

Mobilising in the face of large-scale urban change: a conversation between two community organisers from Johannesburg and London

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Large-scale and long-term urban development projects often cause sizeable transformations in the built and social fabric, raising questions about the impacts on existing neighbourhoods and communities, and how they might try to shape the development. There are significant challenges to achieving community-based engagement at a large scale involving mobilising a wide range of stakeholders with different positionalities, agendas and priorities across multiple and diverse areas of a city. In this interview, two experienced organisers reflect together on their different but resonant experiences in building community networks to engage with large-scale developments. Between 2016 and 2018, the research project ‘Governing the Future City’ explored the governance of large-scale developments in three urban areas—London, Johannesburg and Shanghai. In Johannesburg and London, the research

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process directly funded and supported community-based organising in relation to the planning and implementation of the developments. The organisers and researchers worked with existing community-based organisations to try to influence the planning process, drawing together a wide range of affected community and neighbourhood groups. During the course of the research project, the two community coordinators, Mike Makwela (Planact, Johannesburg), focusing on the Corridors of Freedom project, and Sharon Hayward (London Tenants Federation and Grand Union Alliance), working on the Old Oak Park Royal development, visited the other city to explore possibilities to learn from each other's experiences and contexts. In 2017, while Sharon was in Johannesburg, project researcher Romain Dittgen interviewed them together, twice, on 18 and 20 July, about their experiences of organising and mobilising in their respective cities, specifically in relation to large-scale development projects and in the context of highly diverse communities. Key issues that emerged concerned shared values of community self-organising, the benefits of building consensus or working with different views, and different approaches to relations with government officials and elected representatives. In parallel, they also reflected about working and collaborating with academics, as well as about possibilities for critical analysis of the developments and mutual learning across the two cases.

Introduction

Between 2016 and 2018, the research project 'Governing the Future City' explored the extent to which the challenges of large-scale urban developments generate innovations in community organisation and governance practices.¹ Empirically, this research focused on three specific development projects in Shanghai, London and Johannesburg. In the latter two case studies, the research process was paired with an engaged research component, in the form of supporting and funding community-based organising to foster coordination and mutual learning amongst the various affected community and neighbourhood groups who were attempting to influence these ambitious developments. The latter presented major challenges to community groups to scale up their collaborations across diverse neighbourhoods, and to build capacity to engage in complex, technical and fast-moving development processes.

The engaged research component sought to use university-based resources and research capacity to support community voices in the planning processes where government actors and developers had extensive resources. This followed in the tracks of long-standing research-activist collaborations in each context.

For the two experienced organisers who collaborated with researchers, one of the underlying drivers for mobilisation was to find new ways to bridge the gap between the large-scale and long-term framing of the developments (often difficult to grasp) which stretched across diverse neighbourhoods in the city, and the localised, even socially and spatially divided, everyday realities of people in these areas.

In London, research focused on the Old Oak and Park Royal development project, led by a Mayoral Development Corporation (launched in 2015), and centred around the construction of a railway station for a new High Speed line connecting London to Birmingham (initially Manchester). Spanning three London boroughs, this regeneration project involves the development of substantial numbers of new houses (in the range of 25,000) and anticipation of the creation of around 90,000 jobs. As the plans for the development unfolded it became clear that it would pose significant challenges to the living conditions of existing communities.

The Corridors of Freedom Initiative in Johannesburg was launched in 2013 as a radical attempt to undo the spatial legacy of apartheid planning and thereby allow poorer residents, largely confined to the badly serviced peripheries, to relocate to more central areas, closer to job opportunities. This ambitious development project was geared towards the densification of the built environment in central neighbourhoods, including the provision of social housing and mixed-use facilities, all of which were to be structured along a major new public bus transport spine (BRT).

In both case studies,² the projected and partly implemented transformations in the urban and social fabric stretched across a range of diverse neighbourhoods (whether racially or socio-economically) and raised questions about how residents would navigate these major changes. Each development was associated with complex and technical planning processes, sometimes fast-moving shifts in the aims of the planners and government, and even secretive initiatives unfolding behind the scenes. For neighbourhood groups and community-based organisations this required them to scale up their activities to try to influence these developments, forming wider networks and working out how to strengthen their influence by finding shared, collective positions across differences.

As part of the research project, both community organisers, Mike Makwela (Planact), focusing on the Corridors of Freedom project in Johannesburg, and Sharon Hayward (London Tenants Federation and Grand Union Alliance), working on the Old Oak Park Royal development in London, visited the other city to explore the scope for learning across the two contexts and to develop insights to contribute to the comparative dimension of the overall research project. Mike Makwela joined Planact in 1999 and is a senior programme coordinator, responsible for community relations and liaising with government representatives, alongside the planning, implementation and monitoring of programmes. Established in 1985, Planact is a non-profit organisation based in Johannesburg, which initially started 'as a voluntary association of professionals [coming] together to assist community organisations...during the apartheid regime'. It advocated against racially motivated removals and supported anti-apartheid activism and alliance-building across the city and country which was

a crucial organisational basis for the overthrow of the apartheid regime.³ Prior to her recent retirement, Sharon was the coordinator of the London Tenants Federation (LTF), an organisation which focuses on facilitating a self-organised movement of social housing tenants in London. Sharon had also collaborated for many years with Just Space, a mutual support community network linking organisations and activists across London to try to influence the metropolitan-wide London Plan. It was this experience which inspired Sharon to initiate a project to work out how communities might build networks and alliances to engage with the numerous top-down large-scale developments across the London metropolitan region.⁴

While Sharon was in Johannesburg, project researcher Romain Dittgen interviewed her and Mike together, twice, on 18 and 20 July 2017, about their experiences of organising in their respective cities, the challenges of mobilising in relation to large-scale development projects, especially in terms of working across highly diverse communities (especially in Johannesburg), and their experiences of collaboration with academics. These themes resonate with and can speak to the experiences of activists and researchers in other contexts. Helpfully for this, there were a few moments where each reflected comparatively on the other's city. Some similarities are striking: the complexities of collaborations with academics given their sometimes diverging agendas and timetables; the need for funding to sustain organising initiatives; and the deep challenges of working with very different kinds of communities and neighbourhoods. Some differences included: the different roles of local elected politicians and officials in community organising (crucial in Johannesburg, not significant in London); the emphasis on more direct grassroots organising in Johannesburg, with a stronger networking of existing organisations in London (although Planact also drew existing organisations into development forums); the different stages in the development in which the organising and research began (prior to a planning process in London, largely after it was completed in Johannesburg). Finally, some mutual learning across the two cases is also evident. The text presented here is a shortened and lightly edited version of these two conversations. A full transcript is available on the journal website.

Background detail for the overall research project is to be found in Robinson et al. (2020).

Glossary

Interviewer: Rom(ain) Dittgen (Utrecht University / University of Pretoria)

Sharon Hayward (London Tenants Federation)

Mike Makwela (Planact, Johannesburg)

'Jenny' is Jennifer Robinson (Geography, University College London)

... — deleted text

[abcdefg] — text relocated or inserted for flow

LLDC — London (Olympic) Legacy Development Corporation

OPDC — Old Oak Park Royal Development Corporation

BRT — Bus Rapid Transit

1. Supporting community engagement in large-scale projects: initiating networks, styles of organising and working across difference

As part of Sharon's visit to Johannesburg, Mike and Romain organised several field visits along the stretched-out geography of the Corridors of Freedom development project. This included travelling along the operational sections of the Bus Rapid Transit (BRT), stopping in several neighbourhoods which formed part of the research sites for Johannesburg (e.g. Orange Grove, Orlando East/Noordgesig, Westbury and Alexandra) and exchanging with select interest groups within these neighbourhoods. Following these site visits they all sat down to reflect on some of these impressions and discuss their experiences of community mobilisation practices across Johannesburg and London.

Rom: We've just come back from a few site visits [in Johannesburg] and I think what we should start with is how you as individuals but also as organisations engage with communities, and especially in relation to large-scale urban development.

Sharon: Yeah, I can start. So, with the Old Oak Common I guess what we knew [was] ... that they were going to establish a Mayoral Development Corporation which would have planning powers. So, there was going to be the development of a local plan. In that respect we knew that there would be particular ways in which the Old Oak and Park Royal Development Corporation, I'll call them OPDC from now on, would engage [the] community, would want them to engage with their plan. So, to an extent we were focused very much on that, on how this plan might develop and people might best be able to contribute to and to influence or challenge what might go into that plan.

So, there was a series of things that occurred before the OPDC was actually in place [April 2015]. We'd been working with the community groups a bit longer than that and we had some notion of just setting up a network of different kinds of community groups because that's what we've done in other areas [especially in the London (Olympic) Legacy Development Corporation area]. And it kind of parallels what an organisation called Just Space does (the organisation I work for is a member of Just Space), which is based on bringing together a number of different kinds of quite diverse groups, residents' groups, tenants' groups, people involved with housing, general voluntary and community sector groups, some involved in environmental issues, Friends of the Earth, for example, [to engage in city-wide planning issues]. So, very much based on that kind of structure.

We just started off holding some meetings for people to kind of find out what they knew was planned, what they knew might be coming along and some of the things [discussed] were also about how the group, the network might want to structure itself. So we talked a lot about, you know, their own statement of intent, as a network, and what they wanted and felt was good community engagement, what they would want from their local authorities and from the OPDC, the Mayor's office, whatever. ... We did a big conference quite early on to bring people together—different groups, so it tends not to be individual people but people who are representative of residents' associations, and there were

other kinds of community groups. So, we did a first conference back in October 2014, where we structured it around somebody coming from the Mayor's office who then ended up as the head planner within the OPDC to talk about what the Mayor was planning. We had a guy who was a transport journalist who talked about things around HS2, High Speed 2 train that was coming in, and somebody who had done some work with the Mayor's office around Park Royal which is a very large strategic industrial land area.

Rom: And the purpose of it, the purpose of it was information sharing?

Sharon: In part information sharing but in part two we had lots of workshops during the afternoon on different themed areas that people might be interested in. ... So, I think the workshops were based on, what do you think is the need of your current community and how might that [be related to what is] going to be coming through within this large development area. And at the time there were some people talking of it as regeneration [so, generally positive], but I think for those of us who'd been in and around these large Opportunity Areas in London, we were just talking about a large-scale development and assuming from other areas that we'd been in that there would be negative impact. Whereas we had to kind of taper that a bit to people who didn't necessarily feel that there was going to be negative impact. So that's why we structured it really very much on what are your issues, what are your problems now and how do you think this may benefit or otherwise?

Rom: Right. I want to hear from Mike about the initial engagement in the Corridors of Freedom which was quite different ...

Mike: I think for us as Planact it was by default that we engaged with this process of the Corridors of Freedom. By default in a sense that the plans of the Corridors had already been finalised by the City⁵ and approved [when we got involved through the research project]. We were invited to be part of the team that would research on the public participation process in the Corridors of Freedom together with scholars from the University of Witwatersrand. In the past, we had of course already engaged with some of the affected neighbourhoods, such as Orlando East or Noordgesig in Soweto, or Alex[andra]. Our challenge was that public participation had already come to an end when this research project started. ...

However, despite the fact that we came into the picture by default, we wanted to keep the conversation about the Corridors [going], [we wanted] our engagement to continue. Remember this project is for about 20, 30 years, so we don't know whether there will be another formal round of public participation. We are just crossing our fingers that it does, if it does, then we would have prepared communities. The aim is to avoid that bureaucrats might take decisions on behalf of the communities without considering their needs and aspirations.

It's therefore important to keep this conversation going, precisely because in some parts of the Corridors, already there have been some projects that have been implemented. As a result, people have to navigate what is already there.

In March [2016], we had our first stakeholder meeting where we invited the different organisations, structures in the Corridor[s], including the City, to come and share with the participants what all this, the Corridors are, and the vision of the Corridors. But also in that meeting, that's when we developed themes that, we had already started doing based on interviews, and discuss[ed] with the different people in the Corridors....

Rom: What is interesting so far is that the two community organising projects were tied to different time frames [in relation to the research]. I mean, Mike, you said, you jumped on board while the development process was already well underway, led by the research project's timing, whereas you, Sharon, pre-empted the development in a way, and your organising work came before the research began.

You both started your work by gathering different groups together in open meetings, but from our previous discussions you had different ways of engaging with government actors. Maybe, Mike, to start with you, you made the choice of directly engaging with government officials, with politicians and with other actors, other stakeholders, rather than just community representatives and communities themselves. Can you briefly talk to that before we shift to London?

Mike: The project was initiated by City officials and politicians, therefore it made sense for us to start the conversation with them. Part of our engagement in this process was to engage with the communities but also to engage with the ward councillors.⁶ Because they play a very important role as a mediation between the community and the City. We wanted to find out what their impression about public participation was, and what they th[ought] needed to be done to improve public participation.... Secondly, we interviewed the ward governance officials; these are officials whose main responsibility is to improve public participation at a ward level. In contrast to ward councillors, who are politically elected representatives, ward governance officials are municipal workers responsible for the public participation at ward level. We [also] dealt with the City officials at [the] municipal level. For now we are dealing with the senior officials [at the planning department]; we also wanted to understand what the[ir] vision for the Corridors is and how they imagined public participation....

So over and above communities we had to deal with those layers, to understand them, to frame a picture of what is happening. Obviously, we get different messages depending on who we are speaking to, but by and large all these different entities will affirm that more could have been done in terms of public participation and better organising for public meetings could have been done because this is how the city operates....

What we normally do, in areas where the community-based organisation is non-existent, we will establish it, like in Orlando East, Noordgesig we brought together all the different organisations, 22 of them, and established a coordinating committee so that you don't work with a crèche forum, a churches forum, a sports forum. We bring them together.

We structure ourselves [with] the block committee, district committees, so that the development forum becomes a coordinating structure that we speak to, because then you have one meeting instead of 27 meetings and we plan together, develop action activities together and engage the City in whatever we need to do, develop ward plans, prepare for IDP [Integrated Development Plan] meetings, submissions. We've just completed the budget submissions. The development forums are very critical for us, they are a vehicle so that we build the capacity, empower so that even if we are not there, we have this structure coordinating the activities of the community.

Ideally, we would have loved to do that [in the Corridors project] but I think it is not too late, even when this project is complete, we would like to conceptualise that, look at the different parts of the corridor and probably cluster, so that you have people from Alex, Sandton, Norwood, forming their own development forum. That is our methodology. Otherwise you are going to speak to the ratepayers, to the Alex landowners, to SANCO [South African National Civic Organisation] and that and that and then it becomes a bit messy; so we prefer to bring everybody together as a coordinating structure and they engage the City, and their needs are much, much better refined, like we did in Orlando East and Noordgesig.

So we hope that's the path that we are going to follow, to bring these different structures together and make a consolidated development forum, because then the voice is much, much stronger.

Rom: Sharon, you mentioned that mostly you deliberately didn't want to engage too much with officials, politicians in London... Could you expand a bit on the reasons why?

Sharon: It's very much a tradition of where we're from around the voluntary and community sector, about building an independent voice that is separate from [local government]. That's not to say that we didn't encourage people to engage with their councillors. We did suggest that. But we worked from a starting point of the community having a voice. That's not always done particularly well by local authority planning officers, housing officers and indeed the politicians. So with that kind of structure, we saw ourselves just as facilitating a community voice, with [planning] expertise from 'Just Space' in particular—and I suppose I've grown, I've learnt a lot over the years as well, to be able to translate some of the technical terms and ways in which a local plan might be developed, and what the planning policy means.

Rom: [Let's address the] specific question of engagement in particularly large-scale developments where lots of different groups are involved. [Sharon], you mentioned that you put a lot of emphasis on establishing a safe and independent platform where people can express themselves. In London, you have three boroughs, you have [people from] different ethnic and/or income groups. In Johannesburg, the Corridors as a whole run through [a whole range of] different areas, defined by both race and income. How do you draw in community members from very different backgrounds? How do you go about this?

Sharon: That's right, that's right. So, I feel that within diverse groups, we kind of talk a lot about making decisions by consensus. People were slightly wary of what this meant—there were some discussions early on around whether they should establish more formally what they were as a group. Should they have representatives to speak on behalf of the network? And I think that through the discussions and through the structures of our own organisations, we encouraged just a network, with different people and different views and an acknowledgement that different people might have different views on different issues but that that's kind of all ok. As long as it's a safe space for people to discuss those issues....

So, the network is just a network. It's a loose network that people dip in and out of. And we've had a lot of different people kind of coming through. Some have stayed throughout the whole period of time we've worked through, some have gone, some have come in. So, it's a network with a diverse range of voices within it—it's called the Grand Union Alliance, but it actually doesn't act as one organisation that speaks with one voice. It's a lot of different voices under one, and we expect that [each of] those voices will take forward the issues that they are most concerned about....

Mike: [In Johannesburg], I'm just going to give a practical example [from our work in Orlando] of what we normally do in communities that are different. It took us 18 months [of] facilitating to get 22 organisations to talk to each other eventually. That's a long time. Investing in meetings and trying to find, what we did was to develop a common vision. Our first meeting was 'let's develop a common vision for our area, different as we are', and we had 10 visions. 'We want to be like Sandton [a rich area in Johannesburg], we want to ...' but we had to come to an acceptable vision, not the best, but a common vision that says, 'we want to see development in our area', we didn't know what that meant. But that becomes a holding candle for us.

We then also developed a framework of cooperation. We signed a memorandum of agreement, I have a copy, I always keep it; we signed a memorandum of all organisations committing themselves that they would like to work together. And we were fortunate because the three councillors attended that session where we booked a hall, we invited communities to and say 'come and become witnesses'. People came and signed, and some were like, 'no not today, we are not signing'. But people made a commitment to say we are different; we've got different interests, but I think this vision binds us together and we want to see ourselves moving forward. So they signed a declaration committing themselves, and for me that was a big, big plus. In the next stakeholders meeting [for the Corridors project] we would like to start selling that idea. ...

Also, one of the things that we are keen to follow up is that in areas such as Alex, Sandton, Norwood, it would be very desirable to have a conversation amongst those communities because for now it is divided along racial lines. But we want to have a situation where we bring all those different communities together to reflect on the commonalities. The chances are, I'm just pre-empting, security and access may be a catalyst for these communities to come together. For us that is very critical.

Rom: Sharon, I know you have only been here [in Johannesburg] a week, but could you think of any comparative reflections on this approach Mike has outlined? Or what could be useful to take on board from a Joburg perspective?

Sharon: It's really good that you've been able to do grassroots stuff [in Johannesburg] because I think it is definitely missing here [in London]. So, we are working on building a network on what we've got. One of the things we didn't want to do because we were in three different boroughs was to assume that we were overtaking or replacing their existing networks... [In London], this isn't a person-centred big development. There might be criticism about what has happened [in Johannesburg], but the intention is around people and focused on people, it seems to me, and getting people moving around. Whereas this large-scale development [in London] has none of that. It obviously has transport links but those transport [components] are about business and connection of business between the Midlands and London, and a lot of the new jobs, office-based jobs, finance-based jobs, are about facilitating those types of links and then links to Heathrow [airport]. So, this is about high-level stuff.

Rom: In London it's more an idea of creating a new neighbourhood, not reshaping the existing one as in Johannesburg, right?

Sharon: A brand-new neighbourhood and how that relates to everything that surrounds it. That's why the surrounding communities and the voluntary sector and the community groups that work with us came in.

Rom: What is your exit strategy or timeline in terms of engagement? Once the plan has been approved?

Sharon: As long as we have money to work there [we will stay involved]; so, at the moment we don't have money to work there. Pragmatically, what can I do? Th[ose] are indeed big questions. I think we would feel a piece of work is done if we manage to help them get through a quite big examination in public⁷ where it's another opportunity for them to bring out their own experiences into a forum where there is an independent inspector [who assesses the Local Plan]. Some of them [inspectors] are good, some of them are bad. So, we worked with groups in the London [Olympic] Legacy Development Corporation area. The planning inspector was really good to some very excluded groups, Gypsy and travellers, for example. There was a representative from a Gypsy and travellers' organisation, she brought in Gypsy and travellers from particular sites in the LDDC area, and she spent a long time in allowing them to discuss and to lay out their issues on the table, provide their own evidence about that, and they made gains from that. They made gains through that process. We're hoping this time [in the OPDC area], some of those things will be able to come out and some people will make some gains through a one-on-one [engagement], or a process of an open public hearing rather than just making formal responses to [planning]

consultations. So, yes, it would be ideal to be able to take them all the way through that—either us (or me) and/or ‘Just Space’...

Mike: I think we are fired up as you can see; it is an exciting space for us, so it will be a pity if we were to drop this project at the end of this contract. I’m hoping that we don’t [exit]. We’ve discussed it as an organisation, we would like to continue, even if for another three years or so. Obviously, we need to find funding to sustain it, but that is the thinking, ...

Rom: I want to draw us into a more comparative reflection—Mike, could you pick up on Sharon’s point that NGOs [non-governmental organisations] have limited capacity, so it’s also about making choices and what you can [realistically] do ... So, how do you navigate these realities?

Mike: I think we’re quite mindful. The scale of the Corridors is huge for us. We may want to choose certain areas to focus more on them and to give them more attention and more resources. In our discussions internally, it is well and good that for now we are engaging at the large scale of the Corridors—we are having a bit of a taste of where we would make an impact. But more and more we are going to have to shape and clarify exactly where we want to put our focus. I am pre-empting the discussion already in the organisation, but it looks like [it will be] Louis Botha [a major transit axis that connects the inner city with the northern business district of Sandton and the low-income area of Alexandra], precisely because of the different kinds of communities who live there. More importantly, it is one of the routes for the BRT, [Corridors] investment has already gone in there, and the future plans [are well developed]. And that’s why it’s an important one—to look at the budget, one, whether it’s consistent with the plan and, two, to audit what is delivered.

I think because of the capacity that we have, we may not want to, otherwise we are going to fail, we can’t bite everything. However, I think we will continue to share the lessons of our engagement at a local level with other areas, we don’t want to neglect them ... but you also want quick wins, otherwise you get fatigue, you also want easy pickings. When I say easy, I don’t mean easy in that way, but you need to make sure that you make an impact, otherwise you will be there for the coming 10 years and when you look back and you haven’t even scratched the surface. So our contribution should be such that there are positive things that come out and as I say, just selecting two things—tracking the budget and auditing the services.

2. Community–academic relationships

Rom: How do you relate to more academic kind of work, [both in terms of] benefits, outputs and challenges?

Mike: The balance between research and action research is very critical because the temptation might be to fall into the research category and forget the action part of it, mobilisation and engagement, etc. Let me speak about the Corridors. I think we have been able to, in a difficult way, balance the research component,

or rather the research component that Wits is interested in as the academia and the action research that Planact is more interested in. We are not a research institution, so I think for now we have been able to balance that....

Rom: Some reflections from you Sharon?

Sharon: As a social housing tenant organisation, we get academics and students contacting us all the time. It's really hard because the argument of people I work with is we must make sure that these young people coming through have that grassroots experience. At the same time, I get lots of people saying, how has this actually benefited us, and we have given more of our time, which is desperately needed; it's voluntary time, and we are giving [it] to benefit their education....

Rom: But is [this Governing the Future City project] of any use to the work that you do?

Sharon: That is another question. I'd love to come back and work with Mike for a while. I'd love to come back and do some of the grassroots and get my teeth into what is going on at the local level. In terms of the work we do day to day in Old Oak, I get an email from Jenny every now and again; she comes to all the meetings. I really work side by side, there isn't really any relationship 'with'. She is just observing and studying what was already happening anyway....

I kind of think that if academia is going to be really useful to communities, it has to be the community that defines the project. Not me or anybody else. To be really useful, they have to [listen to communities when they] say, 'that would be really helpful to us; *this* is where we could learn'.

The academic stuff, you know, I think it has its place—such as books where academics have supported what community people are saying,... In theory, I don't want to have any need of you at all. I want my community, the communities I am dealing with, to have the strength and power to argue for themselves and to be heard as they are, without somebody who is more educated, more articulate to be able to express it for them. But in current circumstances, academics may well influence government or mayoral office. You can negotiate the mutual benefits that might be gained, also with academics....

3. Comparing large-scale developments from community perspectives: different vocabularies

Rom: To wrap up I want you to reflect comparatively about the vocabulary that has been used in relation to the OPDC and the Corridors of Freedom.

Sharon: I am very interested in what your colleague [who we met in Johannesburg] referred to as the 'constructive displacement' because that is a big risk in London. I don't know how much of a risk it is for you guys. When we were in Orange Grove, you were talking about the potential of small businesses

to [be forced to] go because they are going to bring in the bigger businesses. In the London context, it seems more appropriate to call it 'constructive displacement' rather than 'silent displacement', because they know it's going to happen. And they're not doing anything to prevent that. They know the property prices will go up and know that those guys will not be able to afford those rents.

Rom: Here [in Johannesburg] you might not call it gentrification, but there is a changing social fabric envisaged along the corridors which might actually displace the most marginalised societal groups within certain areas.

Mike: I think that's what I'm battling with a bit with the title of the 'Corridors of Freedom'. Because what freedom do I have? It's a very nice word but also raises the issue of the 'vision' which ties back to the language and vocabulary—the vision of this kind of mega project. What is it exactly that is intended to be achieved by them? Is it spatial integration, is it economic stimulation, upliftment, is it housing opportunity? It means so many things to different people and I guess that's why I'm unable to pin down to say in fact 'as a result of the Corridors my life has changed because of this'. This is what we are hearing from the interviews, 'it's a great idea, but actually I can relate to the bus, but I can't see the bigger picture that, as a result of this bus, I have been able to get employment, as a result of this bus, I am able to shorten my time to go to work'.

And this has always been my critique about government, they are not able to communicate their story very well. Government is not able to communicate its projects and as a result the language and the message get lost.

Sharon: I would argue that the imagery used in connection to the Corridors of Freedom speaks to a much more grounded level (such as a mom taking her kid to school and her going to work) whereas the imagery associated with the OPDC seems far more futuristic and design-focused.

[London is seen as] global, so they use that language, so London being a global city and retaining its role as a global city was in some of the earlier documents, for the Old Oak area. That's the main focus and you get community people saying, 'but we want a sustainable community, we want lifetime neighbourhoods, we want to know our neighbours, we need to be able to know our kids, we want to know this and that'. The community did a vision and then we talked lots, they talked lots; in fact, we drew bits and pieces and fed through, and then consulted back: we think this is what you are saying overall as a vision of what your area will be like in 20 years' time. And they really liked it and actually it is a nice piece of written stuff, much better than the OPDC's—they have only two pages in their draft planning document which is called 'thinking big and going local'. All the imagery as you see is about any kind of big international, global city. So this is going to be the Crossrail, there is the HS2—it's going to be as big as Waterloo, there's a huge new interchange. People are struggling to get their heads around, what does that mean living next door to this. ...

The marketing is targeted at a very specific [high-income] group—it's not for the person who currently lives in the area. It's surprising to see churches saying we are having mums coming in; we are doing food bank stuff, we are

giving them space for this or that. And then still having some optimism that this [development] will mean equal regeneration, that it will benefit local communities. And they are trying hard to get their own stake within it but [they will be]... *toast* [i.e. not benefit at all]. We need bigger social movements that will change that; we don't have that, because at the end of the day the politics must change in some way.

End

Notes

- 1 This research project called 'Governing the Future City: A Comparative Analysis of Governance Innovations in Large-Scale Urban Developments in Shanghai, London, Johannesburg' was funded through the ESRC and ran from January 2016 until January 2018 (ES/N006070/1).
- 2 Several papers within this special issue provide a more detailed outline of the respective development projects and the nature of participation and engagement. For the Old Oak and Park Royal Development project, see Attuyer and Robinson ([forthcoming](#)), as well as Hayward, Brown and Attuyer (2024). For the Corridors of Freedom in Johannesburg, see Dittgen, Cochrane and Robinson ([forthcoming](#)); as well as Makwela, Dittgen and Rubin (2024).
- 3 For further information, consult the Planact website (<https://www.planact.org.za/about-us/#top>).
- 4 More information can be found on the LTF website (<https://london tenants.org/about-us/extra-page/>). The initial LTF project on the LLDC was funded by Trust for London; information about Just Space can be found at www.justspace.org.
- 5 When used with a capital letter, City refers to the metropolitan government administration.
- 6 Ward councillors are elected political representatives at local government level and are tasked with representing the needs of communities at ward level.
- 7 In the UK, all local plans are subject to inspection by a dedicated national team of inspectors, which includes opportunity for a public hearing on issues of concern which are raised in the course of the formal public consultation process.

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