

Tourism and Multicultural Heritage: Tools for Participation by Low-Income Residents

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1 Introduction

In cities throughout Europe, leisure and tourism provides a powerful catalyst for regeneration and renewal. Adjacent to city centres, there are run-down and neglected neighbourhoods that are rich in built heritage, but poor in most other respects. Public resources are often over-stretched. Nevertheless, city governments - sometimes with external support - select particular historic districts and invest in the public realm of streets and other public spaces to create an attractive setting that will accommodate visitors, including international tourists. Thus, they seek to pump-prime an emerging visitor economy that is expected to deliver a wide range of benefits, including the re-use, restoration and conservation of redundant or under-used historic buildings. More broadly, it is anticipated that it will stimulate the urban economy, create new jobs and enhance the city's appeal as a destination for cultural tourism.

Over the past ten to twenty years, there have been some remarkable transformations of neighbourhoods that seemed unlikely destinations for urban tourism. These include inner city areas whose very street names were once associated with the marginalisation of low-income residents, especially immigrant communities. The (re-)presentation of such areas as 'cultural quarters' has generated new business opportunities, inward investment and badly-needed employment. However, in some cities, the increasing number of tourists may become intrusive. Disturbance and noise continues late into the night, crime and anti-social behaviour becomes problematic [1]. 'Disneyfied Latin quarters' may displace established communities, accentuating social and ethnic tensions beyond the tourist bubble [2]. The authors reflect upon this pessimistic prognosis, and whether this process of 'gentrification' is inevitable.

The paper considers the rejuvenation of a historic but disadvantaged inner city area close to the city centre of London, 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 re-design and upgrade public spaces to make the area more accessible, safer and attractive for local users as well as visitors. It introduces a technique that will build upon this experience, through a pilot project that will test and develop an innovative use of Geographic Information Systems for Participation (GIS-P). The authors welcome discussion on the broader application of their methodology, especially in historic cities across the Enlarged Europe. They invite comments on its potential as a tool to support urban designers and other practitioners who are working to deliver significant improvements to the public realm of historic cities.

2 Regeneration and Multicultural Heritage in London's City Fringe

In countries such as the UK, there is concern that, despite the remarkable 'urban renaissance' of recent years, within a short walk of rejuvenated city centres there are disturbing contrasts between rich and poor neighbourhoods [3]. Showpiece restoration of 'urban quarters' may heighten rather than reduce the disparities between conspicuous consumption and poverty [4]. To what extent can low-income residents and small businesses influence and benefit from initiatives whose main priority is to accommodate visitors, especially through upgrading of streetscapes and public spaces that provide the focus for community life? In London, policy attention has focused upon an area of severe disadvantage that is located within a short walk of the 'Square Mile': one of the world's leading financial centres.

In the mid 1990s, its potential appeal to visitors as an 'emerging cultural quarter' was highlighted by the City Fringe Partnership that brought together Local Authorities, public agencies and commercial interests, and successfully bid for central government funding to rejuvenate 'some of London's last historic quarters':

'These cultural areas, unique to the capital and on the doorstep of the City, will be developed to provide a resource for tourists as well as employees and business visitors, helping to enhance the City's reputation as the premier European business location' [5].

In medieval London, this area was known as the 'Liberties'. North and East of city walls, it was beyond the jurisdiction of the mayor and burgesses, as well as the powerful craft guilds. The area thus provided a home for marginalised groups and institutions whose presence was unwelcome within the city precincts. A short distance from the Port of London, it became home to immigrants from all parts of British Isles to successive waves of foreigners. For example, in the fourteenth century, a colony of cloth-makers from the Low Countries produced sailcloth for English vessels. In the centuries that followed others arrived, many fleeing religious persecution or poverty in their homelands.

From the sixteenth century, Sephardic Jews from Spain and Portugal prospered as moneylenders and merchants [6]. Protestant Huguenots expelled from France in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries gave the word *refugee* to the English language and the area known as Spitalfields became their largest settlement. Their particular contribution to the urban economy included silk weaving [7]. By the early 1700s, the area was by far the greatest centre of the textile industry in the capital, but industrialisation made their skills redundant. Most moved away, but others took their place. The expression ethnic and cultural succession is well illustrated by the *Neuve Eglise*, built in the early 1700s, a non-conforming church that stands at the corner of Brick Lane and Fournier Street [8]:

'The original congregation declined as the French-speaking minority intermarried and became absorbed, until in 1809 the church was taken over by the London Society for Promoting Christianity among the Jews. In Victorian times, it served as a Methodist chapel until the influx of north European Jews to Spitalfields at the turn of the century. In 1898 it was converted into the Great Synagogue. From the 1960s, the Jewish congregation dwindled, and the building closed again. It was reopened in 1976 as the London Jamme Masjid, one of the largest mosques in the capital, with a capacity for 4000 worshippers in the prayer hall.'

As the Jewish population, which had been the dominant community in Spitalfields and adjacent Whitechapel moved away in the 1970s, Bangladeshi entrepreneurs acquired their former textile and leather workshops. The majority of the new immigrants found accommodation in low quality, often high-rise social housing, and the urban environment remained poor, with worn-out infrastructure and neglected streetscapes along roads where heavy through-traffic added to noise

and atmospheric pollution. Elsewhere in the City Fringe area, other immigrants experienced similar hardship; these included Vietnamese, Somalis and Afro-Caribbeans. However, by the 1990s Brick Lane - the main thoroughfare and high street for the Bangladeshi community - was attracting visitors from the nearby City and international tourists, who were increasingly aware of its fascinating heritage, its street markets, cafes and curry restaurants. Furthermore, a growing community of artists and designers contributed to the 'bohemian' ambience.

This nascent visitor economy was given a significant boost by another regeneration programme called 'Cityside' - (1997-2002), whose overarching strategy was to 'strengthen links with the City and encourage diversification of the local economy', especially into leisure and tourism. Cityside's vision was to 'achieve a quantum leap in the area's status as a visitor/ cultural destination' [9]. Particular attention was therefore paid to the main 'access points to Brick Lane, including its pedestrian subways to improve perceptions of personal safety, and in 1997 Eastern-style gateways were erected, together with brighter street lamps, the design of which incorporated ornamental 'Asian' motifs. In the same year, Cityside set up an initiative to enable street events - notably Bengali New Year and the Brick Lane Curry Festival - to attain a higher media profile, and 'Banglatown' was adopted as a brand to promote Brick Lane as a mainstream visitor destination.

3 Visitors and Contested 'Ownership' of Public Spaces

The rapid rise of Banglatown as a centre for ethnic cuisine greatly exceeded expectations. A survey carried out for Cityside noted that in 1989 there were only eight cafés/ restaurants in Brick Lane, with a few additions in the early 1990s. Between 1997 and 2002 this rose to 41, of which 16 had opened 2000-2, making it 'the largest cluster of Bangladeshi/ 'Indian' restaurants anywhere in the UK' [10]. Meanwhile, a redundant Victorian brewery was converted to provide over 250 studios for artists and designers, bars, cafés, two nightclubs, specialist shops and an exhibition centre. This transformation of a run-down and somewhat shabby historic streetscape has undoubtedly brought wealth to ethnic minority-owned businesses, and has created significant employment opportunities; the same study estimated that the restaurants employed around 400 workers, of whom 96% were of Bangladeshi origin.

By 2000, the inadequate local infrastructure was highlighted as a key constraint to further development of the booming visitor economy. In response, an outline Environmental Improvement Scheme was drawn up that would close Brick Lane to motorised traffic: an idea that was presented as something of a 'win-win' concept. Exclusion of vehicles would create a setting that would attract more visitors, as well as a more pleasant environment for local residents. Initial consultation suggested that public opinion favoured the proposal; Cityside and LB Tower Hamlets thus appointed consultants Buro Happold to design a detailed scheme to pedestrianise the street. The consultant urban designers were, however, fully aware of the sensitivity of local feelings and that over the previous decade, various proposals had floundered because of disagreements between opposing local interests or because of insufficient finance.

In the months that followed, it became increasingly apparent that many local residents, community organisations and businesses were sceptical; some were deeply suspicious and strongly opposed the proposals. Pedestrianisation had been advocated most strongly by a group of restaurateurs, who anticipated new opportunities for *al fresco* dining. However, the closing of access to goods vehicles would effectively mean that other local firms - especially those in manufacturing and wholesaling - would no longer be able to function. Some residents were against any further expansion of bars, clubs and restaurants, or late-night extension of their licenses. Unfortunately, a stormy public meeting led to physical blows and the police were called to break up an unseemly brawl in the town hall. It was anticipated that the overall aim of

reducing traffic intrusion would receive much wider support. However, the scheme would have to be acceptable to the diverse local communities that lived, worked, owned businesses, shopped, socialised, worshipped and enjoyed their leisure time in Brick Lane.

The consultant urban designers persuaded their client that full pedestrianisation would be undesirable and unworkable; a comprehensive programme of consultation was needed and all local stakeholders must be actively involved in the decisions affecting their neighbourhood. The two-year programme of consultation and participation (2000-2) that followed, yielded a far more accurate picture of local opinions, and prepared the way for a more satisfactory scheme that would deliver significant improvements to the public realm by means other than permanent closure. Those who took part included residents from the socially and ethnically diverse neighbourhoods around Brick Lane, restaurants as well as other established businesses such as local shops, workshops and warehouses that had different requirements for access, loading and parking, community organisations, the police and other public services, as well as visitors.

Consultation methods combined the use of workshops to elicit the in-depth views and priorities of these different stakeholders, and questionnaire-based surveys to establish whether these were shared by a statistically acceptable sample of these various 'constituencies'. Maintaining the momentum to ensure that people were kept informed was an essential feature of the approach. The initial phase of the consultation programme sought broad agreement on the strategic principles of a scheme to create a more accessible, safe and attractive pedestrian environment. The second phase engaged the various stakeholder groups in detailed design work, including the choice of paving materials, design and siting of street furniture and landscaping, and the lay-out of crossings, loading bays and parking spaces. This included a drop-in exhibition that was held in a vacant shop, where a multilingual facilitator.

As with the workshops, the aim was to create an informal and constructive atmosphere in which a wide cross-section of the local population and all local businesses were given the opportunity to express their preferences. This process seemed to encourage a new spirit of optimism and confidence that the views of 'ordinary' people would be taken seriously. When funding became available in 2002, firm proposals had been drawn up. As anticipated by the consultants, there was no unanimity on how the broad objectives should be achieved. Nevertheless, the scheme that was eventually chosen had been developed through a broad consensus that informed design solutions that would minimise conflicts between pedestrians and traffic, bars/restaurants and other firms, visitors and local residents. The key features of the scheme that was implemented (2002-6) can be summarised as follows:

Traffic Management and Traffic Calming

In accordance with the wishes of the majority, Brick Lane was not permanently closed to traffic (although the option was kept open for timed closure of one section in the evenings at weekends 6 pm-2 am, during the summer). The pavement has, however, been widened significantly, and made flush with the carriageway. Junction designs and priorities have been changed to slow down through traffic (the right of way now is now given to traffic emerging from some side streets). At most times, traffic is now sufficiently slow and the road narrow enough to make it safe to cross at many points along Brick Lane. Drop-kerbs make pedestrian crossings more accessible, especially for people using wheelchairs, others who are mobility impaired, and parents with pushchairs.

Local Identity and Street Furniture

Banglatown's identity would be reflected through public art and choice of materials, not through overt branding. Yorkstone flags (a paving material that had been used in Spitalfields

since the eighteenth century) were used for footpaths; black tegula blocks for road surface, with granite setts to demarcate between footpath/road. Public art, benches, street trees/planting and additional litter bins were located where appropriate, as guided by the consultation. Existing street lighting columns were kept if possible but complemented by feature lighting.

Parking and Loading, Maintenance and Responsibilities

Although the area is well served by public transport, there has been a shortage of parking spaces, and places for delivery/collection of goods. Priority is given to short-term parking, and new restrictions have reduced maximum stay to two hours. Loading bays and parking spaces have been redesigned to make more use of the available space and to align them with premises. The consultants recommended a 'Brick Lane charter': the Borough would maintain the street effectively and ensure that statutory services repair and make good street works, while business and residential communities would play their part in helping to look after the public spaces.

4 Geographic Information Systems for Participation (GIS-P)

The profound re-think of the approach to public engagement and participation described above, suggests some fundamental principles:

- (a) City governments and regeneration agencies must identify the full range of 'stakeholders': residents, local firms and community organisations, they must not allow one interest group to drive the scheme;
- (b) Each 'stakeholder' group must be allowed to contribute to the design process in a calm setting, and on an equal footing: with each other, as well as with practitioners who provide specialist expertise in urban design;
- (c) Differences between the priorities and preferences of the various stakeholder groups are thus made transparent, and local knowledge is used to inform the formulation of design solutions, working down from broad strategic options to the fine-tuning of proposals.

With these principles in mind, a new inter-disciplinary research project called 'InSITU' (Inclusive and Sustainable Infrastructure for Tourism and Urban Regeneration) is currently being carried out as a pilot study. Funded by the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC), its aim is to develop and test new tools to deliver significant improvements to the streetscape of historic but disadvantaged urban areas, using an innovative application of Geographic Information Systems (GIS) called Geographic Information Systems for Participation (GIS-P). GIS-P differs from other participatory GIS (as often called in the American literature) in that it is designed to give participants control of creating the data, rather than just manipulating other people's data [11].

InSITU will thus address the specific needs of communities in three cities in the UK where there is significant leisure and tourism-regeneration associated with built heritage: London, Manchester and York. The GIS-P tool will enable local people to influence urban design, so that the benefits for the locality can be maximised. The aim is to allow all participants - regardless of their expertise - to frame the issues and problems in their own terms. Their preferences will be articulated through local 'panels', composed of representatives of different interest groups. Through these workshops, points of conflict and consensus will be made transparent and represented on multi-layered maps and plans that can be interpreted by practitioners who are working to create safer, more accessible and attractive public spaces.

The tool will thus be developed for use by key regeneration specialists, especially transport planners and engineers, land use planners, urban designers, conservation officers and heritage attraction managers. In each of the case study areas, 'roundtables' will be convened to ensure that these relevant service providers are able to set out the specific issues that they would like to be discussed by the panels. Thus, they will highlight any requirements concerning the form of the output maps and may be used, i.e. to provide a useful input to policies, plans and programmes. Roundtable participants will meet again to review the outcomes of the local panels. The technique will be used to complement other methods of consultation and participation, such as public meetings, exhibitions and questionnaires, and the intention is to compare the results with the outcomes from these more established methods.

Through the case studies, the GIS-P tool can be used to enable local stakeholders to contribute at the critical stages of the design process. If proposals are in the preliminary phase, there may be a broad range of options upon which the public can express their views. Where they are relatively well advanced, the budget will be known, as will the design constraints, e.g. statutory services, safety and accessibility requirements, planning and conservation guidelines. Nevertheless, there will be choices that affect local users. These might include paving materials, type/siting of street lighting, design/location of bus stops, signage and other street furniture, design/location of landscaping and public art. Where works have been completed, the tool can be used to enable users to evaluate the improvements, and to identify outstanding problems that have yet to be addressed, e.g. street cleaning, removal of graffiti, repair of damaged pavements and benches.

The research team anticipates that the following features of the GIS-P tool will enable it to make a valuable and distinctive contribution to street design:

- 1) Focus group/workshop discussion is integrated with spatial and temporal expression of participants' views and preferences (GIS-P mapping);
- 2) 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 tourism-oriented businesses;
- 3) This leads to spatial and temporal analysis of points of consensus or conflict, as a preliminary to the generation solutions that are feasible within the available budget, planning and conservation guidelines, etc.;
- 4) 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;
- 5) The results are presented on high-quality digitised maps that can easily be interpreted by urban designers, conservationists and others who will implement the proposals.

4 Public Space and Democratic Participation in the Enlarged Europe?

As outlined in the section above, the research consortium will work in collaboration with city governments, regeneration and development agencies in the UK to widen participation in urban design. The aim is to enable participants - regardless of their expertise - to articulate views and preferences in their own terms. The authors therefore welcome critical discussion on whether their methodologies might be transferred and applied to other European cities, where a visitor

economy is being nurtured to revitalise historic but disadvantaged urban areas. A decade ago, as the European Union was expanding from twelve to fifteen Member States, Ashworth and Larkham [12] highlighted the need for a pan-European approach to heritage presentation and interpretation that would embrace the diverse cultures of recent past and immigrants, all of whom are citizens of Europe. More recently, Sandercock [13] has argued the need to celebrate the beauty of 'mongrel cities': cosmopolitan places in which difference, otherness, multiplicity, heterogeneity, diversity and plurality prevail.

In practice, considerable tensions must be overcome if this explicitly inclusive 'European' approach is to be accepted across the Expanded Europe of twenty-five Member States. This paper has examined critically the transformation of a 'historic quarter' at the heart of London's East End through a regeneration programme that gave recognition to the special contribution of immigrants to the creative as well as economic life to London. Its objectives emphasised the historic and continuing role of ethnic minorities in the development of London as a 'premier European business location'. However, despite these good intentions, some local residents felt threatened by an influx of visitors more affluent than their communities; visitors who were encouraged to regard Banglatown as a somewhat bohemian and hedonistic 'party zone'. It seemed to many that the requirements of the fast-expanding visitor economy - with its restaurants, bars and night-clubs - was taking precedence over established firms, including local shops and other businesses that serviced everyday needs.

The case study illustrates how serious mis-readings of the 'wishes of the local community' can occur. A very public argument over 'ownership' and use of the public realm did little to foster confidence in local democracy. There was understandable concern that leisure and tourism-led regeneration might alienate and ultimately displace the very people who were supposed to benefit. However, through the programme of engagement and participation that ensued (2000-2), the area's multicultural communities were actively engaged and participated in proposals to improve the streetscape of their neighbourhood. When funds became available, the revised scheme (2002-6) was informed by this involvement of diverse local stakeholders. Through this process of negotiation, the solutions achieved the key objectives of delivering significant improvements to the pedestrian environment for the benefit of diverse local communities as well as visitors. However, this profound re-think seems to be exceptional.

Throughout Europe, studies of urban tourism and its social impact stress the importance of an appropriate and robust planning framework to facilitate sustainable development. In the years that followed the demise of Communism, this proved to be a particular challenge for many historic towns and cities in Central Europe. Hoffman and Musil [14] highlight the influence of air transport and promotion of Prague's spectacular built heritage on the rapid growth of a short breaks market in the 1990s. They observe that despite strong local opposition, the municipality could do little to prevent over-development of hotels and other tourism facilities that displaced residents from the Old Town and heightened social polarisation. Poland's former Tourism Minister Paszucha [15] highlighted the potential of tourism to restore and revitalise whole historic complexes, but he also emphasised that a 'firm plan' would be essential, since free market forces would inevitably pose a number of threats.

In the early 1990s, leisure and tourism-led regeneration seemed to offer significant opportunities for the UNESCO-listed World Heritage site of Kazimierz: a remarkable district of Cracow that features both Christian and Jewish Heritage. Tragically, after more than five hundred years of continuous settlement, the Jewish presence was abruptly terminated by the Nazi invasion. Under Communism much of the area's housing was rented to the city's poorest citizens and historic streetscapes deteriorated. From the early 1990s, selected premises were renovated and found new uses as 'Jewish-style' cafes, bookshops, restaurants and hotels; culturally important sites were restored as memorials to the Holocaust. Thus, particular streets became objects of the

international tourist gaze. A nearby square became a fashionable, late-night entertainment venue for young Cracovians.

Neither *the Detailed Local Master Plan for the Historic Quarter of Kazimierz* (1987) adopted during the Communist era, nor the EU-funded *Kazimierz Action Plan* (1994-9) achieved the intended 'balance of residential, commercial and visitor uses' [16; 17]. Indeed, as residential and commercial premises became desirable, low-rent tenants and craft industries were displaced. In 2004, 'Friends of Kazimierz' was set up as a voluntary organisation, not only to promote events to visitors, but also to enable residents to discuss local issues. With regard to the public realm of Kazimierz, a number of key concerns are apparent. Many residents complain that pavement cafés and restaurants stay open too late, encouraging young people gather outside, drinking and listening to loud music on summer nights. In the daytime, tired tourists 'occupy' public squares, and parents complain that there is a shortage of space for children to play. There is anxiety that the new 'café society' will continue to expand and drive away the popular local markets that sell food, clothing and everyday items [18].

6 Conclusion

As Wolpole and Greenhalgh [19] observed, the best of public spaces have rhythms and patterns of their own, being occupied at different times by quite different groups, occasionally by almost everybody. Historic streets and other public spaces have the potential to provide a genuinely inclusive and pluralistic public realm for the benefit of local users as well as visitors. The examples discussed in this paper highlight their significance, and the strength of local opinions concerning their 'ownership' and use. Across the Enlarged Europe, city governments are increasingly aware that leisure and tourism does not provide the panacea to cure all the ills of historic but disadvantaged areas. If the aim is to ensure that an emerging visitor economy is sustainable and acceptable to 'host' communities, programmes of engagement and participation will be critical to success. The authors will be pleased to discuss with colleagues in other historic cities, how the proposed use of GIS-P might complement existing methods and techniques for consultation where city governments are encouraging an emerging visitor economy.

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