The longue durée of community engagement – new applications of critical theory in planning research

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Abstract

Habermas' critical theory, and particularly his theory of
communicative action, has been applied in the theory and
practice of communicative planning. The concept of creating a
public sphere in planning processes has been used as an
"ought" that planners should seek to achieve to create a
communicative rationality. Accepting some of the critique of
communicative planning from an agonist and Foucauldian
perspective, this paper presents a new application of Habermas'
critical theory. Evidence is presented from community activists
in two neighbourhoods of their ongoing reflection on the
changes to their built environment over 20 years of
regeneration. In this context, Habermas' theoretical work does
explain the long-term discourse as the community moved
towards a shared consensus on their neighbourhood. This is
used to suggest that instead of looking for consensus in the
tense conflicting of moments of initial engagement planners we
should focus on the longue durée, and the Lifeworld of lived
experience, where shared subjectivities over the built
environment can develop.

Introduction

Habermas' theory of communicative action has been influential in spatial planning in critiquing rational planning (Fischer, 2003; Forester, 1993), informing the alternative in communicative planning (Forester, 1993; Healey, 1997; Innes & Booher, 2003), and being applied in pragmatic planning theory (Flyvbjerg, 1998b; 2001; Healey, 2009). By the turn of the millennium it was suggested that communicative planning was the new paradigm of planning theory and practice (Huxley & Yiftachel, 2000).

This paper uses empirical evidence that reflects on the longer term impacts of development – a 20 year story – to reengage with Habermas' theory of communicative action in planning theory. Whereas in planning theory communicative action is often presented as an "ought" – as the public sphere as something planners should aspire to but can probably never achieve (Flyvbjerg, 1998a; Huxley, 2000) – here is it considered as an "is": an explanation of how people behave communicatively and come to agreement, including with their built environment. Two novel insights for planning theory are offered that have so far been absent in much of the literature. Firstly the paper presents an historical perspective on Habermasian discourse. This evidence from community activists' experience of living with the physical outputs of regeneration – the built environment – is used to suggest that rather than focus on the difficult moment of communicative

planning between the planner and community, what is equally important in understanding planning and development, and can be explained by communicative action, is the long-term discourse between a community and its built environment long after the planners and other policy-makers have left. Secondly, the validity of this interpretation is shown through further evidence of community activists acting as 'little Habermasians' (Barnett, Clarke et al., 2008) constantly producing an active discourse of what deprivation and regeneration meant to their communities.

The paper is therefore offering a reappraisal of Habermas' possible contribution to planning and new insights into communicative planning theory. Communicative planning has been critiqued from both a theoretical and empirical perspective. The gap between the rhetoric of communicative planning and the reality of difficult community engagement has brought agonist perspectives to the fore, explaining why the discourse between planners and communities is often political and tense rather than rational, or at worse somewhat tokenistic (Bond, 2011; Brand & Gaffikin, 2007). The insights of agonism have also questioned whether the level of reflexive and empathetic understanding required of communicative planning can ever be achieved (Huxley, 2000). Theoretically, work from a Foucualdian and agonist perspectives have questioned the empowering possibilities of communicative

planning. Foucauldian analysis has used the methodology of genealogy to uncover the power/knowledge at work within participatory processes (Cruikshank, 1999; Fischler, 2000; McKee, 2009).

Looking over the longue durée in the built environment the paper suggests it is wrong to presume a public sphere can emerge in the rapidity of a planning policy cycle. The persistence of the built environment means a public sphere should not be expected to be solely created by planners before development, but continues through time. Residents will have time to debate and discuss how the new built form responds to their lived experience, and proposals that were once controversial and produced anything but consensus, can become a welcomed change to a neighbourhood, or become part of an ongoing discourse that needs to be recognised in planning processes. The article concludes with some thoughts as to what this may mean for communicative planning and planning theory and practice.

Communicative planning – communication, discourse and power

The reflexivity of late-modernity (Bernstein, 1983; May & Perry, 2011) has led to a sustained intellectual project to question claims of expertise or superior knowledge within a differentiated society and polity, including within spatial

planning theory and practice (Fischer, 2003; Fischer &

Forester, 1993; Wagenaar, 2007). In planning theory, the

theoretical perspectives of Habermasian critical theory, agonist

theory drawing on the work ofLacan, Mouffe and Zizek, and

Foucauldian theory have offered new ways of understanding

and doing planning. Some of the debate between these

perspectives is rehearsed here – focusing on communication,

discourse and power – to frame the empirical data and the

theoretical contribution of the paper.

Communication

Habermas' intellectual project has been to try and salvage the

enlightenment from the paradox of rationality (Ashenden &

Owen, 1999; Bernstein, 1985; Finlayson, 2005; Outhwaite,

1996; White, 1995). Further, his programme of critical theory

has been offered as a counter to a post-structuralism he sees as

playing into the hands of neo-conservatives and their particular

brand of rational liberalism (Habermas, 1985). As such it

appealed to planning theorists who wish to pursue positive

planning in the face of post-modern critiques of modernity

(Healey, 2003; Fischer, 2003). It also allowed planning to be

re-formed and understood anew as a collaborative,

communicative practice in a differentiated world of governance

and a networked polity (Healey, Cameron et al., 1995; Rhodes,

1997).

At the heart of Habermas' critical theory is the argument that that the rationality of the enlightenment, exemplified by the reflexivity in Kant's question of *was ist Aufklarung*? (Bernstein, 1985; Foucault, 2003), is a rationality defined by communicative action. In a free public sphere (Habermas, 1989) the Lifeworld, that arena of social life 'geared towards the symbolic production and reproduction of its structural components: culture, society, and personality', can flourish (Cook, 2005: 56-57). Homo democratus can be free to act communicatively, seeking 'agreement [Einverständnis] that terminates in the intersubjective mutuality of reciprocal understanding, shared knowledge, mutual trust, and accord with one another' (Habermas, 1996b: 119). To reach this consensus speakers make a claim for validity based on three standards. The truth claim is judged on: firstly its truth; secondly the speaker's truthfulness (whether they can be trusted); and lastly its rightness (whether it fits into expected norms) (Finlayson, 2005; Habermas, 1996b: 125-126). Through discourse truth claims are presented publicly and the parties to the debate attempt to become reflexively aware of the other's viewpoint to reach agreement (Habermas, 1985; Habermas, 1996b; McCarthy, 1985). Although argued to be a universal pragmatic epistemology, the relativity of truth claims, and especially the rightness of any judgement, means '[t]he typical states are in

the gray areas in between' (Bernstein, 1983: 120; Habermas, 1996b).

Communicative action has been employed in planning theory because of its emancipatory underpinnings. In Habermas' conception, the Lifeworld offers freedom. The development of modern industrial capitalism means that the Lifeworld been corrupted by the System (Habermas, 1989). Crudely put, this is money and power; but can also be understood as the purposive, strategic rationality – the *zweckrationalitat* – identified as a threat by Weber (Bernstein, 1985; Cook, 2005; Habermas, 1996a; McCarthy, 1985). In planning practice this is the technical knowledge that has reified human subjects and 'which makes a fetish of science' as the answer to society's ills (Habermas, 1996a: 63). Applied to planning practice, the theory of communicative action has led to the creation of participatory processes and spaces to allow this public sphere to flourish. The aim has been to create a shared intersubjective understanding between competing stakeholders (Healey, 1997) and examples of successful participatory processes work to create deep inclusion (for example: Quick & Feldman, 2011; Sandercock, 2000), (Young, 2000).

A further use of the theory of communicative action has been as a yardstick to measure participation (Dryzek, 1995). It is the failure of participatory practices to reach the ideals of

communicative action that has led to much of the criticism of communicative planning, as Hillier simply puts it: 'many planning strategies and/or disputes about development applications do not end in harmonious consensus.' (Hillier, 2003: 37). Indeed, from a Lacanian perspective 'conflict, antagonism and contradiction are not breakdowns of the system but rather lie at the heart of society and social change' (ibid.p.46). The emotionality, mess and tension of the real world mean that communicative practices are far from the ideal of rational communicative action (Barnes, 2008; Huxley, 2000).

Further, the tensions and conflict apparent in participatory practice, often reflecting underlying socio-economic inequalities, produce the sort of instrumental and strategic communication of the *zweckrationalitet* railed against by Habermas (Huxley, 2000; Huxley & Yiftachel, 2000). The desire to reach consensus in communicative planning processes can mean deep underlying conflict is not surfaced or discussed (Brand & Gaffikin, 2007) and 'the desirability for the legitimacy of a decision process may mean that a claim to consensus is made authoritatively irrespective of the level of agreement or of who might have been excluded from the process' (Bond, 2011: 171). In these cases it is agonism that resonates and explains participatory practices and so it is suggested 'planning theory needs to have conflict rather than

consensus as its frame of reference' (McGuirk, 2001: 214). In terms of the evidence presented in the rest of this paper, it is important to recognise this critique of the possibilities of communicative action derives from in-depth analysis of individual moments of participation on specific issues or plans, rather than an understanding of communicative action as an on-going process.

Discourse

In Habermas' critical theory, rational discourse embedded in the Lifeworld constitutes communicative action. It is through discourse that actors raise truth claims that are judged to form the basis of future action. The Foucauldian use of discourse as constitutive of society presents a very different idea of discourse to that used in the theory of communicative actions (Fischler, 2000; Flyvbjerg, 1998a) and also presents a critique to communicative planning.

Across a broad range of policy studies Foucault's methodology of genealogy (Foucault, [1980] 2003) and his theorisation of power/knowledge and governmentality (Foucault, [1978] 2003) have gained great traction as a critique of modernity (McKee, 2009). For those planners and policy analysts working with subalterns – groups who lack structural power and are being shaped by the governmentalities of the state (Cruikshank, 1999) – the searchlight of Foucauldian critique has been alluring. In

research on urban regeneration (here defined as the range of policy initiatives aimed at supporting or "turning around" neighbourhoods characterised by concentrated deprivation (Cochrane, 2003: 234)) analysis of the genealogy of Foucauldian discourses has: highlighted and criticised the construction of the "problem" populations within policy documents (Atkinson, 2000; Hastings, 2000; Matthews, 2010; Watt & Jacobs, 2000); problematised the very concept of regeneration itself (Furbey, 1999); and in relation to communicative planning practice, has revealed how partnerships to empower the community cannot live up to their idealistic objectives because of the inherent contradictions of the power/knowledge nexus (Atkinson, 1999; Collins, 1999; Cruikshank, 1999). As Fischler (2000) suggests it is the methodology of genealogy, and the questions it raises regarding what any consensus brought about by collaborative action might mean in terms of the exercise of power/knowledge that arguably offers the greatest critique to of the application of Habermas' theory in communicative planning.

Foucauldian interpretations have been criticised for finding every social relationship to be laden with power. This can lead social agency being downplayed or purposefully ignored for the sake of criticising something as "neo-liberal" (Barnett, 2005; Spicer & Flemming, 2001). At its worst, these analyses make actors empty vessels waiting to be filled up with discourse

(Spicer & Flemming, 2001) and applied Foucauldian theory becomes 'Talcott Parsons updated' (Barnett, Clarke et al., 2008: 640). If this approach is unhelpful then we have to raise the question that was often posed to Foucault – where does critique lead us? (Foucault, [1980] 2003: 256). There is an inherent danger that analysis becomes '"critical criticism"' that will 'seduce us into despair and defeatism' (Bernstein, 1985: 8, 25) rather than pragmatic analysis that seeks to make policy better. The key issues debated in the literature on communicative planning is whether a public sphere can be created that allows the Lifeworld to sufficiently flourish to produce a discourse to counter power/knowledge (Fischler, 2000; Huxley, 2000).

Power

Communicative action in the Lifeworld is perceived by Habermas as an emancipatory force: '"Communicative reason operates in history as an avenging force"' and the Lifeworld will always challenge the System if allowed to flourish (Habermas, 1982, cited in: Bernstein, 1985: 25). In collaborative planning this has been embraced to try and produce a radical democratisation of policy-making (Dryzek, 1995; Healey, 1997; Young, 2000). Through participatory techniques such as consensus conferences, citizens juries, partnerships and partnerships between street-level bureaucrats

and citizens, policy-making is increasingly trying to bring the Lifeworld back into processes dominated by the System and *zweckrationalitet* (Barnes, Newman et al., 2007; Fischer, 2003; Wagenaar, 2007). As such, communicative planning becomes the operation of power in the sense of giving people the ability to effect change (Fischler, 2000).

Critiques of communicative planning present this belief in the emancipatory potential of communicative action as somewhat naïve. As we have seen above, one of these criticisms stems from a Foucauldian perspective of the intertwining of power and knowledge in discourse. As Flybjerg asserts: '[t]he value of Foucault's approach is his emphasis on the dynamics of power. Understanding how power works [in terms of technologies of governance and discourses] is the first prerequisite for action, because action is the exercise of power.' (Flyvbjerg, 1998a: 228). Planners are always doing and acting in a power-full way within a governmentality of planning systems. From an agonist perspective this ignores the underlying inequalities in power relations between the state and communities and that '[p]lanners operate within a 'hard infrastructure' of legal/administrative and institutional procedures, guidelines, and rules that are products of instrumental rationality' (McGuirk, 2001: 209). Within this frame '[l]iberal moral and/or legalistic projects, such as those of Habermas, are generally

unrealizably utopian on anything but a small scale' (Hillier, 2003: 41).

Much of this critique derives from the analysis of moments of participation and evidence of the interaction between planners and communities (Beaumont & Loopmans, 2008; Brand & Gaffikin, 2007; McGuirk, 2001). The agonistic and unequal character of participation even applies to the cases presented below. However, by focusing on communicative action in spaces occupied by planners (or other policy-makers) and communities, this work ignores the public sphere of communicative action created by community groups. In the cases presented below this is a public sphere of working class, predominantly middle-aged, predominantly female, community activists committed to improving their neighbourhood for themselves and others (Grimshaw, 2011; Jupp, 2008).

To summarise this review of the debates around communicative planning, although Habermas is seen as 'morally admirable' (Flyvbjerg, 1998a: 229) his work, and responding critiques, have remained largely a theory of how planning *ought* to be carried out. The empirical evidence on which these broad discussions in planning theory are based predominantly focus on the process, and usual failure, of planners to create effective public spheres for the creation of communicative rationality. The rest of the paper presents evidence of communicative

rationality by communities themselves, without the planners but responding to the decisions of planners.

Planning the built environment, meaning and history

The research sought to understand the meanings of one area of spatial planning policy – urban regeneration policy in Scotland between 1989 and 2009, and how meanings might have changed over this 20 year period (Yanow, 1996; Matthews, 2010; 2012). During the course of nine months of fieldwork in two case study neighbourhoods – Ferguslie Park in Renfrewshire, south of Glasgow and Wester Hailes in Edinburgh – overt non-participant observation (Gans, 1976) was used to collect data in meetings organised to engage the local community and community groups themselves (44 meetings in total). Narrative interviews (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000) were also carried out with 27 community workers and local policy-makers and 16 community activists (43 in total).[1] The unstructured narrative interview technique was specifically used to allow for the free association of ideas from peoples' experiences of living in the neighbourhoods and experiencing the built environment to their experiences of regeneration and planning processes and practices. Thus, although participants knew the subject of the research (the regeneration programmes)

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[1] The broader research study was on the implementation of current policy. The evidence presented here focuses on the data from the 16 community activists.

most of the evidence presented below was in answer to the opening question "can you tell me about your experiences of living in [name of place]?" The majority of the community activists had lived in the neighbourhoods most of their lives and had been involved in voluntary and state-led initiatives for over 40 years in some cases. For these participants the negotiated text of the narrative interview (Fontana & Frey, 2000) became oral history, allowing them to recount their biographies and how their experiences of policy paralleled their lives (Diamond, 2005).

The interpretive ontology and epistemology underlying the research and analysis also accepted that the built environment of the neighbourhood told a story itself (Yanow, 1995). This recognised that through construction, existence, demolition and reconstruction, the built environment entered into a semiotic discourse with residents as they interpreted it and recognised what it symbolised and represented (Feldman, 1995). The methods used sought to capture the stories, metaphors, symbols and other tropes that implemented and created regeneration policy at the neighbourhood level (Shore & Wright, 1997; Yanow, 1996; 2000). The methodology brought together these stories with evidence from ongoing community engagement around place – a process in Scotland called Community Planning (Cowell, 2004; Matthews, 2012) – which for community activists regularly relied on these stories to explain

current problems and possible solutions. The history presented by these participants is subjective, but it was a live history being used and reconstructed in policy discussions (Matthews, 2012, in press).

The data gathered also included a broad record of official, semi-official, community and academic evidence, supported by easily accessible archives of newspaper cuttings covering the twenty years (Collins, 1999; Collins & Gunson, 1997; Gilloran, 1983; Hastings, McArthur et al., 1994; Kintrea, 1996; McCrone, 1991; Paisley CDP, 1978a; 1978b). This enabled present policy and the activities of community activitists to be understood in their historical context – a perspective often ignored in policy analysis (Pollitt, 2008). The paper therefore presents the theoretical contribution of a much broader ethnographic 'thick description' (Geertz, 1974; Yanow, 2000). The thickness of description is an essential part of providing a reliable and valid account to the reader (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow 2009) and as such the theoretical contribution of this paper is supported by analysis published elsewhere (Anonymous, 2008; 2012a; 2012b).

Agonism and communicative rationality in Ferguslie Park and Wester Hailes

Ferguslie Park and Wester Hailes are two peripheral neighbourhoods dominated by socially rented housing.

Ferguslie Park was predominantly low-rise tenement flats built in the 1930s that had been experiencing low demand since the mid-1960s (Paisley CDP, 1978a; 1978b). Wester Hailes was the last major local authority housing estate to be built in the UK with the majority of construction taking place from 1968 to 1971 and on construction was immediately an area of low demand housing (Gilloran, 1983). As with many peripheral social housing estates in the UK and Europe, by the mid-1980s both neighbourhoods were experiencing very low demand and vacancy problems following decades of state disinvestment, combined with problems of concentrated unemployment, worklessness and socio-economic deprivation (Dekker & Van Kempen, 2004; Tunstall & Coulter, 2006). In 1988, both neighbourhoods were chosen for the ambitious regeneration programme *A New Life for Urban Scotland* (Matthews, 2012; Scottish Office, 1988). Over a decade (1989-1999) the programme invested over £400 millions in four partnership neighbourhoods predominantly in capital expenditure on housing renewal (CPC, 1999).

The policy was widely criticised at the time and since (Johnstone & McWilliams, 2005; Scottish Office, 1990; Turok, 2004). This body of criticism focused on two aspects of the policy. Firstly, the initial broad truth claim made about the cause of the urban "problem" and its solution; and secondly the deliberative environment the policy was meant to develop . As

a product of a Conservative government the policy document defined the policy problem as working class communities in peripheral housing estates becoming dependent on the state (Hastings, 2000). Communities were to be made "responsible" through community ownership of their homes and the process of intense community engagement.

The process of developing partnerships was taking place when much of the emerging scholarship on communicative planning was emerging and the policy can be very much seen as part of the *zeitgeist* of modern urban governance in the late 1980s and early 1990s (Healey, Cameron et al., 1995). This community engagement through "partnership" was particularly problematic. It is well documented by the communities themselves (Hastings, McArthur et al., 1994, Collins, 1999), the policy evaluation (CPC, 1999), and academic research (Kintrea, 1996) that this attempt at community engagement was very much like the agonist processes described in much of the literature (Bond, 2011; Brand & Gaffikin, 2007; McGuirk, 2001). It was widely recognised that community activists were not equal partners and the language of partnership was tokenistic (Hastings, McArthur et al., 1996; Kintrea, 1996; Nienhuis, Van Dijk et al., 2011). In Wester Hailes, community activists drafted a document called The Pitlochry Affirmation stating that "the community will do, not be done to" (quoted in: Hastings, McArthur et al., 1994). In Ferguslie Park the

community partners were ejected from the partnership early on in the regeneration and the remaining years were spent rebuilding community representation (Kintrea, 1996; CPC, 1999). Collins' analysis of the discourses of partnership in Ferguslie Park, based on the work of Bakhtin (Collins and Gunson, 1997; Collins, 1999) underlines that the discourse genre of partnership used by the Scottish Office actually created conflict as it clashed with the discourse genre used by community activists fighting for improvements in their neighbourhoods. The result was the collapse of partnership working (Kintrea, 1996; Collins, 1999).

Returning to the neighbourhoods a decade after these regeneration partnerships meant this research could revisit the communities and understand how discourses had developed since the regeneration process ended – a story of where the neighbourhoods have been, what has happened to them, and what their future might be. This was not a given discourse of the Foucauldian sense, but a Habermasian deliberative discourse broad in subject and including the built environment as an agent. It was a discourse about planning and development but one that was not led by planners – they had left in 1999 when the regeneration of the neighbourhoods was "complete". The inverted commas around complete emphasise a double irony: questioning whether a process called regeneration can ever be complete and successful (Atkinson & Moon, 1994;

Shaw & Porter, 2009); and highlighting that both neighbourhoods still had concentrated deprivation and the associated problems, both being in the most deprived 15 per cent of neighbourhoods in Scotland.

Discourse with the built environment

Twenty years since the regeneration programmes in Wester Hailes and Ferguslie Park began the impact of the physical regeneration was still a ready topic of conversation. The stories that the narrative interview technique allowed to be told revealed two judgements on the redevelopment by community activists, a product of ongoing discourse after the initial planning decisions. The first of these is one of pleased acceptance – the new homes met a dire need for improved housing and gave tenants and residents something to be proud of. The second is more contingent, using the new homes and buildings to represent failed delivery and broken promises. The built environment was part of everyday life and was in discourse with community activists so '[w]e see here people jointly considering the extent to which certain maxims do and should hold for them, by taking their ordinary practices as objects of reflection.' (Barnett, Clarke et al., 2008: 646)

The discourse of community activists with their built environment began with the very poor quality housing that had existed before regeneration. In both neighbourhoods the

problems with housing led to the emergence of community activism in the 1970s, increasingly supported by state-funded community development (Cockburn, 1977; Gilloran, 1983; Paisley CDP, 1978c; Taylor, 1988). The problems in the neighbourhoods differed. In Ferguslie Park they emerged as a combination of poor construction and maintenance, overcrowding and simultaneous low-demand and vacant properties being vandalised (Paisley CDP, 1978b; 1978a). One activist had moved to the neighbourhood from elsewhere in Paisley and was shocked by the poor quality of the housing. Their story of living in the neighbourhood included problems with mice in their dilapidated tenement, still heated from an open fire in the mid-1970s:

'especially when you've got young children it's quite frightening to find that you've got vermin running about your cooker an' things like that and them coming out of the fireplace to sit and watch TV wi' you it was quite scary at times. When we couldn't afford to have a fire lit when the fire was lit it was okay but when the fire wasn't lit the mice used to come out the grating an' just run aboot the place it was not nice at the time'

(Community activist)

The problems in the Wester Hailes were with modern, system-built high rise flats and also a general environment that had been designed with the car in mind: 'a bit short on the

pavement department' as described by one community activist. Residents described the neighbourhood as being 'grey' and somewhere they would not have chosen to live. Many of the stories began with them becoming homeless and having to accept a house in the neighbourhoods.

The poor housing was recognised in the initial regeneration strategy documents published in 1989: 'Major investment is necessary to modernise Ferguslie Park's housing' (Ferguslie Park Partnership (FPP) 1989: 4); 'The strategic goals for housing in Wester Hailes are ... to improve physical standards.' (Wester Hailes Partnership (WHP), 1989: 8). New Life for Urban Scotland delivered this housing renewal through massive capital investment and as one research participant described 'it did exactly what it said on the tin' (strategic officer). Over £200 millions were spent over ten years in the two neighbourhoods to refurbish housing and build new homes to replace those that were unfit (Matthews, 2012 in print). In Habermasian terms, the regeneration strategies raised a truth claim that the major problem in the neighbourhoods was poor housing. This was widely accepted by the communities: 'they [community activists] wanted the houses modernised or demolished an' new houses built at the end of the day. They wanted to get away from the tenemental properties' (community activist). The regeneration programme responded by investing in physical improvements.

Understanding this truth claim from a historical perspective reveals how the final judgement on this policy was not based on truth claims raised at any one moment, or a single participation event. Indeed, it was conflicts about the high levels of subsidy offered to private developers and newly formed community-based housing associations that led to much of the conflict during the regeneration process especially in Ferguslie Park (Kintrea, 1996; Collins, 1999). Rather, the truth claim that new housing and physical regeneration would improve the neighbourhood ricocheted down time. The new and refurbished houses and new spaces were not "read" once on construction and completion and this interpretation then fixed. The discourse was ongoing with the readers, the community activists, changing their response to the text of the built environment as their lives changed. As they sought to find consensus on what regeneration had meant and what it could mean in the future, the built environment played different roles in this conversation.

In the stories recounted during interview, physical renewal was closely aligned to biographical details of personal and familial successes, such as a child moving into one of the new homes as a mortgaged purchaser rather than a tenant; or friends and relatives exercising the right-to-buy their socially-rented homes which was interpreted as a commitment to the neighbourhood. Activists who were fortunate to live in one of the newer

housing association homes spoke of their friends in local authority homes being ashamed of their neighbourhood and home.

This positive story had particular resonance in community activists' stories because of the intense feeling of injustice linked to stigma (for a discussion on the nature of stigma towards social housing estates in the UK see: Hastings, 2004). Both the neighbourhoods had gained notoriety and stigma predominantly because of the poor built environment and historic housing allocation decisions. In Ferguslie Park the regeneration strategy explicitly sought to improve the 'exaggeratedly bad image' of the neighbourhood (FPP, 1989). Community activists linked the impact of the stigma of their address to their everyday lives. This was commonly explained as being let down by local service providers, or that more affluent neighbourhoods received better service quality:

'I mean because you've got likes of [neighbouring more affluent area] and places like that where they do on the whole get a lot more done for them ... I used to see it quite a lot you know where they were getting pickups in rubbish bins and things like that put into them you know a lot more then what we did'

(Community activist)

There was also a feeling both neighbourhoods had been used as a 'dumping ground' for difficult tenants, without the necessary support to maintain tenancies, the wider neighbourhood or communities. Among resident activists the expected norm derived from this injustice was that any policy action should be a sufficiently large investment to overcome historic problems; as one community activist described it: 'there has to be more. What? I don't know. But there has to be more'. As such, the capital investment in the built environment was interpreted as the one sufficiently large investment that had occurred to meet the needs of the neighbourhood.

The communicative rationality among the residents allowed for this positive interpretation. However, through their discourse they also explored the shades of grey around what regeneration meant. Subsequently another common interpretation was that the regeneration had offered nothing *except* physical renewal, recognising the continued problems of concentrated deprivation. As one community activist commented:

'to me the whole of the partnership the only real thing that I seen that's been achieved is the change in the housing and I don't know if that's just me personally but that's all I see in in twenty years I've lived here is housing.'

(Community activist)

One key example of this is the interpretation and symbolic use of the Tannahill Community Centre in Ferguslie Park. This modern building, opened by Queen Elizabeth in 1995, was emblematic of the wider failure of regeneration. The community had struggled to make full use of the space and as it had remained under the management of the local authority, community activists had never felt fully empowered to own the space; as one activist described, they were working on:

'changing this into what can be a community centre to benefit this community because this buildin' doesn't. It's whi- it's painted the right colour it's a white elephant.'

(Community activist)

In this activist's story the white elephant of the Tannahill Centre spoke to the problems of Ferguslie Park and the concentrated deprivation and everyday problems that still continued and that there was a need for "more" in the neighbourhood. In a dialogue with the built environment, the Centre represented the promises of empowerment offered to the community – of a community-run centre to benefit the community – that had been broken as the regeneration process became dominated by government partners.

As mentioned above, community engagement in the regeneration partnerships was difficult and fraught with

tension. The discourse described above also allowed this to be reinterpreted as the consensus on the process of regeneration was debated. A unique aspect of the New Life regeneration partnerships was that as an expression of commitment, the UK Government Scottish Office appointed a senior civil servant to the chair of each partnership boards (Scottish Office, 1988). This meant the community activists most heavily involved in the partnerships and who sat on the board, felt a great sense of respect for some of these figureheads. Charged with implementing a policy in partnership with the community, these chairs worked hard to help communities and had a key role as a broker in delivering the policy. This was not always seen positively by senior officials at Scottish Office headquarters. As explained by one community activist:

"the initial lead officer we had from the Scottish Office ... was moved because he was seen to be too familiar with the local local authority mainly, but also with the local community. He tended to be quite open about what they were trying to achieve in the area ... it didn't always have to be done in a formal way if you know what I mean? It became quite informal at the end"

(Community activist)

One interpretation of similar relationships has been that it represents the co-option of activists into the power/knowledge nexus of the regeneration partnership (Atkinson, 1999). In these

activists' stories of regeneration, the relationship was characterised as one of trust and respect. Another community activist described how their chairperson was readily available to be spoken to: 'I would be allowed to phone [the chairperson] ... or phone [name] his secretary'. When the chairs were moved-on because they had become "too familiar" this bond of trust and respect was broken, with a matched break down of relationships between partners.

This discourse among residents and between residents and their built environment, about the planning and regeneration of these neighbourhoods was allowing the initial truth claims of the regeneration to be constantly tested and used to understand how the neighbourhood was continuing to evolve. This discourse was constitutive of the world of these community activists, but it was evolving and questionning. Unlike in the tense moments of participation in the 1990s, the discourse was flourishing in the Lifeworld of a public sphere of middle-aged, predominantly female, community activists. This Lifeworld also had critical power (Bernstein, 1985). Communicative action enabled these activists to reinterpret the improvements to the built environment as a positive and negative change, and to understand the process that they had gone through over ten years of dramatic upheavals and political tensions. As 'little Habermasians' the grey areas in between intersubjective

understanding were still open for exploration as the regeneration settled and the policy world continued to move on.

Policy action and the Lifeworld

For these long term resident activists, regeneration was not a single ten-year planning event. It was an everyday process of coping with the complex problems produced by the spatial concentration of individual problems in their neighbourhood (Atkinson & Kintrea, 2004; Wagenaar, 2007). Inter-subjective understanding as to what regeneration might mean could not be achieved in the fraught atmosphere of a rapid regeneration process. The discourse with the built environment over 20 years of change and mixed improvement described above allowed for this *and* provided a context for an ongoing negotiation of what regeneration might mean. For example, discussing and comparing local environmental problems and what may be done to tackle these (Hastings, 2007), or discussing the youth anti-social behaviour that had occurred over the weekend and whether the Police had been contacted. These processes of everyday regeneration took place in domestic or informal settings (Jupp, 2008). These ranged from the shared story or joke across the table at a tenants' and residents' association meeting, to a quick catch-up when walking about the neighbourhood. The communicative action of these people in meetings was active debate about 'the gray areas in between' of

the truth of local deprivation and what regeneration had been and could be. The activists were 'little Habermasians' (Barnett, Clarke, Cloke & Malpass, 2008: 646) making truth claims about their experiences and what policy intervention might make their lives better.

A common occurrence of this was debates about youth anti-social behaviour and what should be done to stop it. Discussions often began with the characterisation of the perpetrators as young tearaways who needed boot-camp treatment. This would be tempered by the personal experience of others who had been volunteers with youth groups or had problems with their own young relatives. This redefined the problem as one of a lack of opportunity, for things to do in the evening and also in the longer term for employment and education. A more holistic solution to the problem then made sense within the negotiated truth and rightness of youth anti-social behaviour as understood through communicative action.

These deliberative environments were a public sphere allowing the Lifeworld of these resident activists to flourish, uncorrupted by the technicism of the System, empowering them to understand their experiences of regeneration in their own terms (Dargan, 2007; Habermas, 1996a; Jupp, 2008). Community activist narratives would often include dismissive comments about the bad choices of planners in the past creating the poor

neighbourhoods they lived in. They would readily and knowingly use the historic euphemisms of planners to describe the problems of their neighbourhood – 'under-privileged', 'a deprived area' – and link this to their narrative of successive policies (Diamond, 2005). The residents thus had an institutional memory (Pollitt, 2008) of these various initiatives, usually greater than that of the professionals with whom they engaged, and debated the rights and wrongs of each approach.

Conclusion

In the analysis of community activity in Wester Hailes and Ferguslie Park, Habermas' critical theory could not be used as a normative "ought" to which policy should aspire as in communicative planning (Healey, 1997; Flyvbjerg, 1998a) nor as a yardstick to measure participatory practices (Dryzek, 1995). Rather Habermas' theory emerged abductively as an explanation of the "is" – of the everyday deliberative practices of community activists. The historical approach taken questions the assumption that the depth of intersubjectivity required of communicative action can never be achieved. The historicity of the analysis suggests it is naïve to assume intersubjective understanding can be reached in a rapidly moving planning and policy-making process (McGuirk, Brand and Gaffikin 2001). What was most important for the community activists in Wester Hailes and Ferguslie Park was to be given the time to

understand what the changes in the built environment meant to them and use them in their everyday practical discourses.

The discourse with and about the built environment in Wester Hailes and Ferguslie Park had developed over two decades since the beginning of the regeneration process. Over this time, communicative action has created an intersubjective understanding with the built environment. This discourse in the Lifeworld also produced some of the emancipatory potential theorised by Habermas. The discourse enabled communities to challenge definitions of "deprivation" and "regeneration" placed upon them and to understand the regeneration process in their own terms, both positive and negative (Matthews, 2012 in print). These discourses were enmeshed in much larger biographies and were then developed through practices of discourse in the public sphere of community meetings and exchanges on the street.

Using Habermas' critical theory in this way, this paper builds on the growing body of pragmatic thought and application of pragmatism in planning and policy analysis (Flyvbjerg, 2001; Healey, 2009). The discourse of the community activists, over time, in these neighbourhoods demonstrates communicative action producing a pragmatic judgement and outcome. The understanding that had settled at the time of the fieldwork was that the physical regeneration and particularly the

improvements to the housing conditions were the right, practical thing to do at the time. This resonates with the findings from regeneration experiences, where physical renewal made residents feel more secure and happier in their neighbourhood (Manzi & Jacobs, 2009) and that community activists will prioritise physical renewal and capital investment for the rapid improvements it delivers even if this is not the most "rational" policy action (Lawless, 2004; 2006).

In terms of practices of communicative planning it also adds to our understanding of processes of institutional capacity building (Innes & Booher, 2003). Examples of successful collaborative approaches to policy-making often focus on the long-term nature of processes of building governance capacity, institutional capacity and trust (Innes & Booher, 2003; Barry, 2012). The evidence presented here suggests that we also need to consider the built environment itself as part of those institutions. Buildings may not be of sufficient quality to warrant specific legislative protection, but the evidence from Wester Hailes and Ferguslie Park is that changes to the built environment continue to help communities to understand their lived experience and constantly recreate new meanings and new solutions to challenges. Any future redevelopment processes and associated collaborative forums need to recognise this if they are to achieve a level of intersubjective understanding with residents, and further should harness this

knowledge and the intersubjective understandings of residents, to inform future visions.**References**

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