Urban Action, Gateshead

A case study of user involvement in the search of spatial quality in an open space in between and around three Social Housing Blocks

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Urban Context

This project focuses on the open space in between and around 3 Social Housing Blocks. Built in the 1950s, the 8 storey blocks are sited on the edge of Central Gateshead and are strangled between an elevated bypass (built less than 6 meters away) and the back of the High Street. This urban context makes the 3 Blocks an isolated pocket disconnected from Town Centre which is a stone throw away.
The grass area surrounding the three Housing Blocks has no apparent use at present.

The Urban Action team seeks to answer the question of ‘whose space is it’, unearth new meanings and articulate new uses from which emerges a new collective use and memory. These Actions generate temporary agencies forming community networks.

This project spans from autumn 2010 and is still ongoing.
‘Experts’ or ‘Co-constructors’: Asset Based approaches

- In our case study, we set ourselves the task **not to act as experts’ but as co-constructors** of new meanings and new uses for the space thus promoting a reciprocal learning process. The role of external agents is approached here as that of the **initiator or the facilitator**.

- Kretzmann and McKnight (1993) articulate an alternative approach to community building based on ‘a clear commitment to discovering a community’s capacities and assets’. This approach, called by the authors **Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD)**, reacts against the most traditional path based on identifying the problems and needs of a community and providing external help.

- This approach focuses on unveiling and celebrating the **assets of individuals** and identifying and mapping **formal and informal associations** amongst the residents in order to build upon them.

- Asset-based approaches rely on a continuous process of **building relationships** ‘with and within communities’ as well as engaging residents in their **own visions and action plans**.
Methods: from interviews to action probes

- Unstructured conversations occurring through the events organised and through playing games (including tea parties on the open space and bingo in the community hall) have been employed as methods to build a relationship with the residents and create opportunities for social encounters.

- The use of video recording for all the events and games has been unexpectedly welcome and has reinforced the conversations we have had. In addition, the residents who have joined us regularly have openly asked for their image to be recorded. We became aware that the videos are an asset in that they reflect a positive image of those involved as well as they bring back a positive memory of the moment shared.
We invited residents to events and conversations that were held outside or in the community centre.

These events were used to encourage conversation about their green space and what was happening at the events. After each event we later invited residents for a chat to establish a culture of participation and shared endeavour.
We found that residents talked about how the space was used in the past and about other activities they had organised themselves, eg. bingo.
These conversations and events helped us to develop objects that were related to the activities that could happen in the green space.

These familiar objects could help residents become comfortable with the activities we were introducing.
These objects, together with associated events are the elements that led us outside, and will allow us to help change the perception of the green space.
From holding events outside we experienced a number of factors that helped us to develop a set of aims for future events.

These factors led us to develop a design for a pavilion.
From ‘confrontation’ to ‘consensus’

- Hutchinson & Loukaitou-Sideris (2001) argue that two approaches to community organizing appear to be competing for pre-eminence: confrontation and consensus.

- **Confrontation**: Until the 1970s this approach dominated the field of community organizing. This model was based on political activism, confrontation and conflict as the basic strategies for social change. It was the consequence of the drastic conflict between the interest of poor communities and those in power (Alinsky, 1969, 1972). Paulo Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970) encouraged community organizers to awaken the oppressed and to promote fighting as means of emancipation and empowerment.

- **Consensus**: today it is quite common to see community groups forming partnerships with these formerly vilified external actors (government, universities, and corporations) and creating shared agendas that aim at comprehensive revitalization of inner-city neighborhoods (Hutchinson & Loukaitou-Sideris, 2001).
3P's Garden Party

Tea & cake from 3pm. Bingo starts at 4pm.
Come along and join in the fun. Family & friends welcome.

location: green space between Park & Pearse Court

CANCELLED
Consensus building is defined as “a collective search for common ground and the opportunities for mutual benefit” (Innes, 1996, p.463).
Projects without ‘clients’: Community-University partnerships

- According to Kenneth M. Reardon (2006), community based projects do certainly differ in the way the cooperation Community-University is approached:

1. **Paternalistic/Theory testing partnerships** are those in which colleges and universities view the community as a laboratory in which to test their hypothesis. Priority is given to the generation and dissemination of new knowledge.

2. **Professional/expertise partnerships**: the process is truly helpful for communities but is entirely controlled by experts, leaving little, if any, opportunity for local residents to gain deeper understanding of how to study, understand and intervene in the complex urban economic systems.

3. **Empowerment/capacity-building** partnership are those in which colleges and universities both seek to understand the functioning of the local economy and enhance its operation by involving local residents and the university-trained researchers in a reciprocal learning process at each stage in the research and planning process.
AN INFLATABLE pavilion popped up on a Tyneside housing estate thanks to a group of budding architects.

Postgraduate students from Newcastle University designed the "guerilla pavilion" working with residents in Gateshead.

It is hoped the pop-up building will make an appearance at this summer's Bridges Festival on the Quayside.

The pavilion, constructed from steel frames, paving stones, a series of straps and hooks and inflatable packaging material, can be put up and taken down in a day and is compact to transport in a van.

Students Cara Lund, Michael Simpson, Mark Greenhalgh and Amy Linford, working with tutors Armelle Tadiveau and Daniel Maillo, came up with the idea after meeting a research group in Gateshead.

They hope the pavilion could help community groups hold events without needing to apply for planning permission.