, they seek to pump-prime an emerging visitor economy that will generate business opportunities and badly needed employment. However, in some cities it may also heighten social tensions. In time, the increasing number of visitors becomes intrusive, disturbance continues late into the night, crime and anti-social behaviour become problematic. The requirements of the visitor economy takes precedence over local needs, alienating the very communities that were supposed to benefit. The authors reflect on whether this pessimistic prognosis is inevitable.

The paper considers the rejuvenation of Brick Lane, Spitalfields, a disadvantaged but historic district of London's East End, where a two-year long consultation project led to a profound re-think. Previous assumptions as to local preferences were questioned as the ethnically diverse local communities became actively involved in proposals to improve the streetscape of their neighbourhood. The intention was to make the area more accessible, safer and attractive for local users as well as visitors. The paper introduces a technique that builds upon this experience, through a pilot project that will test and develop an innovative use of Geographic Information Systems for Participation (GIS-P) with the collaboration of City Councils, regeneration and development agencies. The aim of the research is to enable participants - regardless of their expertise - to articulate views and preferences in their own terms, and contribute to urban design, where streets and other public spaces are being upgraded. The approach incorporates the following key features:

- a) Focus group/workshop discussion is integrated with spatial expression of participants' views and preferences (GIS-P mapping), in this case for the development of tourism spaces;
- b) The GIS-P maps are multi-layered to compare the opinions and priorities of different local stakeholders, e.g. residents in different age or income groups, local shops versus hotels, bars, restaurants;
- c) This leads to spatial and temporal analysis of points of consensus or conflict, as a preliminary to the generation of feasible solutions;
- d) The process is re-iterative and progresses from strategic design principles through to detailed, site-specific issues, e.g. choice of paving materials, street lighting, landscaping;
- e) The results are presented on high-quality digitised maps that can easily be interpreted by those who will implement the proposals, especially urban designers, planners and transport engineers.

The paper will introduce the new research project (2006/7), the purpose of which is to test and develop the use of GIS-P to widen participation in urban design. The scoping study is funded by the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (Sustainable Urban Environments programme), and is being carried out by a consortium of research centres at London Metropolitan University, University of York and University of Salford.