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Deptford, London
Smith, A. and Pappalepore, I.**

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Exploring attitudes to edgy urban destinations: the case of Deptford, London.

Abstract

The role of tourists and tourism in urban development is not fully understood. Research has focused on tourism districts within city centres, but less is known about tourism in peripheral, less affluent urban districts. These areas can appeal to visitors as edgy alternatives to mainstream destinations. This study establishes who is interested in visiting and why, and it explores the underlying rationale for negative attitudes. The aims are addressed by an in-depth analysis of Deptford in South East London. This area is a relatively deprived part of a world city, albeit one that has long been earmarked as London's next cool district. The study uses a mix of different sources to analyse the case. Responses to a New York Times article on Deptford are analysed and the attitudes of actual visitors and key stakeholders are explored. The discussion includes an examination of different interpretations and attitudes towards the notion of edginess. Edginess is deemed attractive by certain audiences; something linked to a reverence for working class life in the arts. The study concludes that,

whilst edginess is a noted characteristic, what people appreciate about Deptford is its 'distinctive ordinariness' – its contrast with more polished and contrived urban districts.

Exploring attitudes to edgy urban destinations: the case of Deptford, London.

Introduction

On 22 March 2009 a controversial article appeared in the travel section of the New York Times (NYT). It was followed up by other newspapers in the UK, whose readers were keen to comment online. The controversy was caused by the NYT's recommendation of Deptford in South East London as a potential destination for international visitors. Deptford, once a prestigious river port, was affected by de-industrialisation and experimental housing schemes in the twentieth century (Bullman et al., 2012). For many years, regeneration has been both promised and anticipated but Deptford remains one of London's least affluent areas. Even if the envisaged progress can be made, there are understandable concerns that this may be accompanied by gentrification and its negative effects; inequity, displacement and homogenisation.

The surprise, sarcasm and derision that greeted Deptford's appearance in the NYT can be regarded at one level as reactionary and inconsequential. But the fuss raised important issues concerning public attitudes towards less affluent areas and the role of tourism in regeneration. Tourists have long been interested in unpolished - even impoverished - urban neighbourhoods. However, little is known about what draws them to such areas, or what keeps people away. Related knowledge can help to establish the relative potential of tourism as a development tool and provide a lens through which to aid understanding of disadvantaged urban areas more generally.

The purpose of this paper is to analyse attitudes to unconventional urban destinations. In this paper, these are referred to as unpolished but they might also be termed peripheral, disadvantaged or difficult. The research aims to establish if and why these areas appeal to visitors as well as exploring the underlying rationale for negative attitudes. The envisaged outcomes are a better understanding of the opportunities and obstacles facing less privileged urban areas, but also a better appreciation of what role tourism and associated policy making can play. These aims are addressed by a mixed-method approach based on an analysis of the discourses surrounding the controversy mentioned above, complemented by semi-structured interviews with Deptford visitors and key stakeholders.

The appeal of less affluent urban areas

A desire to consume the spectacle of the underprivileged is nothing new; ‘slumming’ tourism was popular in the nineteenth century in the East End of London (Eade, 2000) and the Chinatowns of New York (Christ, 2003) and San Francisco (Gruen, 2000)ⁱ. Slum tourism continues today; most obviously in Brazil, South Africa and India (Dyson, 2012), but also in many Western cities (Hoffman, 2003). It has been encouraged by urban authorities of the past and present as they feel the presence of tourists helps to ‘civilize’ populations (Gruen, 2000) and bring economic opportunities for residents. Despite obvious problems, less affluent urban neighbourhoods are regarded as having some competitive advantages that can assist their development (Porter, 1995). This is exemplified in Colomb’s (2012) analysis of post-communist Berlin; whose mayor famously described the city as ‘poor but sexy’. Unlikely urban destinations in Berlin have been integrated into official destination

marketing campaigns accompanied by narratives of ‘creativity’, ‘diversity’ and ‘hipness’ (Colomb, 2012: 239). These and other supposed qualities of unpolished urban areas are reviewed further below.

Authenticity, diversity and frisson

Urban commentators observe that our cities are becoming more alike (Richards & Wilson, 2006). Thus, to make them more appealing to tourists, many cities are highlighting distinctive qualities. One option for cities seeking to differentiate themselves is to emphasise peripheral areas rather than standardised centres (Hoffman, 2003; Eade, 2000). Visitors prepared to venture into the urban periphery are likely to be put off by the ‘rationality and sameness of the suburbs’ (Allen, 1984 in Lloyd, 2002: 528), as they ‘want edgy cities, not edge cities’ (Peck, 2000: 745). This may benefit ‘grittier’ urban areas in-between the suburbs and the centre that feel different from conventional destination spaces. Visits to these urban neighbourhoods may be motivated by a search for the authentic, as these spaces are perceived as not (yet) ‘commercially appropriated’ (Neill, 2001: 816).

Ethnic diversity provides a complex source of competitive advantage for some urban areas. Multi-ethnic neighbourhoods are places where the exotic and the everyday can be experienced simultaneously, facilitating what Edensor (2007) calls mundane cosmopolitanism. Butler and Robson’s (2003) found ‘multicultural globalism’ to be one of the most important attractions in Brixton (South London), despite regarding social relations between different ethnic groups as ‘tectonic’. ‘Rubbing along’ with

people from different cultural, social and ethnic backgrounds was regarded as fundamental to the *frisson* of this 'edgy' area (Butler & Robson, 2003: 1802).

Multi-ethnic districts attract visitors by providing a range of opportunities for 'cosmopolitan consumerism' (Aoyama, 2009: 81). Cultural festivals, restaurants and shops attract cosmopolitan consumers seeking social distinction (May, 1996). Cultural festivals are also attractive to tourists seeking a 'connection to the city that will enable them to feel like residents' (Halter, 2007: 201). This links to the notion that some visitors are seeking distinctive, but non-touristy experiences. However, the presence of tourists can cause problems. Hoffman (2003: 104) identifies that 'members of Harlem's hard pressed minority community feel wary of what they experience as racial voyeurism - whites on safari'ⁱⁱ. There are signs that the traditional tourist gaze of rich white people gazing on less fortunate black and Asian communities is changing. With greater social and physical mobility, ethnic groups often provide core markets for visitors to multi-ethnic districts in US cities. Examples include Chicago's South Side (Boyd, 2000) and Brooklyn, NY - where ex-residents come back 'to the old neighbourhood for shopping and dining' (Fainstein & Powers, 2007).

A further problem raised by the literature is, who decides how multi-ethnic places are represented and therefore, whose culture is emphasized within tourism marketing?

There is a danger of patronising ethnic communities through ill-informed representations produced by outsiders (Collins, 2007), or of privileging dominant ethnicities at the expense of other minorities. For example, Puerto Ricans have felt ostracized by the promotion of Harlem, NY, as the capital of black culture. In the tourism development process, local entrepreneurs were made to feel that their local

culture was ‘not good enough to attract tourists’, despite efforts to use ethnic diversity in Harlem’s destination marketing (Davila, 2004). Much of the supposed diversity presented to tourists often involves a narrow framing of a place’s ethnic identity (Colomb, 2012). Ironically, places promoted as diverse, are usually framed as hosting high concentrations of certain minority groups – something that sits awkwardly with the notion of diversity.

Dovey and King (2012) observe that tourism to deprived peripheral urban areas is often motivated by an attraction to the ‘sublime’, a pleasure ‘born of fear in the face of the unknown and the overwhelming’ (Burke cited in Dovey & King, 2012: 283). The ‘dark side’ of London’s East End, an area depicted as a mix of poverty and violence has always been a lure for some tourists (Eade, 2000)ⁱⁱⁱ. The depiction of the city as a fearful place in literature and on screen entices a niche market interested in adventurous experiences. Fear is a source of adrenalin, excitement and even pleasure for some. This helps to explain the difference between ‘edgy’ areas, and those which are merely bohemian or hip. One of Lloyd’s (2002: 528) interviewees stated ‘when you’re sure of your personal safety there’s a certain edge that goes away. And there’s something exciting about having that edge’. Promoting this ‘frisson’ is a radical approach to city tourism marketing, proving that ‘even fear itself is not beyond commodification’ (Neill, 2001: p.815).

Creativity, regeneration and gentrification

As well as referring to an area’s safety, the adjective edgy is also frequently used to refer to creative urban areas – those that host ‘cutting edge’ artists and artisans. A

combination of factors, including availability of affordable studio space (Gdaniec, 2000) and certain spatial qualities (Hutton, 2006) attract creative people to derelict industrial areas. Using Soho, New York, as an example, Zukin (1982) famously described how working class areas were transformed into affluent residential districts following their appropriation by cultural producers. European examples of this type of gentrification include Poblenou in Barcelona (Gdaniec, 2000) and Hoxton in London (Harris, 2012), which subsequently started to develop as ‘off-the-beaten track’, bohemian tourism destinations. Ley (2003), following Bourdieu (1984; 1993), explains this process as a shift in the type of capital possessed by social actors from high cultural capital (and low economic capital) to rising economic capital. But as areas appropriated by artists gain economic capital and become attractive to a wider, middle-class audience, the established working class population is displaced. The artistic community that contributed to the area’s valorisation in the first place are also dislocated, as are other small-scale industrial and commercial firms whose premises were converted to residential use (Zukin, 1982)^{iv}.

The displacement of the poorest residents in the gentrification process is less relevant to most UK cities (Boddy, 2007), where middle-class gentrifiers have often occupied new-build developments or conversions of old industrial buildings. This means less displacement of the existing residential population - especially when the gentrified area contains a significant stock of social housing. However, as facilities and public spaces are redesigned for the needs of the new middle-class market, a symbolic displacement of the original residents takes place (Cameron & Coaffee, 2005). Harris’s (2012) account of the socio-economic transformation of Hoxton, in London, highlights the role of public and private grants in subsidising the costs of converting

spaces, thus offering an early example of the contribution of both the public and the private sector to culture-led gentrification.

The link between tourism and gentrification has been recognised and occasionally addressed in urban studies (Gotham, 2005) and, more frequently, by tourism scholars (Fotsch, 2004). When deprived neighbourhoods with distinctive architecture or other appealing features become attractive to middle-class visitors, a process of transformation commences. This brings economic benefits but may also usher in standardisation (independent retailers replaced by corporate chains); commodification and distortion of local histories; and the displacement of local residents (Fotsch, 2004). In some cases, this process leads to the loss of services for local residents, to the development of a 'tourist bubble' (Judd, 1999), and to a reduced appeal to more adventurous tourists (Russo, 2002).

In the case of creative quarters located in deprived areas, development is often initiated when an area's socio-spatial identity becomes attractive to fellow artists. These socio-spatial identities are also attractive to tourists. The presence of consumers in the same sites as producers can be mutually beneficial - spawning cultural quarters (Hitters & Richards, 2002). Consumers appreciate the specialized shops, artistic vibe, street level animation (Brown et al., 2000: 444) and atmosphere (Neff, 2005), whilst producers and retailers enjoy proximity to a pool of customers (Baerenholdt & Haldrup, 2006). The presence of tourists may help to make cafes, bars and other social infrastructure viable, and they may purchase items directly from creative producers - creating a virtuous cycle of creative production and consumption. However, this has not prevented tourists being demonised as agents of gentrification

by incumbent residents and businesses in affected areas. Recent anti-gentrification protests in the Neukölln area of Berlin involved attacks on hotels, hostels and cafés; with several bars posting ‘no hipsters or tourists’ signs on their entrances (Stallwood, 2012).

Study Methods

This study aims to explore attitudes to visiting unpolished urban areas. Deptford in South East London is used as a case study; with the article that appeared in the New York Times (NYT) used as an opportunity to explore public perceptions. Our findings draw on qualitative analysis of the discourse that surrounded the NYT piece (both online and in other newspapers), complemented by 17 face-to-face interviews with visitors to Deptford and with 4 key stakeholders.

INSERT TABLE 1 HERE

Data analysed included newspaper articles published in the period March-May 2009 alongside the internet communication that accompanied the publication of these pieces online (see Table 1). To collect views on Deptford, the views of those responding via internet message boards were analysed. Despite the noted weaknesses of analysing individual internet contributions^v we believe this type of analysis has some important advantages^{vi}. One advantage for this project was that contributions could be gained from a wide variety of geographical locations. In our study, many local people, Londoners and other UK residents are represented, but because of the NYT connection there are also views from the USA and overseas. To add further

geographical complexity, many of these people have been to the area, or even lived in the area, albeit a long time ago. This created a fascinating mix of stereotyped, outdated and naïve views alongside views of regular visitors and those who currently live in the area. Subsequent discussion reveals the range of different impressions held and the basis for these attitudes. In the analysis, participants are identified first by their place of residence (where given) and then by the newspaper ‘message board’ they responded to (abbreviated to Mail, Times, London Paper, Newsshopper).

The views of a selection of tourists who visited Deptford around the time the controversy emerged were also analysed to gain an appreciation of how an urban area can become an unlikely tourist destination. 17 visitors were interviewed face-to-face in Deptford; these were all recorded and transcribed verbatim. Interviewees were approached in public spaces using a convenience sampling approach. For the purposes of the research, any non-resident undertaking a non-routine leisure trip to Deptford of three hours or longer was considered a visitor. Therefore, as well as traditional tourists, London residents visiting Deptford for non-routine leisure purposes were included in the sample. This approach reflects London’s tourism market, which includes tourists, day visitors and internal tourists. A list of the visitors interviewed and their place of residence, age and profession can be found in Table 2. Our interviewees were mainly middle-class professionals from other areas of London. The key themes discussed in the interview included interviewee’s interests and travel habits, reasons for visiting, and perceptions of the area. The primary research also included interviews with the author of the NYT article and three experts employed to assist tourism development in Deptford: a local tourism development officer, the town centre manager and a public relations consultant hired to promote Deptford^{vii}.

INSERT TABLE 2 HERE

Deptford

Deptford is a riverside neighbourhood in South East London, a part of the Borough of Lewisham sandwiched between the Boroughs of Southwark and Greenwich (see Figure 1). The area has a rich history; it was a Royal Dockyard in the sixteenth century and subsequently became an important centre of maritime and manufacturing industries. In the twentieth century Deptford suffered badly from war damage, housing demolition and deindustrialisation. Large housing estates, including the famous Pepys Estate, were developed in the 1960s and 70s. These ‘council estates’ are often unfairly derided^{viii}, and now exist as a complex mix of social, privately rented and privately owned units, but they remain poorly integrated with Deptford’s more established southern zone clustered around the high street (Figure 1).

INSERT FIGURE 1 HERE

In recent years, efforts have been made to regenerate Deptford. Transport links have been improved with the introduction of a (Docklands) Light Railway station and, more recently, the refurbishment of the mainline station. General programmes funded from national regeneration budgets (City Challenge 1992-1997; Single Regeneration Budget 1996-2001) have also been implemented^{ix}. Local agencies have tried to capitalise on the area’s reputation as a base for creative industries which stems from prestigious institutions and arts venues (see Figure 1), and from the success of

musicians living locally. For over ten years the council have supported two local arts festivals (Deptford X, Made in Deptford) and made a former rubbish tip available to the developers of the Laban Centre - a contemporary dance academy designed by Herzog and de Meuron (Figure 1). At the turn of the century, liberal newspapers were touting Deptford as London's next cool district – by labelling it the new Hoxton^x (Lawson, 2000). This wishful comparison even appeared in promotional materials for the inaugural edition of Deptford's major arts festival in 1999. However, in a book published to commemorate the festival's 10th anniversary, a prominent artist stated 'I don't think that came true' (Smith, 2009: 34).

Whilst it remains a comparatively poor part of London, Deptford is culturally rich thanks to its prestigious heritage and arts scene. The area also has a distinctive social geography. Deptford has a population density of 93.7 people per hectare, the 20th highest of all the UK's 573 parliamentary constituencies (Cracknell et al., 2013). Rates of crime are broadly 100% greater than average figures for the rest of London, with the exception of 'theft and handling' offences (which are broadly comparable). In the 12 months to April 2009 there were 41 instances of 'violence against the person' per 1000 of population across the 3 Deptford wards, compared to a London wide average of 23 instances (Metropolitan Police, 2009). Like other 'edgy' areas discussed in the literature review, Deptford hosts concentrations of ethnic diversity. Out of 573 UK constituencies, the district has the third highest proportion of black residents (28.9%) and the fourth highest proportion of citizens identifying themselves as from a 'Mixed/multiple ethnic group' (Cracknell et al., 2013). The area's multi-ethnic society can be traced back to the 'hybrid' world of the Docks; and to the lack of demand from incumbent residents for the new high rise housing. This meant the

new estates built in the 1960s and 1970s were largely populated by immigrants (Bullman et al., 2012).

The sort of regeneration progress witnessed in other parts of East London has been slow to materialise in Deptford. This is not necessarily a problem, as it has allowed Deptford to avoid some of the pernicious effects of gentrification (Watt, 2013) and allowed the area to retain its distinctiveness. Bullman et al. (2012: 79) state that ‘in a city of distinct neighbourhoods and local loyalties its character is one of the most distinct and local of all’. This view was reaffirmed by the PR consultant we interviewed who felt that ‘Deptford has got a sense of community; it's got heart and a high street’. The High Street - once known as the Oxford Street of SE London (Bullman et al, 2012) - is key to the area’s identity and promotion. According to the local tourism development officer, the area has positioned itself “as the only UK high street without a Starbucks”. However, reflecting its character in nineteenth century, Deptford’s bustling commercial centre is surrounded by poverty and low quality housing. A report produced by the local tourism agency recognized Deptford’s image as ‘rough’ and ‘run down’ but suggested the area could be offered as a product to a ‘quirky repeaters and explorers’ segment (TourEast, 2006: 38). However, there seems limited interest even amongst those visitors prepared to venture outside central London. In a large scale survey (n=1403) of visitors in east London, only 5% of visitors indicated they were likely to visit Deptford. Of 17 tourist clusters Deptford was ranked as the area with lowest propensity to visit (TourEast, 2006).

Of our 17 interviewees, all but two were visiting Deptford for the first time. Five were leisure visitors that had come to explore the area, five were visiting friends and

relatives and the remaining seven were staying in accommodation in Deptford. The latter's motivation to be in Deptford was either proximity to education facilities, or the relative low cost of hotels / hostels. The motivations of conventional visitors were; to experience the architecture (particularly the Laban Centre), to visit the Deptford Project; and to visit arts exhibitions. Others had extended a trip to nearby Greenwich to include Deptford. Thus, the sample provides a useful synopsis of possible motivations to visit deprived areas; VFR, cheap accommodation, extended trips, educational resources, iconic architecture, and arts festivals /studios.

Destination Deptford in the news

Print media, in particular publications like the New York Times, play a significant role in making certain places 'edgy'. Lloyd (2002), for example, links Wicker Park's hip reputation to a 1994 NYT article entitled 'Edgy in Chicago: the music world discovers Wicker Park'. However, it remains unclear whether these pieces are genuinely 'trend setting' or whether they simply communicate a trend that is underway. The NYT article on Deptford, which inspired the newspaper and website contributions analysed here, appeared in a section of the paper called 'Surfacing'. According to the article's author, this travel column aims 'to get to these areas early', and 'ahead of the gentrification curve'. The author used to live and work near Deptford and his main motivation for writing the article was that 'I genuinely think that right now there is something going on', whilst also betraying his appetite for an exclusive: 'I genuinely hope with Deptford I can turn round to everyone in a few years and say I told you so'.

Nothing that was said in the NYT article was particularly controversial or inaccurate. The author even provided a disclaimer at the beginning of the piece that ‘those with well-cushioned sensibilities need not make the journey’ and alongside some positive comments there were constant references to some of Deptford’s less desirable aspects^{xi}. This left readers with little doubt that much progress would be needed before Deptford could be included in conventional tourism itineraries. Nevertheless, the appearance of a piece on Deptford in the travel section of an international newspaper caused a significant reaction in the UK press and blogosphere^{xii}. The reaction of conservative UK publications - and many of their online readers - was that promoting Deptford as a tourist destination was at best laughable, and at worst, downright irresponsible. The intention in subsequent sections is to explore the discourses that followed the publication of the NYT article. This helps to reveal more about the factors that may assist and hinder a place’s emergence as an unlikely tourist destination.

The original New York Times piece generated five other newspaper articles about Deptford. The London Paper (a regional daily evening freesheet) was the first UK newspaper to pick up the NYT coverage (see Table 1). It provided a balanced review of the story and restated some of the venues recommended in the NYT piece. Subsequently, a piece appeared in NewsShopper (a local weekly freesheet). Here, the NYT article was described in depth, with the paper then referring to the reaction from a resident - who gave the area reserved praise, whilst acknowledging the lack of attractions and suitable restaurants. These initial articles communicated surprise at Deptford’s designation as an emerging destination, but more damning assessments were forthcoming in subsequent national coverage. The piece that appeared in The

Daily Mail (a major national tabloid) was the most negative. To highlight the inappropriateness of the original article, multiple references to crime were made. An information box inserted to detail the area's history was cruelly headed 'from Monarchs to Muggers' and the article used Deptford's notoriety as the site of (playwright) Christopher Marlowe's stabbing in the sixteenth century to emphasize links with (knife) crime. The only positive aspect of the piece was provided through the inclusion of quotes by a local councillor: 'we have always done well in attracting tourists as we offer something different'.

As its headline suggests (see Table 1), The Daily Telegraph (a major national broadsheet newspaper) was also 'baffled' by the idea of an international travel piece on Deptford. The views of local residents were used to justify this scepticism. Again, crime was a key theme and the only positive aspect of Deptford mentioned was the local music scene. The article in The Times (a major national newspaper), which appeared over six weeks later, was more detailed. Like The Daily Mail, the paper made a link between Marlowe's death and crime, this time in the opening sentence: 'Since the murder in 1593 of the playwright Christopher Marlowe, Deptford and its surrounds have long been defined by violence and crime.' Constant references were made to the dilapidated state of Deptford's physical environment; and its tourism credentials were dismissed: 'there is little to occupy tourists - a large Jobcentre is unlikely to make the list of must-see attractions alongside Big Ben and Buckingham Palace'. This juxtaposition of Deptford and mainstream urban tourism was a common feature in negative critiques (see below). A series of residents' views were included - some of which were balanced, but also others which were rather sensationalist^{xiii}. The

overall tone was derisory, but there was some recognition of Deptford's market, its diversity, eclecticism and arts scene.

The intention in the present study is not merely to assess the media coverage and its likely outcomes, but to discuss what the reaction to the original article reveals about attitudes to visiting areas like Deptford. This reaction was not merely reflected in the newspaper coverage but in the internet communication that followed publication of some of the pieces. The views of people who were visiting Deptford were also sought. These views were organised into themes; each of which is discussed further below.

Edginess

One of the most interesting themes that emerged from the views expressed by online readers was the idea of edginess. The original piece in the NYT included the phrase 'but with the unpolished location comes that heady of urban ingredients: an edge'. This caused consternation amongst journalists and readers alike (see Table 3). Three positions on edginess were observed. Firstly, that Deptford was edgy and this could be something attractive (and worth preserving). Second that edgy could be attractive, but there were edgy alternatives that are preferable to Deptford. And third, that edgy equates to unattractive because it means an area is dangerous and / or dirty.

INSERT TABLE 3 HERE

According to the views we assembled, one of the key characteristics of edginess was scruffiness. Some of our interviewees remarked that Deptford looked 'scruffy'.

According to one interviewee, this was part of the attraction: “Some of the High Street looks a bit scruffy in parts. It looks like there’s not much money in the area, but that sort of adds to the charm as well” (Interviewee 3). Visual disorder – as opposed to the tidy and clear setting provided to visitors by more regulated tourist enclaves – may facilitate exploration and invite curiosity: Edensor (2007) refers to this type of environment as heterogeneous space. According to the author of the NYT, part of the attraction is the element of surprise and hidden beauty that such areas offer: “You want to tell your mates - hey I went to this area which was really scruffy but I found a brilliant bar there - or I have found an amazing gallery in the basement of a car park”. Graffiti also seems to be an attraction for those seeking edgy experiences: Interviewee 17 felt that “the graffiti around here is pretty cool”. However, some people we interviewed were clearly not interested in the Deptford’s edginess. They were there because of friends, because it was a cheap place to stay or because it is near Greenwich. For these people, the lack of polish was regarded in a more derogatory fashion.

Fear of crime

According to Stallabrass (cited in Harris 2012: 232) cool people are attracted to poor areas by urban fabric that is ‘full off incident...with a little edge... yet not that unsafe’. This highlights the importance of analysing complex attitudes to personal safety held by tourists and potential tourists. Unsurprisingly, many internet contributors mentioned Deptford’s reputation as a crime hotspot. These contributions fitted into five categories. The first includes those who had been the victims of crime in the area (burglary, theft, attempted muggings) and who were understandably

negative. A second was those who provided damning, but unsubstantiated, assessments of a 'horrific' area (SE London, Mail) inhabited by 'intimidating youths, druggies, lecherous layabouts, thieves, muggers' (Kent, Mail). It should be noted that several of contributors whose views fall within this category admitted they had never been to the area (London, Times; Anon, LP), and those who admitted their views were based on visits '30 years ago' (UK, Mail) or living there '40 years ago' (Kent, Mail). A slightly more rounded assessment was provided by some who liked the area, but still felt that crime was a problem: 'Yeah I agree it's got great potential, there's the Laban Centre around the corner and it's got a wicked atmosphere. Greenwich down the road. But there are a few nasty streets around there, gotta watch yourself' (Anon, LP). A fourth group liked the area's edge, and dismissed those who were worried about coming to Deptford as 'snobby' tourists: 'If you don't like it stay away, but if you want to venture out of middle England London with its comfortable coffee chains and bland pubs, then come on down!' (London, Mail). It is this group that perhaps provide the 'market' for tourism to 'edgy' areas. A fifth group simply stated that the area's reputation was unjustifiably negative and newspaper representations exaggerated, but without any sense that any edginess would be an attraction.

The actual experience of being in Deptford seemed to lessen fears about safety. Some of our interviewees felt the area was quite welcoming, a feeling exacerbated because their expectations were so low: "I thought we might have a bit more trouble than we've had, but everyone seems quite friendly" (Interviewee 5). Although visiting Deptford tended to mean fewer obsessions with crime, several of our interviewees mentioned safety issues. One felt unsafe at night: "during the day I love it.....but at

night time it's a big dodgy" (Interviewee 12). This view was expanded by another: "In the night when you walk past the market you find a lot of teenagers hanging around - some drunk - kicking bottles" (Interviewee 10). When asked what she did not like about Deptford, one Canadian tourist said: "the fact that I feel I may or may not get stabbed at any moment" (Interviewee 16).

Whilst Interviewee 10 may have been perturbed by Deptford at night, she was prepared to admit that, "I guess you find that anywhere in London" and that "I think it's rough and dangerous if you don't know it, but when you get to know the place it's like any other place - if you know it you become quite comfortable". Another described Deptford's locals as very friendly and welcoming: "everyone seems to know each other which is cool and everyone wants you to meet everyone, so that really cool" (Interviewee 17). Mention of local people was common in interviews: something conspicuously absent from the internet contributions. As the discussion below highlights, people's friendliness and the community spirit contributed to the perceived authenticity of the area.

Authenticity, diversity and distinctiveness

An interesting attitude exhibited in the views we collected was that Deptford provided a rare chance to see the 'real London'. This 'authenticity' was often defined by human, rather than physical attributes: 'you meet real Londoners here, with personality and friendliness, not just some 'perfect image' of London to satisfy tourists' (SE London, Mail); 'while some tourists visit London to see Madame

Tussauds, others might prefer to meet real Londoners' (SE London, Times). Again, these views juxtapose mainstream tourism and Deptford. The presence of independent shops was also noted, with one contributor comparing Deptford favourably to the more standardised high street in nearby Lewisham (London, Mail) and another communicating a sense of nostalgia; 'Deptford is a very unique area and yes it is chainfree - all [the] fresh produce reminds me of London back in the days' (London, Mail). A yearning for 'lost forms of idealised community' is a noted feature of edgy urban areas. For example, Hoxton's emergence as a cool district was partly driven by artists attracted to historicised working class culture (Harris, 2012).

According to Bullman et al. (2012: 75), Deptford - particularly Deptford High Street - 'represents London at its most emphatically multi-ethnic, various and diverse'.

However, whilst diversity was mentioned or inferred by several contributors, perceptions of ethnic diversity were conspicuously underrepresented in the views we collected. One contributor did feel the area was a 'melting-pot conflation of cultures and demographics' (London, Mail), but there were no other references to the ethnic diversity of the area. Ethnic diversity was not commonly cited by the interviewees.

Where there was recognition, it came from the overseas visitors. This perhaps reflects London's cosmopolitanism, which makes Deptford's ethnic diversity unremarkable to those familiar with the city. Whereas some areas in London have a distinct ethnic identity (Chinatown, Banglatown), Deptford is genuinely diverse; and its multi-ethnic identity seem less significant as a draw for tourists. This reaffirms the paradox highlighted earlier: 'ethnic diversity' is more saleable when it involves ethnic homogeneity. However, diversity more generally defined - as variety - was apparent in many contributions. Reflecting a key theme in official tourism promotions, people

seemed to appreciate that the area offers something different - especially compared to central London. Several visitors liked the diversity of local retail outlets and built environment, which they thought made it distinctive. For example, one appreciated the heterogeneous built environment: “I suppose what I like is [the] mixture between old and new” (Interviewee 6).

Creativity

The idea of a creative area is a problematic one. The term usually refers to places that have strong connections with artists, and visible opportunities to consume outputs, rather than levels of creative production. Deptford’s arts scene was mentioned specifically by several interviewees - reaffirming that this type of creativity can provide a competitive advantage for some urban areas. The perceived presence of working artists was seen as a particularly appealing feature. However, studios, galleries and creative outlets were deemed difficult to find without the assistance of local guides. This ‘secret world’ might heighten intrigue amongst urban explorers, but it means creative Deptford is overlooked by mainstream cultural tourists. The town centre manager is aware of this problem and is working with businesses to give them ‘a public face’. It is significant that creative professionals are geographically separated from Deptford’s residential districts (see Figure 1); a class based division which is very typical of other edgy urban areas (Harris, 2012). According to the town centre manager, this geographical division is exacerbated by an economic one: businesses feel that ‘local people are not our customers’ lessening the need to have a public face. There are other reasons to forgo passing trade. Creative businesses actually fear that a public presence might mean they become targets of crime

(interview with town centre manager). This highlights the difficulties reconciling (creative) edge and edginess.

In terms of tourism, the town centre manager sees creativity as one of the area's most important assets. She has tried to link this to the embryonic visitor economy in various imaginative ways: for example, by working with the owners of a local youth hostel: 'we've got local artists that are painting each room' to reinforce the idea that Deptford is 'a funky arts town'. The PR consultant felt that the area's creativity gave Deptford legitimacy as a visitor destination and opportunities for positive publicity: 'there is amazing talent in these areas.... it's not bullshit when I get on the phone and say [to journalists] they've got to come down to Deptford for these artists or that musician.'

Juxtaposing conventional holidays and alternative urban tourism

One of the most important themes that emerged from the contributions we analysed was the tendency to judge Deptford via comparisons with conventional tourism destinations. For some, the contrast was refreshing; Deptford was less bland and less comfortable which made it appealing. But many of the negative attitudes were also framed by this contrast. Reflecting the mockery in the UK newspapers, a key source of incredulity was the very idea that Deptford could be a tourist destination, with the notion of holidaying in Deptford inviting sarcasm. Much of the negative publicity generated by the NYT article on Deptford was caused by the dislocation of the original message into alien markets. Articles such as the NYT article analysed here are aimed at a particular type of visitor who eschews conventional tourism. However,

when picked up by mainstream media, the idea of visiting these areas is equated to a more conventional definition of tourism: holiday taking. When this happens, it seems stereotypes are reinforced, rather than challenged. Indeed, the reaction to Deptford's unexpected media exposure as a destination provides a useful illustration of the dangers of over- or mis-selling unlikely destinations.

The PR consultant was aware of the danger of over-selling Deptford to international or even national tourists: she had tried to encourage locally oriented media coverage – to entice day visitors who live in London, rather than disappointing those from further afield: ‘who might never come back again’. Official promotion is unlikely to assist an area's cool reputation, so it is necessary for destinations to cultivate coverage in influential media. However, this is difficult, especially as writers - including the one interviewed here - tend to ignore official press releases and communications. The tourism development officer we interviewed thinks the answer to this dilemma lies with events: “events is one way, if you don't have good infrastructure, of creating a reason to go... you get a profile through the press. You can build a brilliant profile”. The presence of creative industries and multiple ethnicities presents significant opportunities for cultural festivals and, as long as local involvement can be guaranteed, this option seems both viable and appropriate for edgy areas.

Conclusions

The public reaction to the media coverage Deptford received in 2009 helps us to understand attitudes towards urban areas; in particular the significance of edginess. For a mainstream audience edginess is an unattractive combination of unsafe and

unclean. However, for others an edge equates to charm, distinctiveness and coolness. Confirming the views of some of Lloyd's (2002) interviewees, amongst this group, aspects conventionally regarded as negative (such as graffiti, scruffiness) are seen as part of the attraction. The appeal of edgy, working-class neighbourhoods can be linked to the 'cultural celebration of urban debasement' (Stallabrass, 1999: 247) reflected in the artistic reverence of everyday working class life. This idea is used by Harris (2012) to explain artist-led gentrification in Hoxton. We contend that certain visitors may have the same approach to edgy areas. The appeal of edgy areas is linked to the trend of elevating the everyday to art, a sensibility adopted by cultural intermediaries and sympathetic visitors who appreciate 'shabby chic' (Harris, 2012).

Edgy equates to different; but in keeping with the notion of the mundane / everyday tourism, this can be difference rooted in ordinariness. The lack of contrived attractions, an unpolished environment and a less developed environment is deemed by some to be refreshing. The spirited defence of Deptford on internet message boards, plus the pleasant surprise expressed by visitors we interviewed, suggests places like Deptford can offer distinctive tourist experiences for some people. Noted tourism trends such as the search for authentic urbanism and the desire to consume urban areas 'like a local' correspond well with the experiences and comparative advantages offered.

Ethnic diversity was not seen as an important characteristic of Deptford – because this diversity is now typical in a world city like London. This is illustrative of a wider phenomenon whereby what was once different is now familiar and vice versa. In keeping with this reversal, distinctiveness was provided mainly by the lack of

standardised commerce. The lack of chain stores in Deptford is a function of the area's low appeal to major retailers rather than something planned. As a result this character is vulnerable if the area follows a typical gentrification cycle. A key paradox is that tourists' very presence contributes to neighbourhood change, resulting in what Rosaldo calls *imperialist nostalgia*, 'where people mourn the passing of what they themselves have transformed' (cited in Lloyd, 2002: 529). Even if tourists can be persuaded to visit deprived areas, they are likely to be paving the way for less intrepid explorers. To cater for these groups some of the attractive 'edge' may be removed; either by accident or design.

There was evidence in our study that some visitors appreciate the scruffiness, heterogeneity and creativity of peripheral urban zones. However, there were few instances of visitors appreciating urban fear and frisson. Instead, visitors (actual and potential) accepted this as an unfortunate characteristic of more diverse, less sanitised and more creative parts of cities. Unlike the slumming tourists of the nineteenth century, people seemed uninterested in gawping at the spectacle of the underprivileged. Instead, they were interested in the area's creative industries and in the obvious contrasts between Deptford and other parts of London. Temporal considerations are also important: visiting Deptford before it becomes like everywhere else or experiencing what London used to be like.

Whilst the mainstream market may never be interested in visiting unpolished areas, this does not mean that the potential role of tourism should be dismissed. Tourists can provide custom for local enterprises – assisting creative industries and helping to kick-start development. However, reflecting wider work on destination life cycles,

they can also instigate the changes that remove distinctive qualities. More work is needed to understand the specific role of tourism (and tourism media) in the processes of urban gentrification. Deptford is a fascinating case because for many years people have expected it to become London's next hot spot / cool zone. The latest iteration of the Deptford regeneration 'project' – launched in 2013 – was justified using familiar rhetoric: turning Deptford into London's latest cool district^{xiv}. It needs to be emphasised that such rhetoric is mainly communicated by real estate interests. This is reaffirmed by the consistent inclusion of Deptford in the property pages of London newspapers^{xv}. As one local trader puts it 'when estate agents talk about up and coming its shorthand for over-priced gentrification' (Spittles, 2013). Other people working locally also worry about property-led gentrification. A local theatre producer has stated recently, 'I really like Deptford, even with the lowlights. [but] I am astonished at the pace of development and concerned about gentrification excluding certain groups' (Spittles, 2013).

Despite grand plans and new developments, the area's physical environment may act as a barrier to gentrification. Some disadvantaged areas such as have physical assets that provide the basis for regeneration^{xvi}. In contrast, Deptford's housing stock leads Bullman et al. (2012: 136) to conclude that 'the stark truth is that there is a limit to the extent of development and gentrification that Deptford can ever expect to witness'. This is reaffirmed by property boosters who prefix Deptford articles with the admission 'it may look grim at first glance thanks to its heavy traffic and some ugly 1960s architecture' (Metro, 2013). Whilst there may always be visitors interested in places like Deptford, living there is a different proposition. This perhaps highlights the limits of tourism-led gentrification: Deptford's built environment deters potential

migrants from higher socio-economic groups. Ultimately, this helps to answer the perennial question: why has gentrification / regeneration eluded Deptford?

In terms of policy recommendations, it is tempting to conclude that conventional tourism marketing and development are neither necessary, nor desirable for edgy urban areas. Indeed, the writer of the NYT adopts the attitude that relevant authorities “will get more out of them if they leave them alone”. Supporting cultural events is perhaps the most useful type of intervention. One other, albeit idealistic, approach should also be adopted. To maintain inherent qualities, to ensure any benefits are distributed as fairly as possible and to prevent patronising representations, tourism development and marketing needs to involve local residents^{xvii}. Indeed, future research might focus on whether edginess is best understood as place marketing rhetoric or whether it has any relevance for existing residents. Our research does not address this directly, but a quote from a local resident in Spittles (2013) suggests edginess might be attractive to some residents too: ‘Deptford’s rough around the edges, but has bags of character and is hip and funky. I wouldn’t want that element of individuality to slip away’.

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ⁱ Heap (2009) suggests that the most prominent draw was the availability of illicit sex. Other motivations included observing how the poor lived, conducting sociological research, looking for friends or relatives, shopping, touring creative studios, and seeking out bohemian artists (Heap, 2009).

ⁱⁱ This has explicit links to Shaw et al.'s (2004) identification of Rotterdam's 'city safari', where visitors are encouraged to visit deprived multi-cultural districts.

ⁱⁱⁱ The enduring popularity of Jack the Ripper tours epitomises this.

^{iv} The displacement of the poorest residents in the gentrification process is less relevant to most UK cities (Boddy, 2007), where middle-class gentrifiers have often occupied new-build developments or conversions of old industrial buildings. This means less displacement of the existing residential population - especially when the gentrified area contains a significant stock of social housing. However, as facilities and public spaces are redesigned for the needs of the new middle-class market, a symbolic displacement of the original residents takes place (Cameron & Coaffee, 2005).

^v The inherent methodological frailties of this approach are recognized. Firstly, as Maclaran and Catterall (2002) identify, online researchers have to accept that the characteristics of participants are not known. It is also possible that the same participant could contribute more than once using different electronic identities. Secondly, the sample is not representative and inherently biased, because only people with internet access are able to participate. Some comments may be removed by moderators and, as comments appear on certain sites, the target audience of those sites are privileged. In addition, the validity of the information given is impossible to verify – although this may occur with most other qualitative data collection techniques, for example interviews. Ethical considerations regarding the use of unsolicited first person accounts on the internet have been properly considered. This meant only using data from publicly available sites where no passwords were required to access the data; omitting names, email addresses and other means of personal identification (Morton Robinson, 2001).

^{vi} Morton Robinson (2001:714) suggests that unsolicited accounts on the internet can be an 'extremely valuable source of rich authentic data'. Furthermore, Maclaran and Catterall (2002:324) feel that internet postings can generate 'more thoughtful, structured and edited responses' compared to conventional interviews, with anonymity encouraging 'greater openness and revelation'.

^{vii} All interviews and online comments were analysed using a thematic analysis technique adapted from Flick (2009) and Yin (2003). The data was reduced into a manageable form using categories identified a priori from initial research questions and the literature review. As the analysis continued, new themes emerged from the data, allowing the formation of relevant categories (from both a-priori and emerged themes). The investigators repeated this process until a satisfactory depth of analysis was achieved.

^{viii} Often they have become dilapidated because of under-investment rather than because of inherent problems and London's large estates continue to play a valuable role in housing low-income Londoners.

^{ix} Reflecting ethnic rivalries in New York's neighbourhoods, there were accusations that the black business community was excluded from initiatives (Keith, 2005).

^x See Pratt (2009) for a detailed account of Hoxton's geography and development.

^{xi} 'inglorious', 'up-market this isn't', 'blue-collar aesthetics', 'London's Wild West 'eccentric', 'chaos', boisterous'.

^{xii} This was an interesting illustration of how the contemporary media works: one media article became a suite of items as publications reported the original piece.

^{xiii} a 14 year old was quoted as saying 'It's s**t, unless you like prostitutes, druggies and gangsters'

^{xiv} Coverage of this project in the Evening Standard (Prynn, 2013) was accompanied by the headline 'Run Down Riverside Neighbourhood will be turned into the Shoreditch of South London'. Shoreditch in East London emerged in the 1990s as one of the city's most fashionable areas.

^{xv} Spittles (2013) and Metro (2013) are recent examples.

^{xvi} Examples include the Bronzeville district of Chicago, which contains 'wide boulevards and majestic stone edifices' (Boyd, 2000:112).

^{xvii} This corresponds to Bullman et al.'s (2012: 137) observation that, in Deptford: 'intervention will only work and pay long term dividends by engaging with and seeking the consent of the community itself'.