

## Chapter 14

# The Airport Next Door: London City Airport – Regeneration, Communities and Networks

Iain MacRury

In the context of a book about the Thames Gateway the airport at Silvertown stands as a living case study for transformative urban regeneration. The costs, consequences, benefits, opportunities and opportunisms; the intensities and disorientations of large scale regeneration projects such as the airport, are visible (especially from the air) over and across the Royal Docks sites. Some further consequences of regeneration here are manifest also in neglected interstices, forgotten corners and unvoiced anxieties. In particular the site exemplifies some the dynamic configurations of global and local referred to by Graham and Marvin (2001) as ‘glocalisation’; staging conjunctions of generation and ethnicity, wealth and poverty, connectivity and disconnection, against a rapidly changing post-industrial landscape. A kaleidoscopic sense of the splintered spaces of the Royal Docks site can be captured, initially, through a number of indicative statements about the airport.

London City Airport, at the centre of Thames Gateway London, offers direct flights to most business destinations. Executives based in the Thames Gateway can leave their offices, rapidly check-in to the uncongested London City Airport and be in the business districts of Brussels, Frankfurt and Paris within 2 hours. (Thames Gateway London Partnership)

We had the best Docks in the world, and then ... nothing! (Long-term resident, Focus group Interview)

There is no place here for Silvertown, yet Silvertown is the place where it happens. (Avendano et al., 1999, p. 68)

To consider the relationship between an airport and its environs is to consider the entwining of movement, money, land, sky, matter and information. (Fuller and Harley, 2005, p. 103)

This chapter draws on research conducted in 2005 to assess the ‘social impacts’ of London City Airport amongst residents in the immediate surrounding areas of

Silvertown and North Woolwich, as reported by some airport employees and as understood within wider communities of interest and engagement,<sup>1</sup> for example local government, commercial and other stakeholders. The work was conducted at the request of London City Airport and with their cooperation, but without any direct influence or oversight from the airport management.<sup>2</sup> Components of the research findings contributed to parts of a larger project<sup>3</sup> undertaken alongside the Airport's master planning and consultation processes between 2004 and 2007.<sup>4</sup>

The initial phase of research focused squarely on specific indicators of satisfaction and dissatisfaction within the changing communities around the airport; finding for instance that 56 per cent of respondents saw the airport as a 'good neighbour',<sup>5</sup> that 20.3<sup>6</sup> per cent found noise to be 'a problem', and that

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1 A note on data and methods: the study comprised a large-scale community-based questionnaire which was administered to 500 respondents across a number of areas selected on the basis of proximity to the airport and in order to sample a mixture of housing and demographic types. The research team selected the respondent addresses from the full 360° and from distances up to a mile from the airport. Approximately 300 addresses were from within half a mile of the airport and 200 from between half and one mile, using the Electoral Register, the Newham Street Index and a street atlas. The questionnaires were administered by graduate students from UEL School of Social Sciences, Media and Cultural Studies, trained in advance by LERI staff and in consultation with a member of LCY management team. The survey was undertaken in the first three weeks of April 2005. Data was coded and processed for analysis in SPSS. Qualitative work included four focus groups: long-term residents in North Woolwich and Silvertown; local youth; recent residents in newly built apartment blocks; and airport employees – baggage handlers, fire services, human resources, payroll and across a number of other air services. Interviews were conducted with other stakeholders (e.g. Transport for London, Newham Council, Thames Gateway London Partnerships, the ExCel Centre, local estate agents and hoteliers and some of the major commercial institutions in Canary Wharf). The research was carried out by a team which included Alice Sampson, Tom Wengraf, Alan Walsh and Philip Cohen.

2 It was agreed from the start that the work should be conducted in a spirit of cooperative independence to assure credibility and a full range of insight and reportage. This included testimony from current employees of the airport who, like all the respondents, were guaranteed anonymity.

3 The other master plan related impact studies included close analysis of economic and environmental impacts.

4 As required by the Aviation White Paper.

5 In detail: London City Airport is reported to be a good neighbour by 56.6 per cent of respondents in the locality, and overall only 7.8 per cent suggest that the airport is a bad neighbour. It should be added that indifference is a significant and element of local response; 'indifference' is an important but hard to grasp element of the impact of the airport. So the 20 per cent of respondents who had nothing good or bad to say about the airport, while living within a mile radius are indicative of some local propensity to 'have gotten used to' the Airport as part of the background.

6 In interviews and in focus groups, noise was a recurrent talking point. This is the case even when in the survey 79 per cent of respondents to the questionnaire reported that they did not (themselves) experience noise as an immediate problem: overall however, 20.3 per cent of respondents mentioned noise as a specific, immediate and present problem for them.

only 4 per cent<sup>7</sup> felt that the airport brought ‘new jobs’ to the immediate locality. Nevertheless 60 per cent of respondents felt the airport would be ‘a future asset to the area’<sup>8</sup> and it was clear that taken as an aggregate most respondents accept the airport as a defining feature of the locale – its soundscapes and skyline – with only 6 per cent identifying the airport as a ‘bad neighbour’.

Alongside such quantitative evaluations the project also offered an opportunity to consider some of the dynamics set in train when a highly ambitious regeneration project, like London City Airport, has been located alongside and within communities which have faced and are facing the various challenges and consequences of urban de-industrialisation – to understand a little more about what regeneration projects do with, within, to and for places.

The research – especially the interview and focus group work – was able to open up some useful perspectives on the ‘plan view’ in this particular part of London. This invites re-engagement with analyses of certain regeneration phenomena, notably as described in Graham and Marvin (2001). The descriptions given in these accounts of *Splintering Urbanism* capture, at a conceptual level, a good portion of what is in evidence around the airport and the Royal Docks more broadly viewed – where the ExCeL Centre, The University of East London Docklands Campus, a developing business park and new retail and housing developments will soon be joined by an aquarium centre – and yet more hotels. There is an ongoing re-constitution too in terms of population composition – where multi-ethnic populations of recently arrived migrants live side by side with young professionals buying (and buying to let) commuter homes in a recently thriving property market (*Evening Standard*, 31 May 2006, p. 58; *Mail on Sunday*, 8 January 2006, p. 8). This was a topic of intense interest amongst both staff and resident respondents: ‘It never used to be the best area but people here who owned houses can’t believe their luck’ (long-term resident). And staff in the airport noted the difficulties colleagues had in living in the vicinity of the airport:

I don’t want to go into house prices or anything, but it’s getting very expensive around here. Our fellas, they move our way [Essex, Southend] or Kent. (Airport staff)

These various redevelopments produce together – on the one hand – a startling collocation productive of new network potentialities in derelict space. From another

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7 In 2004 London City Airport required 1,101 full-time equivalent (fte) direct jobs. 66 per cent are within the local core Study Area. It is estimated that the airport supports a further 208 fte indirect jobs and 136 fte induced jobs from the region, i.e. Newham, Tower Hamlets, Hackney, Waltham Forest, Redbridge, Lewisham, Southwark, Barking and Dagenham, Greenwich. The airport is required to source 30 per cent of its staff from within Newham by S106 planning agreements. The definition of ‘the area’ is at issue here – so that while London and borough wide jobs are created, there is a perception that few truly local (i.e. Silvertown and North Woolwich jobs have been created).

8 60 per cent believe the airport will be seen as an asset to the area in the future, with only 6 per cent imagining it will be seen as a disadvantage to the area in the future. However it should also be noted that 36.1 per cent anticipate possible problems in the future and future expansion is cited most frequently as the likely cause of any such problems (15.6 per cent).

point of view, the regeneration has produced a random assemblage of disjointed land use affirming disconnection and to be set negatively against the (formerly and formally) coherent network spaces of river, boats, docks, homes, factories, jobs, road and rail which had previously underpinned the communities from Canning Town to Silvertown. The close urban bonds and networks are replaced by a series of premium sites networking local space into the flows of high value global commerce<sup>9</sup> but, arguably, and by the same process, leaving 'disfigured' (see Boyer, 1995) areas – neglected and unconnected to the renewed spatial ordering.

One resident observed 'The airport fits in well with the things around it – Olympics, ExCel, hotels'. Another agreed, 'yes, but not with the likes of us' (long-term resident).

The airport was part of very controversial series of developments, with significant and well organised opposition from within the local area (see Figures 14.1 and 14.2), and various political stand offs between Labour-controlled local authorities opposing planning initiatives aimed at fulfilling the free market political and socio-economic policies of the governing Conservative Party. Respondents in this research – some of whom have lived uninterruptedly in the vicinities of North Woolwich and Silvertown for their whole lives<sup>10</sup> – were conscious of this history and were able to give detailed assessments of the present conditions, now that the airport has been in place for 20 years. The strong sense of place emerging from such longstanding connections and memories is an important element in the local geography.

This opposition emerged as local communities and other interested parties became aware of a plan to regenerate previous industrial and dock land, which had lain derelict for over a decade – with an *airport*. Looking back on this period some long-term respondents recalled shocked surprise at the plan when it was announced.

Unbelievable ... an airport on our part of the water ... unbelievable. (Long-term resident)

Unlike a number of airport protests, the issue was not so much to do with noise, or with other environmental concerns, nor was there any flavour of straightforward NIMBYism,<sup>11</sup> an accusation levelled at some kinds of protest. At issue was 'place' in an argument between commitments to narratives of development grounded in and oriented to spatial definitions of community redevelopment versus the dynamics of post-industrial de-territorialisation. As one long-term respondent put it: 'The Docks were a living for the people living in the area ... the airport's nothing for us.' For a

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9 Respondents often noted that the working docks linked Silvertown to 'everywhere' so that globalisation as much a part of the local past as it is a part of present and future.

10 The 'long term resident' respondents included individuals who had been in the area since the early decades of the twentieth century, remembering munitions being transferred under the river from Woolwich Arsenal.

11 NIMBY, i.e., Not In My BackYard.



Figure 14.1 Protest against the building of the London City Airport. Photo and banner: Docklands Community Poster Project



Figure 14.2 Anti airport poster. Loraine Leeson and Peter Dunn, Docklands Community Poster Project, 1983

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From Philip Cohen and Michael J. Rustin (eds), *London's Turning: The Making of Thames Gateway*, published by Ashgate Publishing. See: <http://www.ashgate.com/isbn/9780754670636>

minority of respondents, especially amongst older residents, the airport stands as an irrelevant curiosity and even now as a target for some ongoing resentment.

The City Airport was one of a number of prominent regeneration projects developed in East London during the 1980s. The development was driven by the LDDC<sup>12</sup> a body created in 1981 as the government's response to 'failure – by both the market and local government to redevelop the huge area where the capital's docks had lived and died' (Travers, 1998, p. 14).

The LDDC operated by a logic of 'rigorous deregulation' (Meyer, 1999, p. 100) leading to the development of 'infrastructure without public space' (ibid., p. 101) which, over a period, has led to 'an enormous shift in the socio-economic structure of Docklands' a place where: 'Both superior and inferior qualities are present in abundance' but however, where 'the two never meet' (ibid., p. 105) with the airport, for example, 'Seceding relationally from [the] poorer areas that geographically surround them by the use of the old docks literally as moats' (Graham and Marvin, 2001, p. 324).

While some local respondents have remained sceptical about beneficial impacts from the airport it is also the case that a dynamic regeneration process is in evidence, with the airport understood as a key element in local redevelopment. Certainly amongst the business community, a number of stakeholders supported the suggestion that had the airport not been planned and built early in the process of the regeneration of Docklands, others may not have had confidence to invest in the area, suggesting that the pace of regeneration might have been considerably slower. From its conception on, the airport at Silvertown and its environs presents a concrete, brick and glass instantiation of the major dichotomies underpinning regeneration policy and practice. This remains the case.

The airport site working pre-eminently a premium network hub surrounded by hitherto relatively 'low-value' city-space draws special attention in this context. Various accounts of airport-development understood as a particular architectural and social redevelopment 'genre' capture the ways an airport can uniquely transform space, place and experience (Auge, 1995; Fuller and Harley, 2005; Pawley, 1997) as it were excavating locality and re-mapping global and local in ways that are at once increasingly highly familiar but nevertheless always also disorienting. For instance Fuller and Harley (2005) suggest airports produce spaces 'wiped of indigenous particularities and incorporated into a totalising space of global improvement' (ibid., p. 39) Such largely abstract analyses are interesting when read through and against the testimony of local voices speaking, quite literally, at the margins and aprons of airport space. Airports, so understood, form a kind of ideal type of the enclave developments identified by Graham and Marvin (2001) as characteristic of contemporary 'splintering' urbanisms. In a useful exposition of the broad tenor of their analyses they suggest:

It is increasingly clear that the most highly valued spaces in global city cores are being provided with their own dedicated, high-quality infrastructural connections.

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12 In an article looking back on the LDDC Travers (1998, p. 15) described 'An unaccountable, business-dominated quango ... given millions of pounds to clear land, to build new roads and railways, and to promote the area to inward investors'.

These are configured to maximise the ease of connecting to other global city cores around the world. At the same time they are increasingly organised carefully to filter out unwanted connections with the surrounding metropolis – those that are judged to be ‘threatening’ or deemed to be irrelevant to the direct needs of the global enclave. (Graham and Marvin, 2001, p. 313)

One member of staff gave emphasis to the premium nature of the development, referring to the aspiration of the airport to be the ‘Harrods’ of airports. In more practical terms the airport’s private jet centre offers the pinnacle of dedicated high quality private transport connectivity and is seen as an elite operation even within and amongst the airport staff – with ground crew seeing movement to the jet centre service as a promotion. Across the airport the aim is towards the speed and smoothness of transition – premium efficiency for ‘businessmen who wants a 10-minute check in – or quicker now with the computer ones – they check in at home and print it out their selves’ (airport staff). Noise and fumes from the jet centre specifically (as it affected a local footbridge adjacent to the airport) provoked particular concerns. The pedestrian and the jet engine uncomfortably juxtaposed as local networks abut global ones.

The airport continues to be understood by some as a pioneering project based on a novel approach to regeneration – the provision of high quality premium network facilities – such as this ‘boutique’ airport – small but serving key European and UK cities – centres of commerce and financial service industries – would act as an attractant and stimulus for further inward investment to the area and the relocation of businesses of the kinds that could see a benefit arising from such connectivity. Cowlard’s description usefully connects the airport to other kinds of technological connectivity.

‘Just 6 miles east of the City, London City Airport will give business travelers what they value most – time.’ The advertising for the short-take-off-and-landing airport in the Royal Docks claims to provide rapid travel for City business people on short-haul flights to Europe. Also in keeping with the promulgated high-tech image, Docklands has two ‘teleports’ operated by British Telecom and Mercury to provide worldwide satellite telecommunications from the heart of the regenerating area. (Cowlard, 1992, p. 233)

Premium connectivity for the transit of ‘high value’ people and information is central to the operation of the contemporary economy. Regeneration architectures are predicated upon these mobilities – a conception of space out of kilter with more territorial notions where space and place more readily serve a *grounding* function for communal identifications and relations.

London City Airport is consistently described as a valuable local asset, although it is generally not distinguished as *the* key regeneration driver (either by businesses or by local residents), but rather as an integral part of a wider picture of regeneration initiatives and certainly as an important element of the local transport infrastructure. More broadly, Thames Gateway, as a regeneration zone on a grand scale, can usefully be thought about in this context.

Thames Gateway is a conception of ‘place’ predicated on a variety of regeneration locations and modalities, up and down river; rural, urban, brownfield

and lately mega-event and theme park centred renewals. The regeneration of Docklands – begun in the 1980s and ongoing – provides a useful focus to consider the dynamics, anxieties and experiences attaching to the making and remaking of places in and around London – where complex populations, embedded histories and shifting geographies abut global flows of information and capital – co-evolutions of place and ‘non-place’ as Auge (1995) phrases it (see also Avendano et al., 1999, p. 69).

London City Airport, its environs and networks, are key constitutive parts of the Thames Gateway development (Al-Naib, 1990, 2003; Foster, 1999; Mayor of London, 2004). At the same time, and notwithstanding important specificities, the airport stands as an early instance of Thames Gateway development – one permitting useful retrospection.

|                  |        |       |       |                |
|------------------|--------|-------|-------|----------------|
| Zurich ZRH       | LX451  | 8:25  | 3     | Final Boarding |
| Manchester MAN   | VG426  | 8:30  | 8     | Final Call     |
| Rotterdam RTM    | VG274  | 8:30  | 6     | Final Boarding |
| Amsterdam AMS    | KL1556 | 8:45  | 7     | Final Call     |
| Luxembourg LUX   | VG302  | 9:00  | 4     | Boarding       |
| Frankfurt FRA    | LH4801 | 9:10  |       | Checkin        |
| Glasgow GLA      | BA8722 | 9:15  |       | Checkin        |
| Edinburgh EDI    | BA8704 | 9:25  |       | Checkin        |
| Dundee DND       | CB919  | 9:45  |       | Checkin        |
| Amsterdam AMS    | VG218  | 9:45  |       | Checkin        |
| Milan Linate LIN | AP4217 | 10:05 |       | Checkin        |
| Isle of Man IOM  | 3W802  | 10:05 |       | Checkin        |
| Edinburgh EDI    | BA8706 | 10:10 |       | Checkin        |
| Rome FCO         | AP4221 | 10:10 | 10:30 | Checkin        |
| Dublin DUB       | AF5115 | 10:30 |       | Checkin        |
| Geneva GVA       | LX445  | 11:20 |       | Checkin        |
| Antwerp ANR      | VG104  | 11:30 |       | Checkin        |
| Dublin DUB       | AF5125 | 12:00 |       | Checkin        |
| Luxembourg LUX   | LG4593 | 12:10 |       | Checkin        |
| Zurich ZRH       | LX457  | 12:15 |       | Checkin        |

**Figure 14.3 Indicative list of some destinations<sup>13</sup> from ‘live’ online departure board, June 2007**

13 London City LCY on the global database system of airport destination alludes to a network of location codes DUB, LU, IOM and so on which links passenger tickets, baggage tags, flight numbers and departure boards at a level of abstraction where ‘place’ is effectively forgotten. It is interesting to contrast the local names of Dockland sites (such as



In particular (and since its conception) the airport has been understood as a concretisation, more effectively realised as a growing array of new routes have developed (see Figure 11.1) of the idea of the Thames Gateway as primarily a ‘Gateway to Europe’. Thus just after the airport opened *The Economist* reported:

London will be in the absolute forefront of Europe. International companies will want facilities they cannot find in the City, and that is another reason why the success of Canary Wharf is an inevitability. A model working environment for the next century, unparalleled in Europe. (*The Economist*, 9 August 1989)

This is Europe understood as a primary economic centre and is consistent with a conception of European-ness, and lately globalisation, which is primarily about financial connectivity. The political importance of Europe in the 1980s, and the intimate link between European unification, Docklands and the famously pro-European figure of Michael Heseltine (Al-Naib, 2003; Travers, 1998), coincided with some background legislative changes highly relevant to the developmental context of City Airport – important European regulation changes described by Cowlard (1992) at the time as follows:

The year of the Single Market of the European Community, 1992, will give further impetus to the internationalisation of financial markets, and London will be a part of that process. The Second Banking Directive will, for example, enable any bank authorised in one member state to operate anywhere in the Community as a step towards a single market in financial services (Cowlard, 1992, p. 240)

This, as much as local regeneration imperatives, accounts for the initial and particular relevance of an airport as a defining iconic development alongside the Canary Wharf office space developed – with financial services companies (understood in part in terms of their mobility needs) as the major likely future tenants. This ‘regeneration’ strategy has proved effective (in its own terms) and is at the heart of a good deal of the promotion of London Thames Gateway. Gateway to London, who are responsible for marketing business space in London to corporate employers suggested that ‘we would have had 80 per cent less success in attracting new office developments if London City Airport did not exist’.<sup>14</sup>

The Royal Docks regeneration is understood primarily in terms of attracting corporate investors as tenants for developments such as the Royals Business Park, a joint development between Standard Life Investments, Development Securities PLC and the London Development Agency. Building 1000, a prominent glass and mirror office building, is the first completed phase of the development and comprises 252,273 ft<sup>2</sup> (23,436 m<sup>2</sup>) of office space. This building faces the airport on the opposite

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‘Cyprus’ – a DLR station – on the Dock facing the airport – or Canada Water – a Jubilee Line tube station – or Canary Wharf itself). These allude of course to the distributed place names of Empire trade and to wharves and quays (the lifeworld of the Docks).

14 Stakeholder interview: with thanks to Richard Karberry and Louise Congdon of York Aviation.

side of the Royal Albert Dock. The business park will ultimately comprise some 1.6 million ft<sup>2</sup> in a highly landscaped 50 acre premium environment. The airport is cited as a major attractant for corporate office tenants, standing as a potent emblem of, and as a practical contribution to, the kind of 'premium connectivity' and manicured spaces deemed essential for contemporary service industries.<sup>15</sup>

Local authorities stand firmly behind the ongoing strategy even while enforcing planning regulations ensuring a good degree of restriction on flight times and frequencies.<sup>16</sup> The Newham Council UDP states that the airport forms:

a major strategic asset to the Borough and to London as a World City, linking business centres in the West End, City, Docklands, East London and elsewhere in the Thames Gateway with a wide range of European business destinations. It is an incentive to further development in the Royal Docks and is an important direct and indirect generator of employment. The Council's policy towards London City Airport is one of support and encouragement in recognition of its strategic and economic importance to the Borough and sub region. (LB Newham UDP)

The borough has direct responsibility for planning decisions affecting the airport. Some Silvertown respondents were critical of the way that the borough had represented their particular local interests. Again, and with political representation the underlying issue, the debate requires attentiveness to the definition of 'space', and to interpreting the balance of interests of one area against the aims and strategic ambitions of the borough. This is played out in the main in the scrutiny of, and on the airport's part, adherence to, the strict limitations on aircraft movements at the beginning and end of each day, and at weekends.

Respondents agreed that this was a contributory factor in the assessment of the airport as a 'good neighbour' with the borough successfully mediating between the needs of the airport and the community. Nevertheless, in terms of more general anxieties respondents were unsure about the extent to which local-political governance was a reliable safeguard for them.

Newham gives the planning permission for them to do all this. We have no say...we're in the outback here ... Newham don't know we exist. (Long-term resident)

At the metropolitan level the London Plan (Mayor of London, 2004) also cites the airport as a key nodal point linking London to continental Europe as part of a 'Gateway'.

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15 Thames Gateway London Partnership reported that existence of the Airport is vital to efforts to attract new investment to the area, particularly in the office market: 'We would have had 80 per cent less success in attracting new office developments if London City Airport did not exist.' Stakeholder interview with thanks to Richard Kaberry and Louise Congdon of York Aviation.

16 Local respondents agreed that the airport was good at adhering to such restrictions.

East London should become London's gateway to mainland Europe, building particularly on the Stratford International Railway Station, but also on access to the City and Stansted airports, the Channel Tunnel and the Port of London. Economic development should be geared for the long-term opportunities these present. (Mayor of London, 2004, p. 244)

London-wide, the airport offers a degree of iconic place-making, signalling an intention towards service driven regeneration, the provision of premium transport links and a practical contribution to the economic life of the city. It is, in this sense, a part of the 'figured city' (Boyer, 1995) – a construction of space that can however leave elements of degeneration untouched and unthought. It is important to note that Silvertown residents continue to register a sense of disconnection from London. The airport seems not to 'map' their space as the working Thames had done, and, as they anticipate, the DLR will now do (see Figure 11.4 below). Such a sense of spatial refiguring amplifies the impacts of redundancies and withdrawals associated with the decline in value of manufacturing labour and the communities supporting 'heavy' industry. Such a dynamic is likely to be resonant in some cases, considering the prospects for the re- and dis- and yet-to-be-located sites and people up and down Thames Gateway as it develops. This in turn highlights the centrality of issues about transport and ICT connectivity, necessary for fulfilling a movement-centred (re-)conception of communal geographies – perhaps with the sense of connectedness increasingly important (economically and for individuals and groups) as the sense of 'place' becomes attenuated.

Regeneration projects such as London City Airport, as in the 1980s, are predicated on the future and elsewhere – the focus on intention and becoming. As Fuller and Harley (2005) argue, it is the logic of airports that they grow – with expansion the default mode of each individual airport installation as well as for the global network – an airports-city they name 'Aviopolis'. The risk is that in such a mode of thinking (as routinised in the professional imagination of regeneration planning) *past*, *present* and *here* can seem to be 'bracketed' or even entirely occluded from the visions, processes and products of 'growth' and 'regeneration' – with quantitative expansions and efficiencies standing in for palpable improvements in quality of life, i.e. connectivity, relationship, 'sustainability' or 'liveability'.

The permanent anxieties about connection and disconnection to Europe and debates about various kinds of union mean that planning, managing and delivering transport connectivity (the Chunnel, Cross Rail, City Airport) have often been overlain, spurred but also inhibited (in debate and execution) by anxieties and fantasies about London's and Britain's changing place and status and relationships the world.<sup>17</sup> Today the important European dimension must be

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17 One might speculate that City Airport symbolised a 'light touch' engagement with Europe privileging financial connectivity, as opposed to the Channel Tunnel, a more concrete connection, and associated with freight and heavy lorries and with anxieties about immigration and the body of the nation – even despite the pseudo airline marketing of the Eurostar brand.

understood alongside three further and more recently emphasised practical and political 'geographies'; those of 'community', regionalism and globalisation. These are not issues to be ducked – and the Gateway is usefully conceived as a spatial project articulating elements of engagement with globalisation – and with the airport key to this vision. But the airport, like the Gateway is also and assertively also *here* and *now*; it is Essex, Kent, Newham, Silvertown – places existing in past and present as well as in regeneration 'future-speak'.

As has been well documented, the docks and adjacent manufacturing industries closed down in this part of East London in the 1960s and 1970s (Carr, 1986; Meyer, 1999).<sup>18</sup> The airport complex stands adjacent to a runway built on a strip of land surrounded by large dock basins – flanked on two sides by water – once part of a 'world famous Docks ... we were the centre of the world' (respondent, long-term resident).

The Royal Docks terrain – 'the product of a past geared to the carriage of goods rather than people' (Cowlard, 1992, p. 240) – was a surprising location for an airport. The London City Airport is in fact a STOLPORT (short take off and landing airport), this for environmental reasons (restrictions on size and type of aircraft) and because the runway is necessarily limited in length. The sense of continuity in 'transport' function – for instance with air cargo – and associated work is minimal. The airport is primarily a 'light' service industry and not a substitute for the heavy industry that had once occupied the Docks.<sup>19</sup> As an example the work of maintaining the aircraft is largely handled away from London City, so that the particular skilled jobs that might otherwise have come into the area are distributed more widely; as exemplified in the instance of Belgian airline, VLM. Their crew and maintenance bases are located in Antwerp, i.e. elsewhere – even while London City Airport acts as the main hub on its network, but without the presence of ground-based crews. Nevertheless there are fire service and other skilled jobs at London City – but perhaps not as many, even proportionally, as there might be in a larger international airport.

This is consistent with the initial aim of the airport. In essence, the concept was to replace the global colonial-commercial and industrial gateway role of the original docks with a new modern technological air service gateway to European financial networks and flows, and so, it was hoped, to catalyse the redevelopment

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18 As Travers (1999) describes it: 'London docks handled their maximum tonnage in the early 1960s, yet by 1981 virtually all docking activity had gone from the upstream part of the Thames. Between them, antiquated labour practices and containerisation caused fatal damage to the old Port of London. Such docking activity as survived had migrated to Tilbury.'

19 However, ground staff respondents described the jobs they did in baggage handling – commenting on cargo '90 tonnes a month and on the increase' (respondent baggage handler), primarily the airport is designed for the quick, smooth and efficient passage of business people to European and UK destinations – usually linked to financial services and other commerce. However, baggage handlers' observations of increasing amounts of large luggage, suitcases and backpacks indicates an increase in non-business travel and increase in tourist travel corroborating a sense amongst staff of a more heterogeneous customer base in recent years.

of the area. There was a political-economic choice implicit in the decision in that the materiality of the service industry is light not heavy; it is people and information, not things. The City Airport (qua icon) emerged from a particular interpretation of the degree and kind of Europeanisation the UK was prepared and preparing for in the 1980s. This has had consequences locally.

Young people in the area reported that they were largely unaware of the types and kinds of jobs the airport could offer, and sought work in the remaining factories, such as Tate and Lyle – maintaining continuities with a local history and habitus disposed to manual labour. However such continuities are not readily served in the prevailing regeneration ethos – where the transformative educational projects needed to link past and future habitus have been under developed or misaligned.

The airport, now 20 years old – so that some respondents ‘had grown up with it’ as a permanent presence in the area – remains nevertheless as a kind of symbol of novelty, standing as a sign of regeneration and change, of course in particular to those members of an older and long established community who were ‘born to’ the sounds, sights and smells of the working Royal Docks. As Avendano et al. (1999, p. 68) observe:

The residents of Silvertown sit sandwiched between two landmarks of London’s global economic history. On the one side is the Tate and Lyle sugar refinery, one of the last vestiges of the industrial past, and on the other is London City Airport, landmark of the post-industrial present ... physically and socially the divisions between the two worlds are constantly reinforced.

This sense of novelty the airport carries may, for some, lie in the paradoxically remote but proximal character of the airport; a resolutely strange local element – even while lending its now highly familiar and visually ‘spectacular’ backdrop to the area – alien in terms of habitus and use value. In terms of daily functional engagement the airport remains ‘distant’ from the lives of a large proportion of the people who live next door to it. Even in terms of ‘news and gossip’, there was, for the older residents, used in the past to knowing about all sorts of local coming and goings, a real sense of deficit: ‘they never tell us what’s going to happen ... how do we know?’ (long-term resident). The sense of local pride and ownership is not well served if people feel ill informed. Such anxieties about information flow to do with airport developments was counterproductive for the airport too – feeding local anxieties and suspicions.

The survey element of the research confirmed the anecdotes about low usage – where respondents talked about going occasionally for coffee and meals, but where flying was a rare and expensive thing to do. The airport is not heavily used by residents from within the immediate locality with any great frequency. Seventy-five per cent of survey the respondents had ‘never flown from or to London City Airport’ and 41 per cent had never been to the airport ‘for any reason’.<sup>20</sup> This

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20 This low usage is primarily a function of the specialist nature of the airport, selectively serving a relatively small number of European and UK destinations. It is also a

paradoxical relationship between local people and the airport echoes a number of theorisations of contemporary urban change (Graham and Marvin, 2001).

The 1980s wave of Docklands regeneration seemed in many ways to bypass and further undermine communities ravaged by unemployment and various other forms of deprivation—as opposed to regenerating them (Carr, 1986; Foster, 1999; Meyer, 1999; Butler and Rix, 2000; Jerram, 2000). The airport, planned as an iconic regeneration project to the East of Docklands—extending the regeneration further out of the centre (around Canary Wharf) was the first of a number of regeneration project in the Royal Docks.

The specific geography of Silvertown, North Woolwich and the airport produces something of a ‘peninsular’ feel. It may be that this geographical isolation exacerbates the sense of being cut off, from the main swathes of the City, from Newham borough and from the more positive energies and experiences emerging around Docklands. It may be that the ‘village’ will remain something of an outcrop as there is not much buildable or urbanisable land around the airport. The huge dock basins on one side and the river on the other, isolate the installation. Land is so expensive (the north side of the Royal Victoria Dock is reserved for new business parks) that there is little scope to build more inclusive or mixed settlements. And the river on the other side is another obstacle. This geographical fact of life is one of the reasons why some Silvertown people may feel like an enclave of earlier times.<sup>21</sup> As one respondent suggested, this has been a long standing feature of the area:

You never got no bother cos the only way out of here was East Ham and the only other way was Canning Town, so nobody ever got any bother cos they could get you at both ends ... you were in trouble, the police were there, you couldn't get out. (Female 70s)

And an airport staff member recalls:

When I joined there was only one road into the airport – think if there was a burst pipe or something ... we'd be in trouble. (Staff member)

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function of the size and capacity of the airport and in part reflects the business level pricing. Fifty-nine per cent of passengers using London City Airport are travelling on business, which is a far higher proportion than for any other UK airport, including Heathrow. Sixty-three per cent of all passengers using the airport come from socio-economic groups A and B; again much higher than for any other UK airport. Airport staff expected an increase in volume and diversity of passengers as the DLR link ties the airport more closely into non-business networks and puts the airport ‘on the map’ (staff respondents) and less remote. Of the 22.5 million air passenger trips originating in or destined for the London boroughs making up London City Airport’s main catchment area within east and central Greater London, only 4 per cent were via the London City Airport. It remains a niche airport. Any democratising impact of budget airlines has not directly influenced the LCY service, though increasing tourist travel is a future aim.

21 With thanks to Michael Rustin for this observation.

suggesting that as there was only one way in and one way out, a certain order was maintained in a relatively closed community space. This ‘geography’ and its psychosocial correlates (in the facts and senses of local intimacies, identifications and rights) is no longer affirmed in the regenerated settlement – where the airport signals wide dispersal and unintelligible comings and goings.

Politically also – in terms of any broadly ‘local’ sense of control and ownership – there have been shifts, as development companies, local authorities and planning and regeneration bodies have at various times held sway in decisions about present and future change. The lack of reliable information for local people was identified as a problem.<sup>22</sup>

### Concluding Points

When Monopoly launched its new seventieth anniversary limited edition, designed to reflect the changing face of London, it was something of a coup for London City Airport to appear as a square on the revised game board. This recognition in the new version of the highly popular game ‘map’ of London is poignant. Alongside a variety of more substantive developments; regeneration projects such as Stratford City, the continuing expansion around Canary Wharf, the Olympics<sup>23</sup> and the Thames Gateway itself, the airport stands alongside a great number of other incidental indications of a reconfiguration of city space to the East of London – iconic affirmation of a reconnection between the East of London and the familiar names, places and spaces of the City and the West End.<sup>24</sup>

City Airport then, even 20 years on from its controversial opening in 1987, is iconic of novelty – of a new turn on the London map. In keeping with this recent appearance on the Monopoly board, the City Airport stands as a token, associated as much with the flow, direction and movement of capital as with planes, people and places. This square on the monopoly board, replacing Kings Cross Station, also asserts the necessarily global and international character of (East) London and Docklands – the extension and tightening of aviation based ‘connexity’ (Mulgan, 1998); to Europe, to global business, and, as Fuller and Ross (2005) have it, to the flows and transits of the global network they term ‘Aviopolis’. The question is: does London city Airport stand as a place (to live and work) or as a token – a square on a board – a card in the regeneration game? A place or a non-place?

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22 Shortly after the consultation the airport took positive steps to enhance this aspect of community engagement strategy.

23 The 2012 bid document was taken from London City Airport to the IOC offices in Lausanne, Switzerland, by 14-year-old East London basketball prospect Amber Charles’ (*Daily Mail*, 7 July 2005, p. 92).

24 In practical terms this is registered in the figures recording borough of departure for passengers flying from London City Airport. The two leading boroughs are Westminster and x..



**Figure 14.4 London City Airport square on the 70th anniversary edition of the Monopoly board game**

Certainly the employees, many of whom have now worked there since before it opened feel like a community. ‘We are a close knit group’ in a place with ‘a special atmosphere’ (employees’ focus group).

A point made quite powerfully by longstanding residents, who remember the arguments set out (promises made) at the time the Airport was first developed, is that the existence of Newham-wide employment targets is beside the point; it is those parts of Newham which are directly adjacent to the airport and which bear proportionately the most costs in terms of disruption and necessary accommodation, that should be positively transformed by benefits such as employment opportunities. Respondents did not feel that such benefits were consistently apparent to the locality (as tightly defined in Silvertown and North Woolwich) though they were able to point to friends and relatives who worked in the airport and saw that the jobs created were valuable – even if not routinely taken up by local people.

However, some informants from the stakeholder interviews were of the view that there were some strong and clear secondary benefits from the LCY which improved (or will come to improve) local employment. All the community interviewees thought that the airport had attracted or helped to attract other businesses into the area; most notably the hotel industry, which provides local employment opportunities. The bars in the hotels also provide a place for local people to meet and are popular places for socialising. However, one interviewee thought that the new leisure businesses were City businesses and not ones that benefited Silvertown people. The community interviewees also felt that the presence of the airport had resulted in the extension of the DLR, which they felt would not have happened without the Airport and its willingness to lobby for the extension. The DLR station opened during the period of the research and





Bruce Jerram's (1999) tour of Dockland noted ruefully that the airport is not linked to DLR:

The Docklands light railway, itself a local paradigm for the priority of movement over permanence, passes tantalisingly within sight of the airport, but in the non-plan regime of Docklands development it runs past the far side of the runway with no station connecting to the planes (Jerram, 1999, p. 40)

Belatedly, then, this omission has been addressed with the positive development for Silvertown. The link to the DLR is important practically and figuratively in that the benefits of connexity enacted for the City by the airport are now (only now) affirmed also for the local community (see Figure 11.4). Importantly the DLR is not a premium network connection – though it provides high quality local and commuter service across the Royal Docks and a connectivity that was impossible in the 1980s – and not even envisaged as recently as 1999 (see Jerram (1999) and Avendano et al. (1999) whose scenario views of Silvertown point out the lack of a smooth network link to the airport).

In thinking about 'splintering urbanisms' I would argue that the DLR can be contrasted positively, from the point of view of building local amenity and connectivity for Silvertown, against the Heathrow Express which Graham and Marvin (2001), contrariwise, cite as 'excellent example of glocal bypass', premium connectivity outstripping the poorer transport system – at a premium price. They go on to discuss an example of the politics of transport connectivity in an era where the regeneration tendency is towards the profitability, security and efficiency of premium networks and less supportive of public infrastructure development serving more elaborate, localised life-worlds. They cite the example of a change in public transport policy following the Labor (sic) victory in the Federal State of Victoria, Australia, in 1999.

In most cases, scope continues to exist at the level of local and national state and governance regimes to reassert and even strengthen leverage over the production and regulation of premium networked spaces. Local municipalities and planning agencies can renege on licence agreements and bring networks back into direct connection with public network operations. (Graham and Marvin, 2001, p. 397)

They give the example of an Australian development which:

paved the way for the possible linkage of Melbourne's international airport to the city's public transit system, even though the developers of the CityLink e-highway had negotiated a contract with the previous Conservative government that promised them exclusive connectivity to that most lucrative of sites. With the right political backing, traditional policy intervention through the construction of public duct space, public investment, leeway rights and planning instruments can do much to (re)socialise benefits from premium networked infrastructure investments. (Ibid., p. 398)

The DLR is of course a much smaller and different type of facility, and the City Airport a far smaller airport. However the porosity and accessibility of some

elements of premium network space means that the positive regeneration benefits of some development can be felt in more inclusive ways. In this connection the Cross rail development is highly relevant – for the airport, for Thames Gateway and for local and regional regeneration. Linking the East of London to Heathrow and eventually Paris cross-rail could prove to

In the meantime and in general terms there is an ongoing aspiration around the London City Airport towards community links and engagements which are more than cosmetic. The community, young and old have come to accept the airport as a defining feature of the area, and while anxieties remain in general about regeneration, housing and change, the airport is no longer sense as the unwelcome intrusion it once was. Indeed it is seen by some as an ally against further regeneration, as the flight path of the planes precludes high rise building in quite a wide area of Doclands and beyond<sup>25</sup> opening the skyline and providing a sense of space relatively rare in London.

The process of embedding a premium regeneration enclave is a slow one – and one that is never complete. As Avendano et al. (1999) suggest concisely:

The aim is to create the overlapping conditions between place and Auge's non-place by disassembling the existing physical borders so that one can start to include local cultures and societies.

This is a laudable aim, and in a design project about the airport they proposed a largely architectural solution aimed at making the airport more of a destination (by giving it accessible amenities and inducing a night time economy via a night club for the late hours when the airport qua airport is not in operation). It is a compelling vision, if somewhat fanciful. However, the overlapping of place and non-place which Avendano et al. (1999) suggest – and as a broad aspiration for Silvertown and thinking about Thames Gateway – must be resolved not just on the plane of architecture, but through practical arrangements across the region. The routing of the DLR into Silvertown in 2006 is exemplary here.

Further developments need to emerge providing a genuine connectivity continuous and contiguous with the airport transits and flows, in terms of enhanced exchange and flow of information and people between the airport complex and the community – via communications but also through jobs and other deep-seated forms of participative engagement and dialogue. Place and non-place converge only in such concrete and continuous processes.

Fuller and Harley (2005, p. 48) suggestively propose a connection between Foucault's observation that:

We are in an epoch of simultaneity; we are in an epoch of juxtaposition, the epoch of the near and the far, of the side by side, of the dispersed. We are at the moment I believe, when our experience of the world is less that of a long life developing through

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25 This factor has caused some conflict between the airport and various regeneration plans.

time than that of a network that connects points and intersects with its own skein ... (Foucault, 1986, p. 22)

and the network cultures epitomised and enacted in airports and their spatially transformed milieus. The generations of residents and employees who live and work at the airport now accept, express and embody much that Foucault articulates. However, and at the same time, the airport and planners, and policy makers, implementers and politicians must be alert to the power and necessity (however complex) of continuities in place and narrative.

Important too is the overlapping of connectivity (premium and local, as per the DLR), producing sustainable narratives of place and space and inclusive inter- and intra-site communications and exchange. In the face of an urbanism prone to the enclave and the enclosure it is important to 'plan in' and develop 'points of interconnection, not hermetically sealed objects' (Thrift, 1997, p. 143)

You'd never believe that the area could change so much, in what? ... 20 years; you'd never believe how this could go from a little village, because that's all it was (Long-term resident, Silvertown)

The identification of a 'village' points to the close knit community that developed around the Docks and factories. Of course it was anything but a 'village' as now understood in the national imaginary, though it had a far higher level of amenity as it has had in recent years.

Like everyone knew everyone and we had lots of shops, the park and the swimming pool, cinema, a little cinema, it was lovely ... the council ruined it when they broke the community up and let all the places out, you know all through different ideas they had..the council broke the community up. (Long-term resident, Silvertown)

But Silvertown, North Woolwich, Canning Town and many other 'villages' continue to serve the memory and desire for place and for narrative. For the Gateway to become something more than something to pass *through* on the way to somewhere else, for it to become a place of connection and development attentiveness to the micro-politics of place must remain a priority. Boddington (1999) argues 'places such as airports reconstitute synthetic gateways and borderland territories' (Boddington, 1999, p. 5). It is important in Silvertown and across the Gateway that that synthetic comes to mean integrative rather than 'unreal' and that the Airport can become more of a bridge between the local community and the processes of regeneration rather than being (as some longer standing residents see it) an outward sign of a regenerative processes to which they cannot contribute and from which they can see few clear benefits so that:

forces of disintegration can be...used as the medium for new forms of integration and affirmation. That is how and why people survive in cities and rebuild their lives out of so much rubble, injustice and disappointment'. (1996, 67) (Graham and Marvin 2001:393 check)

The Thames Gateway Regeneration Agenda needs to be alert to the provision of physical but also social linkages, new and emergent networks of association grounded in systems of movement and re-connection. The development (and preservation) of such systems offers practical redress – in policy agendas – to some of the excesses of glossy but dystopian developments of inequitable ‘glocal’ network regeneration.

While a romanticisms about locality can be readily dismissed regeneration professionals need to acknowledge that the uncompromised and uncompromising primacy of premium network regeneration in the production, renewal and reproduction of space – up and down the Gateway cannot, on its own, deliver the sustainable and liveable futures anticipated.

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