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community media as public space and social infrastructure

APaNGO Demonstration Projects – Spectacle Productions

By Mark Saunders

Spectacle has a long history of establishing and supporting participatory community media workshops in areas of urban change.

Through Spectacle's workshop process, residents make their own videos, acquire skills and develop their own uses for media as a public space. The positive effects of Spectacle workshops during production occur behind and in front of the camera and, after production, through screenings and discussions.

By recording their neighbourhood participants not only contribute to the history of their neighbourhood and community but also, through screenings, participants positively intervene in the regeneration discourse. Both the production and viewing processes help to promote communal activities that cut across the usual divisions of age, ethnicity and religion and stimulate unmediated communication within communities. The use of media technology facilitates better engagement conditions through visually communication of the message across local and global boundaries.

Compared with the usual methodologies for stimulating participation that are generally based on meetings, video workshops provide an activity-based environment. It is our experience that people who may never attend a meeting will engage in video workshops. People who at the level of community politics may be oppositional to each other have participated and worked together in our workshops.

Spectacle's APaNGO demonstration projects explore the uses of media technology,

particularly by residents, in the context of participation in urban planning.

For the purpose of this chapter, there is a focus on four projects, but Spectacle worked in various locations and sites as part of the APaNGO project, including Ixelles and Rue Laeken in Brussels and Stockwell and the proposed Olympic site in London. Each is at a different point of development on the regeneration timeline. They represent a range of scales and levels of community empowerment. All form part of a regional plan.

6.1 Projects

6.1.1 England

Silwood Estate, London



Silwood Estate is a Single Regeneration Budget¹ (SRB) scheme in Rotherhithe, South East London. Spectacle has been working with residents using video as a tool to document and influence the regeneration since 2001 when the Silwood Video Group was formed.

SRB project start date: 1999

Spectacle's documentation start date: Early 2001

Finish date: Ongoing

¹ This is a form of national funding for regeneration to assist low-income areas. The criteria for funding are less stringent than other forms of funding for regeneration and it attempts to develop local assets through local partnerships. The SRB is administered by Regional Development Agencies at the regional level (the London Development Agency in London)

Marsh Farm, Luton



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Spectacle began working with this community in 1994, documenting Exodus's community initiatives for social regeneration on Marsh Farm Estate. Spectacle has made three broadcast documentaries about Exodus, the ground-breaking social direct action group, and has continued to work with residents of Marsh Farm up to the present day. Since 2002, the Marsh Farm Estate has been the focus of a £50 million project through the New Deal for Communities (NDC) regeneration scheme that includes ongoing masterplanning.²

In 2004, Spectacle established the Marsh Farm Video Group. It has already documented the masterplanning consultation and produced a video for neighbourhood renewal supported by the Luton Assembly. The project has been subject to various delays and will continue beyond the time scope of APaNGO.

Project start date: 2002

Spectacle's documentation start date: 1994

Finish date: Ongoing

6.1.2 Belgium

St Joost, Brussels



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Spectacle, together with PTTL (Plus Tôt Te Laat), started a video workshop group – the PTTL Video Group – in 2000 based in an unemployment office in St Joost, Brussels. The video group documented the resident consultation process of the 'Contrat du

Quartier,' or District Contract, for 2000-03.³ Two films were produced – *Call me Josse* and *La Participation* – which have been screened extensively locally and internationally.

The PTTL Video Group has had its work broadcast, featured in festivals and screened at the Palais des Beaux-Arts, Brussels and the Institute of Contemporary Art in London.

Project start date: 2000

Spectacle's documentation start date: 2000

Finish date: Ongoing

Cité Administrative, Brussels



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This is a huge former government office complex in the centre of Brussels, and neighbouring St Joost, that is now empty and about to be developed. Spectacle started 'Open Workshops' on the site and continued them by integrating the group into the PTTL Video Group.

Project start date: 2004

Spectacle's documentation start date: 2004

Finish date: Ongoing

6.1.3 Community relationships

Spectacle had formed relationships with Marsh Farm residents before the regeneration project there commenced and with the Silwood community and Cité Administrative almost at project onset.

6.2 Local focus

Owing to the sheer size of London, its people are less acquainted with neighbourhoods where they do not reside. It is therefore socially and politically fragmented, and residents in one neighbourhood are unlikely to have much knowledge of the others. There

² The New Deal for Communities is a programme to reduce the income gap between Britain's poorest communities and the rest of the country. There are five social ailments that the programme attempts to remedy: poor job prospects, high levels of crime, educational under-achievement, poor health, and problems with housing and the physical environment. The NDC is part of the National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal

³ The 'Contrat du Quartier' (District Contract) is a revitalisation programme initiated by the Region of Bruxelles-Capitale that works in partnerships with local communities. The programme consists of nine months of preparation, a four-year implementation, and then a subsequent two-year follow up phase

tends to be obscure and inaccessible layers between residents and decision-makers.

A feature of Brussels, compared with England, is how near the local power structures and people are to the residents. This has been accomplished even though Brussels is a complex place politically. Within Brussels, there are French and Flemish-speaking communities, and it is subject to local, regional, national and European levels of decision-making.

6.2.1 Silwood Estate

The Silwood SRB⁴ scheme is a small part of the massive regional Thames Gateway plan and a more substantial focus of the Lewisham and Deptford regenerations.

It is also squeezed between two commercially-driven developments in Surrey Quays (docklands) and the proposed Millwall Football Club schemes.

One drawback of the project is that the residents were not consulted and were often ignorant about the larger over-arching schemes. The community was only made aware of Millwall's plans through the local press, even though they are going to be significantly affected. It is a private development, and there does not seem to be any consultative mechanisms in place.

6.2.2 Marsh Farm

As the major working class district in a still industrial town (home to Vauxhall Cars and Luton Airport), Marsh Farm and its future has a major influence on the housing situation in the region. A top-down masterplan that reflected this agenda was roundly rejected by the community. The struggle between the community, who have a highly developed

bottom-up regeneration scheme of their own, and the council, which has become the main implementation agency for a top-down masterplan, has been a source of delays affecting our project to set up and support a Marsh Farm Video Group.

It has been remarkable to witness how the £27 million already spent by the NDC has scarcely been able to benefit the community.

6.2.3 St Joost

A feature of St Joost, which was the object of a very local Contrat du Quartier regeneration scheme, was the presence and accessibility of the mayor and his councillors in the neighbourhood. However, like the Silwood scheme, St Joost is a small square in a much bigger grid.



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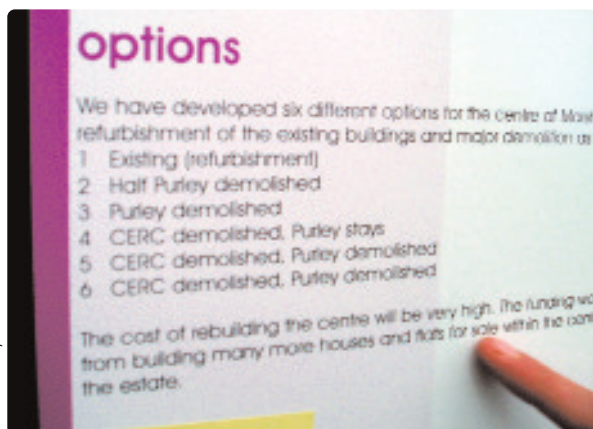
Left

St Joost – false impression of the plan's flexibility

The community's aspirations were hopelessly let down. In the end, 'back room deals' and horse-trading side-stepped the temporary 'participation' of residents in the scheme.

In Brussels St Joost is famous for its well documented history of mayoral 'clientalism'. The wishes expressed by residents through the participation process were either ignored or unilaterally 'interpreted' by the mayor. As final decision-maker, the mayor, a jazz lover, installed a jazz organisation in one District contract building and interestingly a video project from outside St Joost in the 'community centre'.

Some residents complain that the Contrat du Quartier actually served as an exhausting diversion from plans being hatched in the neighbouring European Quarter that would negatively impact their neighbourhood. In our film *La Participation* (see the Spectacle catalogue at http://www.spectacle.co.uk/catalogue_index.php), the community representatives expressed total 'participation fatigue'. However, the video project revitalised the group. Spectacle and PTTL have the intention to follow this up with a new film during 2007/08.



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Masterplanner's choice reflected in 'options' 5 and 6

⁴ Single Regeneration Budget, a UK government scheme to tackle the physical and social decline of impoverished urban areas through direct funding of physical infrastructure

6.2.4 Cité Administrative

This is a functional government office complex built in the 1960s that is no longer in use. At the start of the project the main issues were: who will make decisions on its future, on which masterplan, and who should be consulted.

The initiative is in the hands of the regional government. The private owners (Dexia bank and Breevast) are of course also involved. Because of its size and its central location a change of use of this empty complex could create all kinds of potential, including a finger park extending from the Botanique Park to the Cathedral.



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Above

Cité Administrative gardens

The complex consists primarily of offices and a few shops. Lower down the hill and nearer the centre are a few social housing blocks, but the area was designed for and used by commuting bureaucrats.

St Joost, the biggest nearby residential area, is one of Brussels' poorest and densest and lacks open or green spaces. The majority of the young people who used the Cité Administrative gardens and fountain areas in the summer evenings and at weekends resided in St Joost. The site also had one of the biggest public open spaces in Brussels, with a magnificent view across the city that attracted some tourists; however, skateboarders were the most persistent users.

The Cité Administrative therefore is a project of great concern and interest, but with no clearly defined constituency. In August 2004 Spectacle, together with our Brussels partner PTTL, ran a series of workshops on the site including the week-long 'Open Workshop' as part of the PleinOpenAir04 film festival event. There was a great diversity in the workshop – 19 attendees spoke 17 languages between them. The film *Cité Admin* (see the Spectacle

catalogue at http://www.spectacle.co.uk/catalogue_index.php) grew out of this workshop.

6.3 The model used for workshops: Silwood

The Silwood Housing Estate Video Project proposal detailed below is the basic model used in all of the Spectacle workshops. One key factor, essential to the success of participation, is the extent to which the project is supported by the residents.

The proposal is based on the experience and knowledge gained through Spectacle's successful pilot project and proposes a partnership between Spectacle Productions, Groundwork Thames Gateway London South, the Silwood Single Regeneration Budget Team, London Borough of Lewisham, and the community.

The main project goals are listed below.

The Video Project

Project aim

To train residents to film and edit video footage and through this, capture the changing physical and human face of the estate.

Through the pilot, it has been recognised that the scheme has considerable potential to help tackle some of the issues prevalent on the estate and thus incorporates these within its aims:

- **Eliminate barriers between residents across ethnic, generational and socio-economic lines:**

Significant tensions currently exist between different groups on the site. Racism is unfortunately experienced by some residents. A sense of community will not be created without first breaking down



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Silwood Video Goup editing



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Stockwell Video Goup

some of this resistance and encouraging greater interaction between different generations and ethnic groups.

Through training workshops, residents of all ages and backgrounds will learn to film and edit video footage. As well as directly working and interacting together at the workshops, part of their duties will be to interview residents and 'officials' working on the estate. A young person may interview an elderly person to understand life on the estate when it was built; a black person may interview a Vietnamese to gain their perspective. Another resident may interview the Head of Regeneration at the council or their local councillor.

As this continues throughout the life of the project, Spectacle hopes to encourage people to interview people removed from their normal social interaction. This will create some understanding and recognition between the different groups.

- **Provide a voice for people's thoughts, opinions and concerns:**

While the majority of residents support the development of the estate, there are currently few outlets for residents from marginalised groups to express either their excitement about the development of a new estate or to grieve for the loss of their old way of life in a suitable way. Many people are being uprooted from their homes, and understandably are concerned at the prospect of great change. The video gives people the opportunity to express their thoughts and concerns.

The video also acts as a conduit to convey ideas and opinions in a relaxed way. Many people do not participate in more traditional consultation methods, such as public meetings and questionnaires. Even those that do attend may not feel comfortable articulating their thoughts in front of an audience.



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Marsh Farm residents interview Marsh farm residents

The video provides a mechanism to interview people informally on their own terms, perhaps in the local café or on the street. This can be a much more effective way for people to feel able to voice their opinions. As the interviews will often be undertaken by another resident, this may also create greater empathy and understanding than if interviewed by a stranger.

The video footage taken by participants will then be screened at regular public events on the estate. This will enable all residents to view the work and spark debate in a way that more traditional consultation techniques often cannot achieve. As individuals have a natural interest in seeing themselves and friends on film, attendance levels at such events are much higher.

- **Confidence and self-esteem development:**

Through the ongoing training and interview process, the video project will give people more genuine participation in the regeneration scheme and will support them in building their confidence, co-operation and interpersonal skills. As most people have no experience using video, it is also a great 'leveller', allowing everyone to take part, without fear of lack of ability.

It is envisaged that as the project progresses, participants will acquire greater control over the project and its management. At the beginning, the scheme requires a lot of input from external agencies for capacity-building and training; as participants gain in confidence and ability, it is hoped they will be able to run the project with minimal external assistance, apart from technical training.

For those individuals wishing to progress beyond the scope of the project, they will be supported to pursue further skills and qualifications in associated areas of work.



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Silwood Video Group – passing on skills

- **Create a social history document:**

The video will provide a permanent archival document highlighting the regeneration process over seven years. The video will be available for regeneration practitioners and residents alike.

Project delivery

The project will incorporate the following elements:

- **Scheme promotion:**

Ongoing outreach and promotion of the video project will attract residents to take part. It is envisaged that a core group of participants will develop, maintaining a constant involvement throughout the scheme's life. Other people will join and leave as appropriate to their level of interest and life stage, and this natural turnover is inevitable in any long running scheme.

- **Training workshops:**

Throughout the duration of the project there will be regular workshops to train participants in both technical and interview skills. Technical components will include use of the video camera, ensuring quality sound and lighting and editing footage. Training in interview techniques will help participants build confidence to deal with a wide range of interviewees and gain skills in drawing out individual concerns and issues.

- **Community interviews:**

Armed with their skills developed in the training workshops, participants will interview a wide variety of community members and officials. There will be opportunities for young people to interview older people; community members to interview partner agencies and each other. Some residents will be interviewed regularly throughout the project to chart changes in personal feelings as the regeneration programme progresses.

- **Video documentation:**

As well as interviews, residents will film the estate and the surrounding area to



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Stockwell Video Goup interview

illustrate the changing physical state. In its entirety, the film will carry the viewer through demolition phases to the building phase and through to the completed and new estate. Footage will also be taken of the public meetings and other estate events such as local football matches, fun-days or youth club sessions to illustrate the interaction of the community with the development.

- **Public screening events:**

Throughout the filming process, regular public screening events will be held so that all residents can view the footage, make comments and suggest where edits can be made. As well as promoting the video scheme to new participants, these events will help raise awareness of the progress of the estate, consult residents and encourage participation in all aspects of the regeneration programme. Through the video interviews, residents' concerns will also be highlighted to partner agencies, such as the housing associations.

- **Production of archival video:**

After the final edit and at the completion of the project, a high quality, professional video will be made freely available to community members, key regeneration partners, local libraries, universities and schools.

The value of video is in its flexibility as a medium. This project is part of a response to many different factors, not least the regeneration programme itself and the views of residents. As development progresses, the project can easily adapt and respond to changing conditions, perhaps by increasing the number or type of sessions and events offered. This plan therefore can be seen as a 'working' tool and will respond as circumstances evolve.'

Submitted by Groundwork TGLS

6.4 Lessons learned

6.4.1 Implications for project continuation when funding has ceased

One of our strategies has been to continue a project even when funding may have finished. This is in the belief that funding will follow a flourishing project and that activity sustains a group. Although this is not sustainable over long periods of time, it is a strategy that accounts for the long duration of our workshop projects.

Most of the groups have succeeded in attracting funding beyond the original funding period, normally in the form of project funding. However, in Brussels the PTTL Video Group has effectively created a cultural enterprise whereby its activities have led to work being commissioned and broadcast. Operating in a smaller city means there is a great deal of cross-over. PTTL's resource base has now moved from St Joost to Midi, from one side of central Brussels to another. While in London this would seriously affect the demographic of attendees, in Brussels it appears not to have affected attendance or participation.

The success of Spectacle projects is greatly increased when there is support on the ground in the form of either a physical base or a key video person, as there is with PTTL in Brussels. A group can survive for a long time simply through the demand and activity of residents. Without this kind of support, such as on the Silwood project after the Cyber Centre closed and local funding stopped, the project becomes dependent on Spectacle's active input at every level to function, and this is only sustainable in sporadic bursts.

Silwood Video Group has been sustainable through Spectacle's direction and contribution of resources to the development of the group. For instance, when commissioned to make a

fund-raising video about LOOP (Lifestyles Opportunities for Older People), Spectacle instead ran workshops and made a video *with* LOOP members. For Spectacle it was an extension of our outreach work on the Silwood project, where many of our group members were also LOOP members.

Spectacle has given work placements and part-time employment to residents of the estate – a priority aim of the regeneration process. Silwood Video Group members filmed two conferences organised by the Marsh Farm group, and Spectacle took both these groups to Brussels to work with the PTTL group. It is important for us to find ways to provide some continuity, a strategy that has sustained the Silwood and PTTL groups for the past six years.

In fact, Spectacle has seen a constant changing of regeneration personnel on the Silwood project. Spectacle has been the most constant and enduring community activity on the estate. The work is highly visible; the Silwood Video Group and/or Spectacle have tried to document most of the monthly community regeneration meetings.

Spectacle's activities continue today, and recently the Silwood Youth Project commissioned Spectacle to run a series of music video workshops with Silwood rappers – one participant remembers Spectacle from when he was 14. The Silwood Youth Project is seeking additional funding.

6.4.2 Relationship-building

The building of relationships between Spectacle as 'outsiders' and residents is important for the success of the projects. While it clearly requires that Spectacle is funded to support the group, our relationship to the participants needs to operate beyond and outside of client/provider economics. In reality, funding for video projects is rarely at a level where survival can occur without unpaid or voluntary work. As a means to help bridge the gap between those roles, Spectacle operates open accounting, which is to say that we actively encourage workshop participants to understand and help make decisions about the economics. Open accounting helps to acknowledge and value the unpaid contributions of participants through its definition of the 'other' – what must be paid for, how much and to whom.

We are trying to fight the perception that professionals are involved solely because they are paid. It is important that our scope can last beyond the two- to six-month time frame of funded activities. Unpaid project development,



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LOOP video project

which also thrives better with open accounting, is a necessary part of the 'real world' situation of small independent production companies. We have often involved our users in preparing funding applications.

We are striving to create self-sufficient community media groups: we therefore want all the people involved to take ownership of the project and the work that comes from it. It is in editorial group discussions that issues of boundaries, transparency and openness arise. For residents, the video project is often a tool for exploring those boundaries.



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Silwood, Marsh farm and P TTL Video Groups on live radio in Brussels

For instance, on numerous occasions participants have interviewed regeneration project managers, or have interviewed planners at public exhibitions and events. The presence of a camera and being 'on the record' often serves to clearly define what can and what cannot be said. There is a need to be more precise and avoid casual verbal promises. The response of decision-makers involved in regeneration schemes to residents with cameras often reflects the level of their real ability to participate in meaningful debate and a possible lack of openness and transparency.

It is often the case that councils tend to view video as public relations; something to be managed and kept 'on message'. For Spectacle and our participants it is about having a voice; about those not attending meetings having the chance to express themselves.

These points are made to illustrate that a video project can be a success on almost any social criteria, producing numerous excellent 'outputs'. However, that is dependent on those in control understanding that not having a voice is social exclusion. Community media should be seen as social infrastructure, not about

making films, or the content of any particular film. It is about media as a public space. The more people who participate, the better it works. As Spectacle originally proposed, it should be a partnership.

6.4.3 Addressing social exclusion

Addressing social exclusion is a major aspect of Spectacle's agenda in facilitating workshops. We actively go out to work where the socially excluded or less mobile are found. All activities are free to participants, another reason such work needs to be funded.

Spectacle ensures that regular meeting times are in the evenings and at a time most people can attend. Once a group is established, we will negotiate meeting and workshop times with residents. Activities occur at different times throughout the week, which means most people can find a time that suits them to become actively involved in filming or editing.

Spectacle ensures that participants rotate the role of chair and minute-taker at every meeting. This breaks down the difference between new and old members since rotation occurs frequently. No-one is left to endure a tiresome role for an extended period. During a production period there may be ten hours of planning and editorial meetings or screening discussions in a week. This strategy is extremely effective in helping to bond a group of otherwise disparate people.

Spectacle ensures that groups are not *exclusively* made up of the socially excluded, as this would simply continue the problem. To ensure the mix, it is assumed that the most socially mobile will find us through our publicity and the internet, and conversely we target under-represented groups; we seek out older people or other groups who may have a technophobia or inverted bias, thinking it only for 'other people'.



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Above

Mixed group at a workshop



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Marsh Farm Video Goup record masterplanning event

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PTTL Video Group explore Rue Laeken

Spectacle works a lot on the streets to boost visibility among the community. People see us in operation and see that other local people are operating the cameras or conducting interviews.

At the Marsh Farm Master Planning Day, three of our five young camera operators were on the point of having Anti Social Behaviour Orders and were considered by many local people as 'impossible to work with'. Contrary to what was perceived about the youths, they took care of expensive video equipment and did excellent filming all day, showing great commitment and concentration, filming long discussions between planners and residents. At Marsh Farm, Spectacle held a series of workshops with young people where two of the principal participants were ankle-tagged and at 7 pm would have to leave the workshop to get home in time for their curfew.

Spectacle does not see this work as rehabilitation, youth crime diversions or social work but as community-building. By prioritising social inclusion, Spectacle can bring all residents together through the workshops. There is remarkable diversity in project groups. Silwood Video Group has an age range of 16-66; and the Cité Administrative Open Workshop attracted many immigrants and ethnic minorities: there were 19 people who spoke 17 languages between them. Most regeneration projects aim to address social exclusion. It is disappointing that so little interest or support is given to projects that give people a voice, as this is the essence of social exclusion.

In Brussels there seems to be a more engrained notion that a condition of democracy is in accepting a range of diverse opinions and that people have a right to express them.

Participants in our video workshops are engaged in discussion about planning issues. However, it is often the case they are not particularly interested in planning at the outset. Going out on the streets with a camera (the technique of 'dérive with camera'⁵) is an essential part of our workshops process. It means that people not only have an engagement with their surroundings and the other residents, but they also become very knowledgeable.

This community expertise and knowledge base is an important aspect of Spectacle's work. Not only is there much pooling of information, but new information is produced. Ideas that are often inspiring get disseminated and developed. The Active Archive part of the demonstration project is addressing how to best use digital media technology and computer convergence to usefully service and support this community level of networked information across national borders and linguistic divides.

Recently the Active Archive provided several hours of visual history of the now largely demolished Midi area of Brussels from 2002-03 for use in the film *Dans 10 Jours ou dans 10 Ans...* by Gwenaël Breës, a resident. At its first major screening, it attracted more than 150 local people and stimulated a very animated discussion about an issue considered 'dead and a lost cause'. Other users include Bral, the University of Caen and a variety of international PhD students. Spectacle has also provided Grenoble University Architectural School with a range of material for its distant learning planners' course.

6.4.4 The acquisition of skills

For many, the attraction to the workshops is the acquisition of skills, particularly where opportunities are thin on the ground. Spectacle

⁵ In philosophy, a *dérive* is a French concept meaning an aimless walk, probably through city streets, that follows the whim of the moment. 'Derive with camera' allows people to explore their environment through the camera lens without preconceptions, to understand their location in the city better, and therefore their existence



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Above

Brussels resident using the Active Archive

takes care to create a social space and tries to make it a happy and creative environment. Residents are stimulated and motivated to keep attending exactly because they get to meet a range of people – perhaps people who they might otherwise never meet.

One elderly white woman got to meet her long-time neighbour, a young black woman with a family who lived immediately above her on the next floor, through the video workshops.

People have a whole range of uses of video and information technology, ranging from wedding or birthday videos, to the production of music videos or show-reels, to video for the internet or transferring their family home movies to DVD format. The video workshop, especially if it can establish some kind of resource on the estate, will be a very popular and widely used facility.

6.4.5 Potential of cultural production

There is also potential for cultural production and even occasional cultural enterprise. For example, the films produced by our workshops in Rue Laeken and Ixelles have been broadcast in Brussels. One film, *Quand les Papiers Arrivent...*, an Ixelles spin-off project, has been broadcast nationally. Like Silwood Video Group, PTTL Video Group have had work shown in festivals all over North West Europe. All the films address citizen participation in planning.

6.4.6 Progressive social thinking

On the Marsh Farm Estate, PRP, the masterplanners, had a budget of over a million pounds. The Marsh Farm Video Group filmed the masterplanning event as part of our series of workshops (total budget a few thousand pounds). Spectacle filmed many interviews on the day and produced a DVD. The sentiments and ideas that came across from residents



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£1.1 million spent on the masterplan

interviewing other residents reflected their objection to the main principle of the proposed and imposed masterplan. Two years later, the PRP plan was rejected and the community's own, long fought-for alternative plan was eventually taken on.

This is a classic case of almost limitless resources being put into trying to persuade a community to accept a council-devised scheme by presenting a narrow range of options 'for consultation'.

The conference 'Swimming against the Tide: Regen: From the conventional to the inspirational', that was organised by Marsh Farm Outreach and filmed by Spectacle and Silwood Video Group (see the Spectacle archive at http://www.spectacle.co.uk/catalogue_index.php) was about how poverty on estates can be addressed by self-help and plugging the economic 'leaks', where money flows out of the estate when, for instance, there are no local shops or entertainment or social venues. The idea is that a flurry of investment followed by an investment drought does not seem to be a sensible approach to urban renewal, even if it was all being spent on developing and investing in the long-term future of the area.

This and other forms of progressive social thinking are also ideas that Spectacle wishes to help make available via the Active Archive.

6.5 Conclusion

Definite advantages have emerged from the use of the technique employed by Spectacle to facilitate community participation in the planning process.

The use of media was able to bypass obstacles usually faced by officials that attempt to involve residents in decision-making. Spectacle's work on participatory media is about more than simply making films; it is the basis for social networking, community capacity-building and cohesion. Its starting point is that media is a public space and should be part of social infrastructure.

Oftentimes community groups are not represented proportionally at conventional public hearings. Diversity in participants was a goal, and the atmosphere of openness created a less intimidating environment.

Spectacle video projects address social exclusion and under-representation behind and in front of the camera. Behind the camera they create inclusive, non-hierarchical, socially relaxed work environments. In front, they seek out under-represented voices and the socially excluded. Spectacle actively tries to recruit into the group everyone we meet through our media work.

Spectacle attempts to accommodate the schedules of residents, but one potential barrier to broad involvement is that participants will have to commit more time than if they were to simply attend a community engagement meeting. Video production is time consuming, and those who work long hours to support a family or work night shifts might find it difficult to allocate time to participate in such activity. However, they have the opportunity to contribute to the project in front of the camera or to input into editorial decision-making by home viewing of indexed rushes or simply by attending a screening and discussion.

When the film is complete, it can reach a wide audience. If everyone involved in its making invites just a few friends and family to a local screening, it is quite possible to get audiences of 50-100 people together to discuss the planning issues of the neighbourhood – in a discussion un-mediated by outsiders and professionals, and outside of any existing local political or social frameworks (that may be perceived as exclusionary or cliques).

Video has the capacity to allow people to speak in their mother tongue, and it can be translated and subtitled or over-dubbed. As a visual language, video can often express meaning to those who may not understand all the verbal content of a film.

The creation of films and other media projects also fosters a sense of communal ownership. Participants finish with a concrete product that is the result of their time, energy and passion. This sense of accomplishment is also supplemented by the fact that they have contributed a body of information to community history. If participation is fostered and continued, then a new channel for community participation has been created and will hopefully be sustainable. Additionally, materials created can be consulted by other communities that wish to embark on a similar project or learn about how communities are affected by regeneration projects.

It is hoped that local officials are open to this new kind of community engagement. There is no way to predict how the films produced will be received or if the information delivered through them will be utilised. Residents should ensure that they are being properly made use of by decision-makers.

Residents should be informed about regeneration as a whole. They should be told what is 'good practice' and be provided with good, clear and current information. They should have a clear idea of the parameters and limitations on their ability to make or influence decisions. They should have the opportunity to meet with other residents and discuss a range of other successful regeneration projects. It might be useful to have an independent one-stop information source to advise residents on their rights and obligations, the processes and technicalities, such as section 106 agreements,⁶ and perhaps provide a 'good ideas library'.

Community media is both a public space and social infrastructure. To exist, it needs a little funding support, space for dissent, and greater respect and power given to a community's ability to help themselves and those around them.

How to do this for the 'greater good' should be the subject of urban planning and social development. That is what Spectacle believes is the purpose of participation and the regeneration process.

⁶ Section 106 of the England and Wales Town and Country Planning Act 1990 allows a local planning authority to enter into a legally-binding agreement or planning obligation, with a land developer over a related issue. Section 106 agreements can act as a main instrument for placing restrictions on the developers, often requiring them to minimise the impact on the local community and to carry out tasks, which will provide community benefits