

CONTESTED SITE #4

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LIMERICK / JUNE 2017

FIONA WOODS

FREE*SPACE is a long-term project in the city of Limerick. It is a critical spatial practice that aims to disentangle lived space, as a material condition, from normative representations of space that serve the interests of power. The practice is influenced by the French theorist Henri Lefebvre, whose work on space has become central to understanding the way that spaces are socially constructed. Space is not a container for social life but one of its formative elements (Lefebvre, 1991). The kinds of spaces that are available to us shape the social practices that we engage in, and vice versa. Different ways of defining and controlling space not only mirror social relations and values but actually shape them (Stavrides, 2010). Practices such as urban planning, zoning, regulation, architecture, workspace design and infrastructural development give power and ideology a spatial form. So too do representations of space including maps, plans, public statements, policy documents and promotional materials.

While the political management of space depends on multiple forms of policing, it also relies on the production of a social imaginary (a set of values, institutions, laws, and symbols through which people imagine the social whole). The social order is produced and reproduced through such social imaginaries. In Limerick one of the representations of space that attempts to shape a dominant social imaginary of the city is the vision document *Limerick 2030: An Economic and Spatial Plan*. In addition to producing aspirational designs for economically beneficial spaces in the city centre, this document identifies the interests that will be prioritised in reshaping the city.

The first paragraph in the section on the Spatial Plan (fig. 1) uses the term business four times, in the context of the economic potential of the city. There is no mention of publics, users or citizens. The city centre is defined as a 'shop window', a place of consumption rather than public occupation. The second paragraph is even clearer. The city centre must provide quality of life factors that are 'so important to investors, employers and skilled workers'. The needs and desires of this group are prioritised.

4.0 A New City Centre Spatial Plan ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~

The Spatial Plan will ensure that the City Centre fulfills its full economic potential by becoming a desirable place in which to 'do business'. The ambition is to create a City and Centre that can attract new inward business investment and encourage the formation of new local businesses by providing high quality, flexible space to meet accommodation requirements and ensuring the necessary business support structures are in place.

The City Centre should be at the heart of the wider economic strategy for Limerick, developing its role as a place of creativity, culture and consumption. It is the 'shop window' for Limerick. Its role will not just be about providing the accommodation and infrastructure, but also providing the 'quality of life' factors so important to investors, employers and skilled workers. Many of the ingredients and inherent attributes necessary to be successful are in place – the Spatial Plan seeks to take advantage of these.

Figure 1; *Limerick 2030*, LCCC, 2013: pg vi.

The first paragraph in the section on Marketing (fig. 2) suggests a 'place proposition' for Limerick, a rhetorical device that can function to discipline messages about the city and to inform aspects of the Limerick experience including 'behaviour'. The official message of the city will incorporate and promote a set of desirable 'behaviours'.

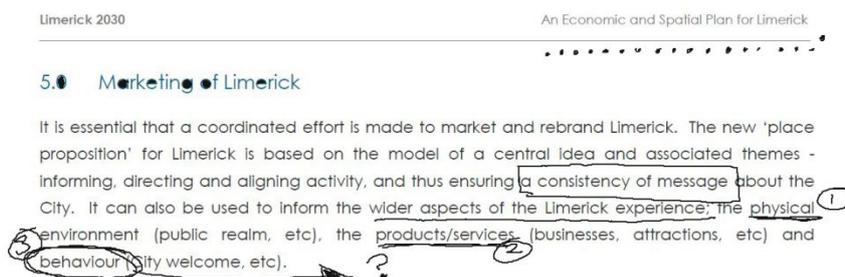


Figure 2; *Limerick 2030*, LCCC, 2013: pg xvi.

The plan arrives at four 'themes' to focus messaging around Limerick (related to the idea of desirable behaviours above) (fig.3): authentic is used twice, innovative four times, progressive twice. These values are 'the promise of what Limerick is'. The people of Limerick should be 'authentic, innovative, genuine, natural, real, welcoming, friendly, leaders and achievers'.

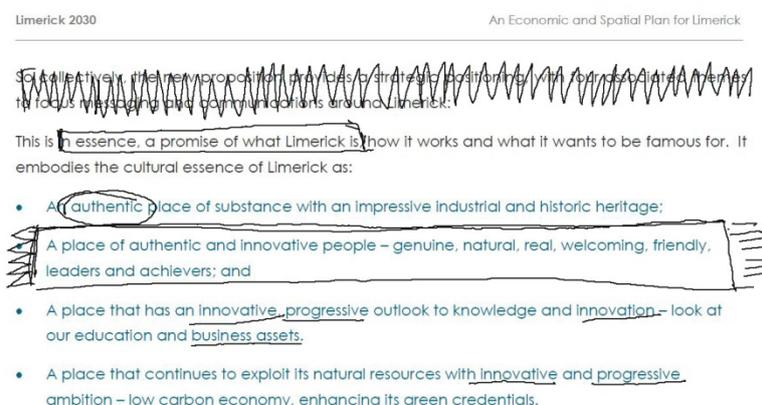


Figure 3; *Limerick 2030*, LCCC, 2013: pg vii.

These statements attempt to legitimate a set of norms about who is a desirable occupant of public space in the city and how they should behave. A vision is promoted that divides people into categories, those with economic or productive power and those without. The poor, the unproductive, the unassimilated, the non-conforming, the feeble – these people are rendered invisible, absent from the desired publics of the city.

Representations 'from above' like this one are highly resourced productions, interest driven and ideologically underpinned. They legitimate the interests of power in highly sophisticated ways that make those interests seem like nothing more than common sense. In contrast to these *Representations of Space* shaped by power, *Spaces of Representation* (the third node on Lefebvre's triad of spatial production, diagram opposite) emerge within the lived experiences of people. These are spaces where people make their own understandings and productions of space, where they occupy space in ways that do not completely conform to the official position, where they create contrary narratives. *Contested Sites* actions seek out fissures and fault-lines in the dominant production of space to generate contrary spaces of representation. Each *Contested Site* action involves another person from the city who identifies a site where spatial conditions are conflicting or contested. Sometimes the social imaginary of the space is in conflict with the material reality, sometimes contradictory logics are operating at the site. We work together to generate a representation of the site that is not necessarily coherent or complete, one that gathers together fragments and moments with which to forge a representation-from below.

Contested Site #4 is a co-production with an activist based in a regeneration area of Limerick, unnamed at his request. The activist selected the contested site because it exemplifies many of the conflicting logics that characterise discourses of regeneration in general, and of Limerick Regeneration in particular. Having been 'degenerated' over a period of years, 49 houses in Clarina Park were eventually demolished and the population of the estate dispersed, ostensibly to make way for new development. More than 10 years after this area was designated a regeneration area significant development has failed to materialise, a fact attributed to the financial crash of 2008. However, ideological opposition to social housing, as demonstrated by the current government, suggests that other forces may be working on this site. The Fitzgerald report of 2007 advocated 'unlocking the value of lands close to the city centre'. Transforming land into real estate, a shift from concrete space to abstract space in Lefebvre's terms, is a well-recognised strategy of neoliberal governance which seeks to embed market forces in all aspects of social life. The *Limerick Regeneration Framework Implementation Plan* (2014) recommends that private landlordism should be encouraged in regeneration areas, although private rented accommodation is very costly for the state when used as social housing (Hearne, 2017).

The rhetoric of 'community consultation' is a bone of contention with local people. What looks like consultation and participation on paper is a façade, according to the activist, little more than a smokescreen. The Resident's Forums were described by one Ballinacurra Weston resident as 'toothless. . . just a way to keep us quiet and pretend we were involved'

(Regeneration Watch, n.d.); in 2013, Limerick Live 95 FM reported that 'a community group in St Mary's Park has resigned en masse in a row with Limerick City Council over the direction of the massive regeneration project. The nine-person group said they have no confidence in the current process as their concerns are being ignored by council officials' (Regeneration Watch, n.d.).

The field of possible experience and expression is structured by a 'regime of visibility', according to Jacques Rancière (2005: 20), which determines what can be seen, what can be heard and what can be said. The very terms by which some things are made visible excludes others which are invisibilized, creating a fragmented residue that struggles to appear in public discourse. However this residue can find unanticipated modes of address to constitute a performative, counter-public sphere (Warner, 2002) that amounts to a 're-framing of the real' (Rancière, 2010: 117). *Contested Sites* is oriented towards such a re-framing.

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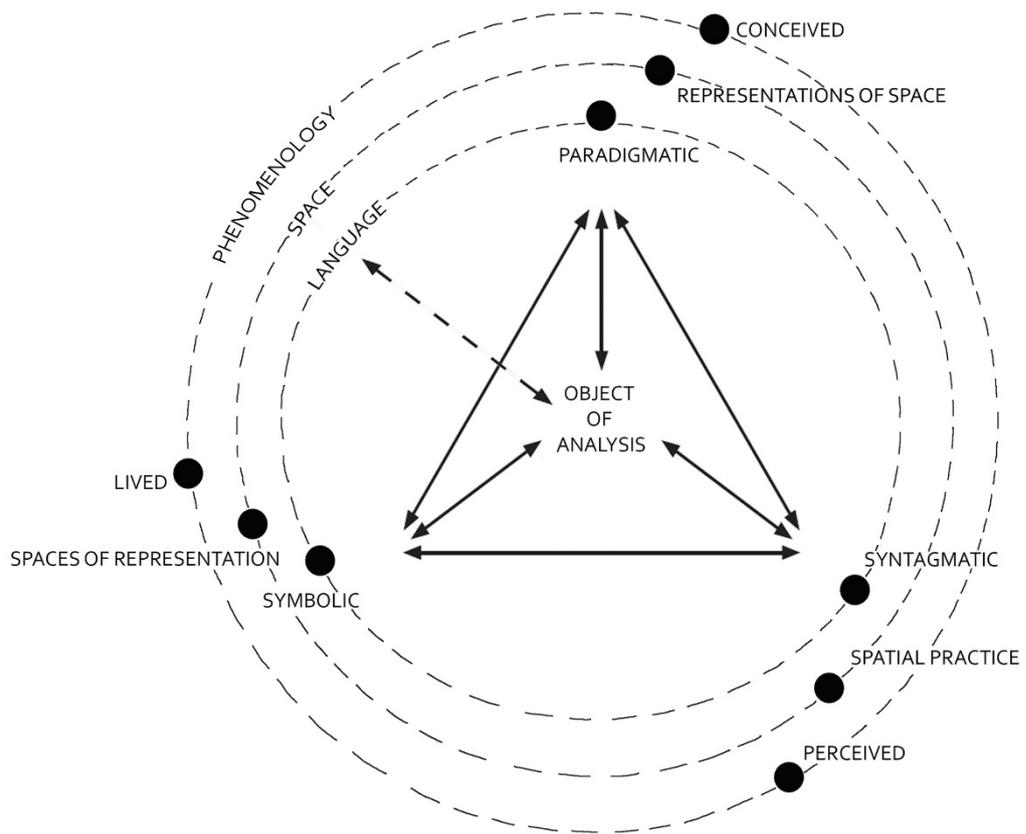
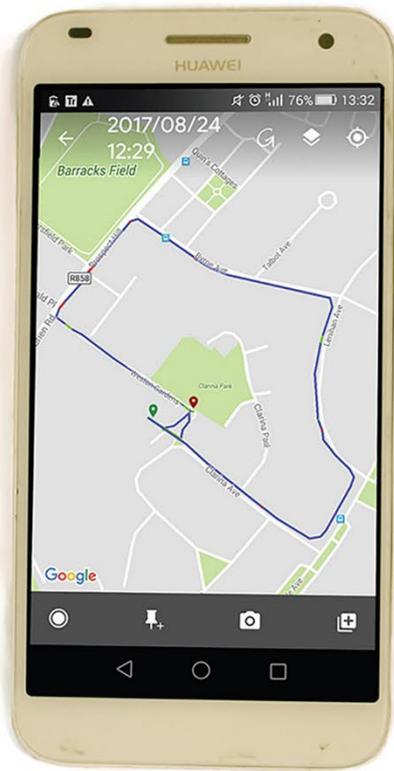


FIG 1. LEFEBVRE'S TRIADIC ANALYTICAL SCHEME AS HE APPLIED IT TO A NUMBER OF AREAS OF INQUIRY





FW: So we are standing here at the top of Blake's Boreen. . . on the statutory boundary which marks out this particular regeneration area.

CMC: Yes, we are just at the edge of it. In the middle of the road is where it ends officially.

FW: What exactly does the statutory boundary confer, what does that mean?

CMC: They were introduced in 2008 when they amended the ministerial orders which established the regeneration agencies. They included deposited maps as well as adding other people onto the regeneration board. The purpose of the deposited maps was to make it legal for them to board up a house in the area. Once an area has been marked out for Urban Renewal, that allows the council to purchase a house in the area and board it up without any legal obligations to refurbish and relet or any obligation to demolish if it's derelict. They can sit and wait.

FW: Even though the Regeneration Agency has changed, there has been a transfer from a semi-independent agency back into the council, the nature of the areas themselves, what this boundary actually marks out, that hasn't changed?

CMC: That hasn't changed and I thought it would. What they did when they handed power back to the council regarding regeneration, there was a transfer of functions and legislation was amended to say that the functions that once applied to the agency now applied to the council. I had assumed they would scrap it completely but they didn't. Those deposited maps for the north side and south side still are on the statute books. The red line still exists and the functions of the agency are now the functions of the council.

FW: We are going to walk down Blake's Boreen and we are going to walk around the Clarina Park Estate. Is that right?

CMC: Well, the former Clarina park estate is now gone. We will be going through Ballinacurra Weston and Clarina Avenue. We will then go up Hyde Avenue and Lenihan Avenue and Byrne Avenue because we are going to look at those houses as well.

FW: Sometimes, it's very hard to fathom the different logics that are operating. That's one of the things I'm interested in. These things happen and there must be somebody who has a logic for it somewhere but it's very hard to track it down. Often they are in conflict.

CMC: The logic is there. The official agenda doesn't correspond with their actual agenda which I believe is to get rid of everybody and then redevelop the land.

FW: Everybody, how far would that everybody extend, in the entire statutory zone?

CMC: Certainly they had named in the legislation, certain areas. They claimed only the named areas were targeted. That's stated in the legislation: "which includes" and then it names the areas.

FW: It was kept deliberately vague?

CMC: I have a letter from Regeneration say that the boundaries were so wide because then they could expand regeneration if they want-



ed to. I have that letter from Brendan Kenny. I also saw the deposited maps in advance of them being made law. . .It's smaller here... It's bigger up further.

FW: I know this is something of a problem corner for you because you have pointed out how dangerous it is. People walk on that wall. There's a steep fall off on the other side.

CMC: Back in the 80s a child had a serious fall further up that boreen. He was hospitalised. They still do. Their plan was to remove the fence and knock that section wall and they were going to put rock armour in there.

FW: This is the rock armour?

CMC: Yes, That would create problems. It would have created a picnic area. As you know we've had problems there. Open space....a lot more vulnerable.

FW: Passive security (means) having the neighbourhood police the area?

CMC: Parts of the security worked because it's at the main road. If you have traffic going through that can provide passive security. But here there's no one really looking. The context of the passive security as it was outlined in the new plan. There was Garda... up in Dublin that came up with it. That's the design expert; he often features on Crime Watch. The context of that was with houses being built there. Passive security would be provided by new houses with the residents in them. There is no new houses there as you can see. So opening up the site that goes against their stated ideas.

FW: This site now, I've seen the houses that were on it on google earth from 2009, how long is it since the site has been cleared?

CMC: 2012, the last two houses were demolished.

FW: Were they inhabited?

CMC: No they were the Community Development Project.

FW: So, 5 years?

CMC: 5 years, they were all tenants. There was 49 houses in total. They were built in 1996. There was nothing wrong with them, physically.

FW: What happened was, this process of sequence of events that happen, where they start to, I think the term you use is de-tenanting?

CMC: De-tenanting, yes. They offer the tenant the same rate in another area. Then the house gets boarded up, looted and burnt out. I have loads of



CONTESTED SPACES # 4
CLARINA PARK WALK



photos of that happening in Clarina Park. In Clarina Park they were all tenants. In the rest of Weston they were mostly homeowners. The tenants were peppered throughout the area. They removed them and then would board up the house on the block, or two houses on the block. They would get the homeowner to then sell their house back or as they call it become a tenant elsewhere. You go from a homeowner to a tenant and get compensated for €30,000. Of course that money would be gone in rent in three or four years.

FW: I can see why people would resist that.

CMC: Yes, as best they can.

FW: The fact that the house would be emptied and boarded up, that wouldn't happen in other parts of the city. They would either have to demolish or refurbish.

CMC: A house that was derelict they would have to demolish. A house that was not derelict would have to be refurbished and relet. That's the law.

FW: The stated logic of why they would board up, is there a stated logic?

CMC: The stated logic is to keep the property safe. In many cases it actually advertises the fact the property is now empty.

FW: As you have pointed out, first of all, people go in and strip the copper. Then often it becomes a dumping ground.

CMC: You can find examples of where the council has deviated from that policy, officially, in places like Anacurra outside the regeneration zone in Burke Avenue which are 3 story duplex houses that were built in the 70s. There is only two tenants left in that block of houses near the station. Two tenants. Not the ones that are refurbished, the ones in Burke Avenue which is just off Lord Edward Street. There is only two tenants left in those. Looking at them you would think that they were all occupied because they are boarded up from the



inside with curtains covering the boarding. At the back you can see the boarded. They are more secure.

FW: It is a very strange policy. It is very clear from what you have described that the boarding up process, I've seen your photos as well, what that does is often you get leaks and then you get a lot of damp penetrating into the still occupied houses next door. It's a very strange decision . . . it's hard to fathom why you would do that.

CMC: It is because you do it once, you see what happens, do it twice you see it happen again, you do it a third time, they know that this policy isn't working and the effect it's having yet they are repeating it and repeating it and ignoring the complaints about it.

FW: It isn't working at least in terms of what the apparent objective is, but the suspicion is that there is some other unstated agenda.

CMC: Well, the unstated agenda would be what I call "intimidation by proxy." It puts pressure on the homeowner to get out and to take whatever deal they are offered. It becomes intolerable to live there. Especially if you are elderly and a lot of the homeowners here were elderly and are elderly. The estate is about sixty years old.

The Limerick Regeneration Framework Implementation Plan (2013) is a 500 page document launched by Limerick City and County Council, setting out a programme that it claims

"will revitalise the communities over the next ten years by raising standards of living, opportunity and health and wellbeing for all residents of the regeneration areas."

In the section on Ballinacorra Weston a number of maps (257 - 259) show blocks of houses around Clarina Park that are marked as scheduled for demolition, some of which are privately owned.

At the time of the launch the Ballinacorra Weston Resident's Associations showed these maps to the house owners in question who seemed unaware that their houses were scheduled for demolition.

COMMUNITY

PARTICIPATION

IN THE REGENERATION PROCESS.

RIGHTS AND WRONGS

CATHAL MCCARTHY

"The right to participate in decisions which affect one's life is both an element of human dignity and the key to empowerment - the basis on which change can be achieved." (Amnesty International 2005, p. 48)

The prospect of regeneration promises change to residents of estates that have been let run down and are at a low point after the drugs crisis, population decline and years of neglect, estates where "people welcome the promise of change (any change) without thinking things through carefully and without full information or meaningful dialogue" (Tenants First 2006, p. 4). In such cases conflict and mistrust are to be expected as homes, communities and estates are targeted for regeneration, however, conflict can be minimised and trust established by "an unequivocal commitment to full community participation" (Maginn 2007, p. 26).

Community participation can be defined as a process that involves a number of procedures designed to consult, involve, inform and empower communities and allow those affected by a decision to have an input into that decision (Maginn 2007, p. 26; Lahiri-Dutt 2004, p. 14), essentially it is a power-sharing exercise, which "...enables the have-not citizen, presently excluded from the political and economic process, to be deliberately included in the future" (Arnstein 1969, p. 216). Community participation is a process by which communities become empowered. Empowerment is central to achieving full community participation. Empowerment, however, is not something which can be done to communities: "...it is a multi-dimensional social process that helps people gain control over their own lives. It is a process that fosters power (that is, the capacity to implement) in people, for use in their own lives, their communities, and in their society, by acting on issues that they define as important." (Page and Czuba 1999, cited in Allen et al 2002, p. 28)

Communities can become empowered during the participation process through capacity building, training and resourcing. "Empowerment is a working style which aims to help people achieve their own purpose by increasing their confidence and capacity" (Wilcox 1994, p. 41). However, Craig warns that community capacity building can be manipulated to serve governments interests, that it is used to give a false sense of community ownership and hide false consensus on goals and interests (2007, p. 354). Such practices are not uncommon and constitute the subordination of the community's wishes. It is not often acknowledged that real community involvement in the regeneration process should "produce a transfer of power to those currently powerless" (Carley 2000, p. 288).

Unlike empowerment, subordination is something which can be done to communities. Subordinate groups sometimes cannot find the right voice or words to express their thoughts, and when they do, they discover they are not heard. [They] are silenced, encouraged to keep their wants inchoate, and heard to say 'yes' when what they have said is 'no.' (Mansbridge cited in Fraser 1990 p. 64). Part of this subtle subordination of communities involves the use of jargon, which is used to isolate communities from the decision-making process; "Not only is jargon alienating, it can increase levels of mistrust between communities and outside agencies" (Hibbitt et al 2001, p. 156). Smith (2008) noted that many residents wanted to be involved but found it hard to understand the structures and languages of regeneration. This may be true, but with genuine capacity building regeneration 'jargon' would be a language that an empowered community could speak fluently. So, what constitutes real and meaningful community participation? In 1969, Sherry R. Arnstein wrote 'A Ladder of Citizen Participation' in which she defines eight types of participation and places them on rungs of a ladder. The bottom rung is the 'manipulation': "Instead of genuine citizen participation, the bottom rung

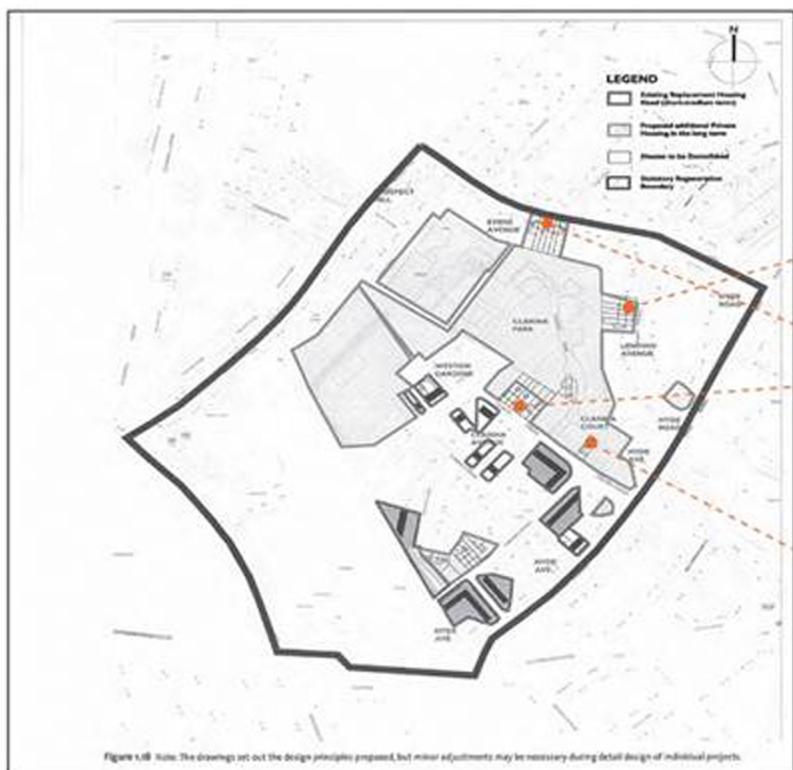


Figure 1.88 Note: The drawings set out the design principles proposed, but minor adjustments may be necessary during detail design of individual projects.

of the ladder signifies the distortion of participation into a public relations vehicle by power-holders" (Arnstein 1969, p. 218). At the top is 'Citizen Control', where residents can govern a programme and be in full charge of managerial aspects.

The ladder juxtaposes powerless citizens with the powerful in order to highlight the fundamental divisions between them. In actuality, neither the have-nots nor the powerholders are homogeneous blocs. Each group encompasses a host of divergent points of view, significant cleavages, competing vested interests, and splintered subgroups. The justification for using such simplistic abstractions is that in most cases the have-nots really do perceive the powerful as a monolithic "system," and powerholders actually do view the have-nots as a sea of "those people," with little comprehension of the class and caste differences among them. (Arnstein 1969, p. 217)

Arnstein's use of her "simplistic" ladder analogy to explain societal divisions in America over 40-years ago was certainly justified, and you would imagine that such gaps would have been bridged in that time-span. Yet there is evidence to suggest that the same observation could be made today and on this side of the world. Powerholders still have a "narrow and mechanistic view of what (or who) constituted the local community" (Maginn 2007, p. 28) and communities remain suspicious and "reluctant to engage with the 'suits' associated with regeneration initiatives" (Skidmore et al 2006, p. 32). Arnstein's ladder is still very much in fashion. David Wilcox (1994) in 'The Guide to Effective Participation' adapted Arnstein's Ladder to five 'stances': "Information, Consultation, Deciding together, Acting together, Supporting independent community interests" (p. 4) and warns that participation is a process that takes time.

Another adaptation of Arnstein's 'Participation Ladder' is Frank Pretty's 'Participation Continuum', which defines seven stages as follows:

- PARTICIPATION CONTINUUM**
- 1. manipulative participation:** Participation is tokenistic with community representatives on regeneration boards but with no power.
 - 2. Passive participation:** Information is shared with the community by the regenerators without listening to responses.
 - 3. Participation by consultation:** people are asked their opinion but not necessarily listened to.
 - 4. Participation for material incentives:** people volunteer their labour or time in return for incentives.
 - 5. Functional participation:** people participate to achieve project goals where there is some decision-making involved but only after the major decisions have been made by regenerators.
 - 6. Interactive participation:** People participate in joint analysis and development of plans where participation is seen as a right and eventually take over local decision making and ending with
 - 7. self-mobilisation:** where people's participation becomes less passive and more active and they have full decision-making powers (1995, cited in Allen et al 2002, p. 29; Jones 2003, p. 590).

Fig. 1

LENIHAN AVENUE, work scheduled for demolition



Fig. 1

CLARINA AVENUE, work scheduled for demolition



Fig. 1

BYRNE AVENUE, work scheduled for demolition



Fig. 1

CRECORA AVENUE, work scheduled for demolition



The manipulative stage represents the pretence of community-led participation where can be found evidence of what Jones (2003) calls "institutional and community filtering" of who is then able to participate (p.584). This "often can be revealed as tyrannical decision making" (Cooke and Kothari cited in Jones 2003, p.598). It has been noted that in such circumstances groups have complained that supposed community representatives fail to act on their behalf, that residents groups were even unaware of who their representatives were and that the regeneration agencies were not concerned by this (Jones 2003, p.598). As Anim (2000 cited in Jones 2003, p.586) suggests, any agreement to emerge out of such partnerships will be the product of struggle and compromise.

In November 2007 the Canal Community Partnership (which includes Fatima Mansions and St. Michaels Estate) in conjunction with Dublin City Council published *Regeneration Learnings & Insights (2007)*, which contained the following lessons:

"1. Include community representation and consultation in a real way" which advised that communities should be treated as an equal partner and that time should be spent getting to know local community's representative structures (pp.7-8).

"2. Use Regeneration as a regenerator - resource communities to participate" which acknowledged the power differential and advised that training and support should be provide to enable communities to participate fully (pp.8-9).

"3. Agree independent structures to oversee the regeneration" This stated that communities would require a legally-constituted and representative structure to underpin agreements (pp.10-11).

"4 Engage in good and honest Practice" this promoted the sharing of information, meeting commitments and honouring agreements (p.11).

"5 Demand excellence" this demanded that social and physical regeneration should be given equivalence (p.12).

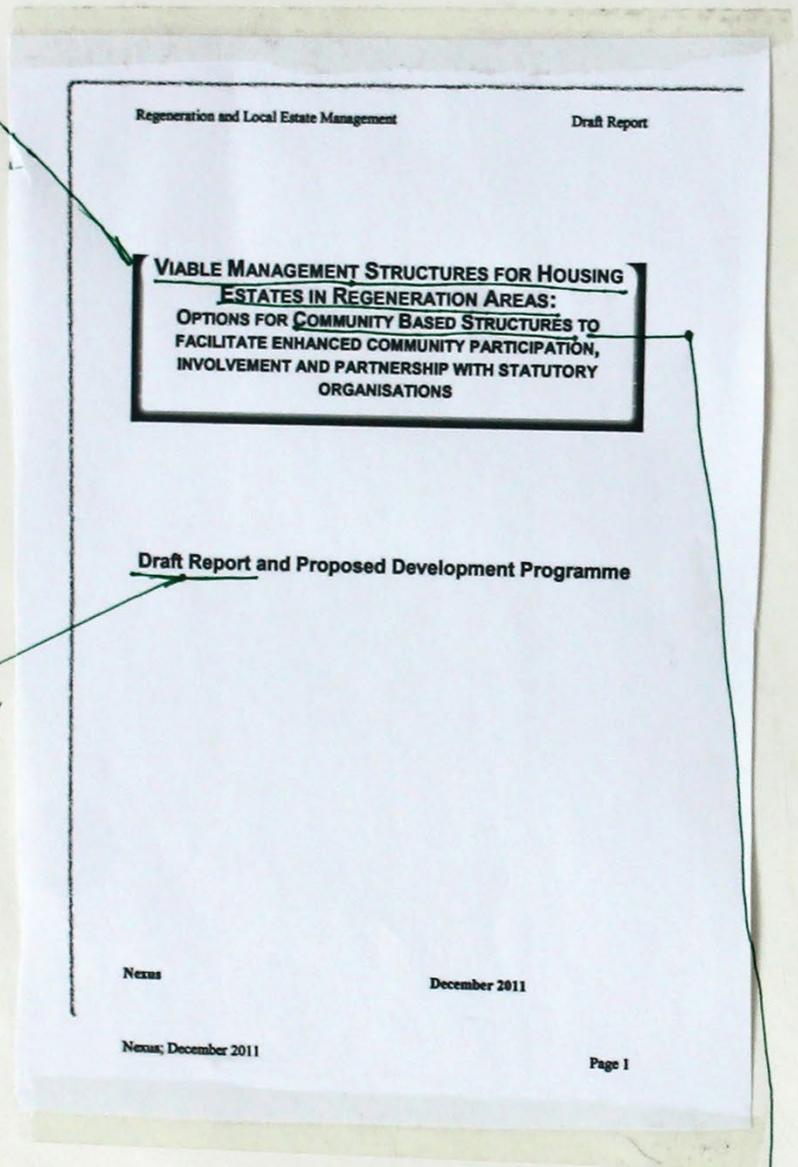
"6 Build local unity and external support through communications" this advised the consistent sharing of information with the wider community and communication protocols to prevent embarrassing public standoffs and misunderstandings (pp.12-13).

There is little evidence to suggest that these learning's and insights ever made it outside Dublin or became common practice promoted by the state.

Indeed, since the collapse of the Irish property market in 2007 the state appears to have abandoned its commitment to real community participation leaving regeneration in Ireland with very much a top-down approach and a bottom-up veneer.

The above is an extract from a longer essay.

SUCH STRUCTURES ARE DOMINATED BY NON-RESIDENT STATE-SPONSORED ACTORS ... THEY DO NOT REPRESENT THE RESIDENT'S BEST INTERESTS + THEY ARE NOT ACCOUNTABLE TO THE COMMUNITY



NEVER PUBLISHED, YET ITS CONTENTS + RECOMMENDATIONS WERE PILOTTED + REFERENCED IN THE 2014 LIMERICK REGENERATION FRAMEWORK IMPLEMENTATION PLAN TO PROPOSE A "COMMUNITY CHARTER" WHICH WAS PRESENTED TO COUNCIL OFFICIALS IN NOVEMBER 2015, BUT NEVER SIGNED OFF ON ... IT JOINS THE DUST REPORT GATHERING DUST ON SHELF SOMEWHERE IN CITY HALL!

THE COMMUNITY STRUCTURES FUNCTIONED BETTER WHEN THE POSITIONS WERE FILLED BY VOLUNTARY MEMBERS OF THE COMMUNITY - THE INVOLVEMENT OF THE AND DOMINANCE OF THE 'DISADVANTAGED AREAS INDUSTRY' IS AT THE HEART OF THE PROBLEM

REPORTS ARE OFTEN USED AS
A STALLING TACTIC - ACKNOWLEDGING
A PROBLEM OR ISSUE AND COMMISSIONING
A REPORT ON HOW BEST TO SOLVE IT, THEN
IGNORING THE FINDINGS OR BURYING THE
REPORT

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THIS IS WHERE THE PROPOSAL
FOR AN AGREED COMMUNITY
CHARTER CAN BE FOUND
IT WAS SUPPOSED TO BE
DEVELOPED WITH RESIDENTS
AND ENDORSED BY STATUTORY
SERVICES + PUBLIC REPRESENTATIVES
← IT NEVER SAW THE
LIGHT OF DAY WHEN
COMPLETED!

MAAY REFERENCES TO BE FOUND AT
LIMERICK REGENERATION WATCH
WITH "RESIDENTS" FIRST - TOWARDS
REAL COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION
IN REGENERATION AREAS -
USED AS THE SOURCE,
ALTHOUGH NOT REFERENCES
DIRECTLY



STEP 4



STEP 2



Step 1. Local Authority identifies block of housing that it wants to demolish, some of which is privately owned. Owners of property are offered a low 'market value' sum to sell the house to the Local Authority. Many owners refuse this offer.

Step 2. The Local Authority begins to depopulate the block by re-housing its tenants. Empty houses are then boarded up.

Step 3. Boarded up houses attract the attention of people who scavenge for copper wiring and piping, which can be sold for good prices due to the world shortage of copper.

Step 4. As water supply has most likely not been disconnected, this scavenging of copper results in flooding in the abandoned house. This flooding leads to damp penetrating the walls into the privately owned properties to either side of the abandoned house.

COMMUNITY DEVASTATION PROJECT



STEP 6



STEP 7



STEP 5



STEP 8

Step 5. The boarded up house draws in anti-social behaviour, with the house being used for illegal drug-taking, graffiti, general vandalism and rubbish dumping.

Step 6. In some locations, gardens are used for illegal fly-tipping of rubbish, generating rat problems.

Step 7. The boarded up houses often become magnets for arson.

Step 8. The majority of private owners, no longer able to withstand this 'intimidation by proxy', and suffering intolerable conditions brought on by the scale of deterioration, sell their property to the Local Authority who demolish the entire block. Owners who hold out may be threatened with a Compulsory Purchase Order.

