



Understanding Cities

Growth Agendas

Michael

I think it's almost worth picking up on the second point that Alan made there as well, to almost turn round the paradox of some of the growth agendas that are taking the foreground or certainly the pivotal position in a lot of city governments, because if you look at the East End of London in particular I think one of the more progressive problems if you like, the Keynesian welfare state that Alan was talking about, was that it assumed a particular kind of universalism, by that I mean that it assumed that one of the objectives of government was the population and a population defined in a fairly restricted sense, so it was a definition of the population that didn't make too many allowances for anything beyond the nuclear family, so differences of class tended to be obscured, but also differences that emerge in contemporary cities around ethnicity, around sexuality, around gender divisions were in some way very often kind of struggling to emerge into a governmental agenda that was based on this premise, largely in many ways a laudable premise that everybody was innately the same, and I think what that means is that a lot of different voices are kind of clamouring to be heard at a time in cities when growth agendas talk about as Alan was saying it's kind of a rhetorically easily mobilised nation that you have economic growth, then everything will be alright. David Harvey I think famously once said that the question we all need to ask is in whose image is the city made and if you look at the current East End of London there has been this enormous transformation of the old dock area which has been changed through, depending on how you calculate the figures, £2-3 billion of government investment, into being a major second city of London in some ways, so you have like a very large scale development of a financial services district around Canary Wharf which includes in it several national newspapers, but also Citibank moving their London headquarters there, Hong Kong & Shanghai Bank moving their London headquarters there, and obviously a kind of large economic base, alongside which there has been massive private residential development of luxury waterside apartments and so on, so that part of London has been hugely restructured over the last 16-17 years, but in whose image it has been made it is quite clearly that of certain kinds of property developers, certain kinds of place marketing that Alan was talking about, and that engendered fairly major problems through the exclusion of the local community, but interestingly enough although some of the work that went on around the docklands in the 1980's, tried to use a fairly unproblematic notion of community and juxtaposing the changes that were going on against the communities that were present on the ground. They tended to have at times kind of little grasp on the realities of community immobilisation and community protest, precisely because community didn't fit this kind of nice image of being the opposite of the property developers' vision of the future, so some fractions of the community were keen to get on board in a fairly pragmatic basis with whatever kinds of job were going, some people were affected were more by new kinds of property development than others, and in the same borough, the same part of London, if you look to the fringes of the City of London you have a situation where there's enormous fear in the late 1990's that the city will spread eastwards and wipe out the local community as office development increasingly gathers around the old city corporation boundary. And what you see there are a lot of contests around specific land sites which tend to reflect what we might call the politics of difference as different fractions of community see new forms of property development very differently, so as the city begins to spread eastwards the Bengali community will be simultaneously both very afraid that that particular kind of urban renewal, the old 60's term in the States would be translated into a sort of Bengali removal from the area and so there's campaigns to preserve a Bengali presence, Bengali community, housing as well as Bengali jobs; in that part of London there's been a big campaign to celebrate Bangla town as the heart of the Bengali community as a kind of almost like putting down a boundary against the city moving eastwards. But at the same time other voices in the community want to preserve a slightly different notion of community, a version of

community that's tied to the heritage of the area, to some of the old Huguenot buildings of the area, that translates in terms of both social class and, in some ways, in terms of race as people who are equally afraid of the city moving eastwards, but are preserving for them a very different image of the city than the one that might be put forward by those people who want to celebrate a notion of Bangla town and community jobs on Brick Lane. So I think what's quite interesting in a way is that those divisions cannot but be seen eventually and they cannot but be seen both in the old Keynesian models of universalism which begin to fail, but also in some of the new models of partnership which assume at times I think a fairly homogeneous notion of trying to bring together the private sector, the public sector and something that is referred to as the community when in reality the kind of fragmentation and complexity of both the private sector and the community is actually something that is extremely difficult to bring on board in institutions in a way that is both equitable and at the same time workable.

Alan

I think that's really important I think in terms of getting a shared agenda, or getting an agenda which looks shared; it doesn't mean that actually everybody agrees with everything that's on it. So while it's OK to imagine, I mean that's in the case of East London, much of the image was handed down from the Docklands Development Corporation; actually of course it's been reinterpreted, reused, rethought by the people who live with it, and by the people who work in it. I mean it's not straightforward, you can't just say that because something is dominant or a particular agenda appears to be dominant that that's actually how it's working out in practice because there are always processes and negotiation of argument because of the way in which difference comes out, and that it can't simply be homogenised and I think that's one of the things that makes notions of urban governance quite exciting, which comes back to the original question: it is the possibility of realising that stuff can't be closed down, that there are openings, that there're always openings, sometimes it doesn't feel like it.