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SURF
Scotland's Independent Regeneration Network

scotregen

issue 51 : autumn 2010 sharing experience : shaping practice

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Green solutions for community regeneration

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green approaches
to regeneration
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A view from the chair



Ian Wall
SURF Chair

DON'T THROW OUT GRANNY

Across Scotland, Public Sector managers are gearing up to bring in a range of cuts the size and nature of which will be savage and unprecedented. It will result in damaged communities and wrecked lives. At present the worst has yet to be exposed and the language seeks to hide the reality; for 'delaying' read enforced unemployment and penury on £65 a week for many public servants with of course the consequent loss of services for us all.

These cuts are being presented to us as unavoidable and necessary to 'balance the Nation's books' but where did these debts that we have to pay come from? They are the private debts of the Banks and their shareholders that the government has nationalised in the hope of enforcing 'private riches, public poverty'.

Imaginary lifestyles

The recent report by the Institute of Fiscal Studies on the emergency budget showed that it hit the poorest worse and since then the Chancellor has announced another £4 billion in welfare cuts against 'welfare lifestyle' beneficiaries. Of course, outside the fevered

imagination of some newspaper editors, these people do not exist. This propaganda is part of the attack to disarm those who consider that, if we are to pay the banks' debts, it should be done by the bankers first (£10 billion in personal bonuses for last year alone) and then those most able to pay. If our household income drops we don't throw out Granny, reduce the food for our kids and stop heating the house; but this appears to be the UK Government's policy.

This of course makes the work of regeneration triply difficult by threatening resources, creating even greater problems and undoing the good work that has been done to date.

A sign of the times is that the Regional Development Authorities in England (the equivalent of Scottish Enterprise Network) has been closed down and their staff are currently being fired and our English equivalent, BURA, has gone into liquidation, reflecting the pressures on regeneration in particular.

In these circumstances the continued solidarity that SURF members can bring to each other through sharing information, sharing our experiences and establishing joint work, amongst other things, can help us all to deal with the onslaught that is coming. It is only by working together that we will be able to generate the responses needed to defend individuals, our communities and our services.

Editor's note

This is the final Scotregen 'View from the Chair' by Ian Wall who stood down from that position at the recent SURF AGM. Scotregen and SURF more generally, have benefited hugely from Ian's unflagging support and dedication over recent years and we look forward to his continuing involvement as Vice Chair in the future. Stephen Maxwell will offer his 'view' as the new SURF Chair in the next issue of Scotregen.

Editorial



Andy Milne
SURF Chief Executive

GREEN SOLUTIONS AND CREATIVE APPROACHES

Welcome to the Autumn 2010 issue of
scotregen.

These are hard times for everyone involved in community regeneration. As always, Scotregen looks for constructive responses. In this issue we highlight Green Solutions (not soft soap) and Creative Approaches from Govan to Pittsburgh and Falkirk via Singapore.

Elsewhere, we examine the challenges for better community regeneration policy and practice; big cuts in the big society, balancing love and power, planning the future and reflecting on past recessions.

As part of SURF's unique, independent, cross sector, regeneration network, all of the contributors to Scotregen do so freely and we are grateful to them for sharing their experience, knowledge and views. I hope you find them interesting and useful for your ongoing work in these challenging times.

As always, Scotregen welcomes feedback and suggestions on content and policy focus. To add your voice, please just e mail me at andymilne@scotregen.co.uk.

Letter from America

Scotregen's regular USA columnist and international community facilitator, Denys Candy, gives some thought to what he values in an urban environment, and why.



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THE BEARABLE AND LOVABLE CITY: A PERSONAL VIEW

The heat of Pittsburgh's high summer reminds me of the equatorial heat of Singapore, where I recently spent time working and visiting friends. Today, I'm thinking about those gifts that make any city bearable, even lovable to me, even when heat, pollution and other challenges interfere. Here are three that come to mind:

Large Concentrations of Trees

As a result of a slow economy, lower tax revenues and bad policies, my neighborhood is fraying around the edges – more buildings look banged up, un-cared for, abandoned even. Yet I look out a second floor window over a lush expanse of trees. In back yards and along the streets they mask a main road and railway line as they spread out across the valley to Frick Park, one of the city's biggest public parks. Trees do their level best for our health and I take comfort in plans to plant thousands more throughout Pittsburgh in the coming years. In Singapore, centrally planned and managed as a Garden City, tropical trees and plants, remnants of the rain forest, create pockets of peace amid the relentless pace and high energy bustle, offering endless moments of joy without discrimination to any who might take note.

Water

Many urban dwellers live near significant bodies of water – rivers, lakes, streams, oceans. Because of Pittsburgh's industrial decline, many more species of fish are now populating the waters of our three rivers, though we can't yet eat them due to the heavy metals they imbibe from the depths. This week, I heard scientists on the radio talk of discovering oil from the BP spill close to the very foundation of the food chain - in plankton - in the Gulf of Mexico, reminding me of how the health of even far away water can support or undermine our health. I enjoy exploring water's place in a City's ecology from a boat.

The step from terra firma to the water leads to a shift in how I view a city. Pittsburgh's neighbourhoods and Singapore's shop-houses and high-rises come to life in altered ways.

Street Food

On the sidewalks of Penn Avenue in Pittsburgh's produce district (known as The Strip) the Mexican grocery owner whips up tortillas and enchiladas for passers-by. Down the street, from carts, one can grab Vietnamese food or a hot dog smothered with onions. In Manhattan's Washington Square, the Dhosa Man's cart is a local institution attracting long lines. But Singapore cannot be topped for the variety of inexpensive tasty dishes available twenty four hours a day all over the city. Chinese, Indian, Indonesian, Malaysian and local blends of multi-cultural cuisines (even "Western Food" – generally deep fried!) are on offer from the entrepreneurs who run the kitchens of the many stalls that make up outdoor Hawker Centres (food courts).

When I notice transient experiences of discovery in any city – taking a new short cut down an alley past a beautiful garden, tasting the best local food, putting my hands on a huge tree preserved amid dense buildings, hearing birds chime during a lull in traffic, spotting angles created by juxtaposed low and high-rise buildings, breathing air on the river – any city, in spite of its challenges, becomes more liveable and more lovable.

Denys will be involved in SURF's upcoming 'Creative Approaches' conference on 10/11/10 - See page 4 for details.

Water, trees and food - Tanjong Pagar, Singapore.



Dates for your Diary:

SURF has a busy events schedule in the coming months. Here are some highlights of our forthcoming activities.

Creative Approaches

Date: Wednesday 10/11/2010

Location: Pearce Institute, Govan, Glasgow

Further Information: www.scotregen.co.uk

In the current climate, we need to be creative in supporting real community regeneration. In collaboration with Fablevision, the Scottish Wave of Change initiative and the Heritage Lottery Fund, SURF has organised a special film-based conference on 'Creative Approaches to Real Regeneration'. It will use archive film clips to highlight the success and diversity of practical, community-based projects from across Scotland that are using creative artistic processes to involve communities in celebrating and building on their authentic identity and assets.



2010 SURF Annual Lecture

Date: Thursday 11/11/2010

Location: Dundee City Chambers

Further Information: SURF members will receive a free invitation in September.

The new Permanent Secretary to the Scottish Government, Sir Peter Housden, will deliver the 2010 SURF Annual Lecture in Dundee. This will be a timely event of keen interest to everyone concerned with the future of community regeneration in Scotland. The SURF Annual Lecture is a free event for SURF members. Information on the benefits and costs of joining SURF is available on page 18.



Physical Regeneration In Hard Times

Date: Wednesday 03/11/10

Location: Venue tbc, Glasgow

10% Discount for SURF members

Further Information: www.holyrood.com/regeneration

SURF is also supporting Holyrood Events to deliver this national conference on 'Physical Regeneration in Hard Times – Recovery or Reinvention?'. The conference will feature four sessions exploring the key aspects of: future policy; infrastructure investment; international perspectives; and building better places.

PHYSICAL REGENERATION IN HARD TIMES:
RECOVERY OR REINVENTION?
Wednesday 3 November, Glasgow
A forum to question policy, examine new routes to investment and debate how we achieve the best outcomes for communities
Keynote speakers include:
Stellan Fryxell
Partner, Tengbom Architects, Sweden and Project Developer Hammarby Sjostad, Stockholm
Diane McLafferty
Deputy Director, Housing and Regeneration, The Scottish Government
Andy Milne
Chief Executive, SURF Scotland's independent regeneration network
Ian Manson
Chief Executive, Clyde Gateway
Alex McGuire
Executive Director, Development and Regeneration, GHA
For further details and updates: www.holyrood.com/regeneration



Upcoming SURF events



2010 SURF Awards Presentation Dinner

Date: Thursday 02/12/2010

Location: Radisson Hotel, Glasgow

Further Information: <http://tinyurl.com/2010surfawardsdinner>

SURF and the Scottish Government have teamed up again to deliver the prestigious SURF Awards for Best Practice in Community Regeneration in 2010. The SURF Awards are presented each year to projects that are doing outstanding regeneration work in some of Scotland's most disadvantaged communities. Housing and Communities Minister, Alex Neil MSP, will present the SURF Awards again this year.

Reserve your table now for the highlight of Scotland's regeneration calendar.

2011 SURF Annual Conference

Date Thursday 17/03/2011

Location: Roxburghe Hotel, Edinburgh

Further Information: <http://tinyurl.com/surfnewsletter>

The broad theme of our 2011 Annual Conference will be community resilience. As usual, the event will feature prominent speakers in relevant fields alongside interactive elements such as debate groups, panel sessions and electronic voting. Those on SURF's e-newsletter mailing list will be the first to receive a full conference programme; readers who are not already signed up can do so at the above link.



SURF Network Access Programme (SNAP)

The SNAP project enables SURF ensure community involvement by covering the event booking fees, travel costs and related expenses of voluntary community representatives attending SURF events. There are a limited number of free, fully funded places at all SURF events on these pages available to those on the SNAP database. We will be writing to SNAP database members in September with further details.

If you are an unfunded community activist in Scotland, and you are not already on the SNAP database, please contact Derek at SURF on 0141 585 6879 or email derek@scotregen.co.uk to sign up. The SNAP project is funded by the Scottish Government.

Further details on any of these events are available by contacting SURF Events and Communications Officer Derek Rankine on 0141 585 6879 or by email to derek@scotregen.co.uk.



A Shared Manifesto for Community Regeneration

SURF Chief Executive, Andy Milne, summarises SURF's plans to maintain the status of community regeneration on the political agenda in advance of the 2011 Scottish Parliament elections.



Andy Milne
SURF Chief Executive
andymilne@scotregen.co.uk

BUILDING ON CONSENSUS

The Scottish Parliament debate on regeneration in March of this year displayed a welcome degree of cross-party consensus on the key policies and measures required to support successful and sustainable community regeneration.

The potential for SURF taking a lead in helping to develop some firm practical policy foundations that could span future elections and priority shifts, was raised by the Minister for Housing and Communities, Alex Neil MSP, when he spoke at a recent SURF board meeting.

SURF is now undertaking a collaborative process with cross-sector partners in key areas of regeneration activity towards the creation of 'A Shared Manifesto for Community Regeneration' by January 2011.

In doing so SURF aims to focus on issues affecting communities in areas representing the bottom 15% of the 2009 Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation.

Upon completion, the manifesto will be presented to the main political parties in advance of the May 2011 Scottish Parliament elections. SURF will then convene a hustings event at the Scottish Parliament prior to the election.

YOUR PRIORITIES, YOUR SAY

SURF will be holding an open discussion with all interested members and contacts to review the intended contents of this vision for better community regeneration policy and practice. If you want to know more about this process, and how you can contribute your views and experience to it, please contact Jennifer Fleming at SURF on 0141 585 6849 or by email to jennifer@scotregen.co.uk.

Creating Good Lives and 'THE WIRE'

*Carol Craig, author of *The Scots' Crisis in Confidence* (2004) and *The Tears That Made The Clyde* (2010), founded the Glasgow-based Centre for Confidence and Well-being (CCWB) in 2005. In this article she outlines two linked CCWB events that SURF is supporting.*



Dr Carol Craig
Chief Executive
Centre for Confidence
and Well-being

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Class, Inequality, Work, Family, Education and Well-being

The CCWB has run some great events in the last five years. I am sure our upcoming conference and a linked lecture will both be of interest to everyone working in regeneration.

The conference (Friday 29th October, Glasgow) is called *Creating Good Lives: Class, inequality, work, family, education, environment and well-being*. The keynote speaker is the distinguished and celebrated Harvard academic, Professor William Julius Wilson. Professor Wilson, America's most prominent sociologist. He is particularly interested in worklessness and the plight of the urban poor.

Wilson argues that while the problems of the black ghettos in the USA are primarily caused by structural unemployment, cultural factors, such as attitude to education, macho values and the decline of the family, also play their part.

I will also speak at the event arguing that we need to develop an 'integral' perspective on some of our acute urban, social problems. Other speakers include Dr Harry Burns, Scotland's Chief Medical Officer and Professors Phil Hanlon, George Morris, Susan Deacon and others. The famous barrister and human rights campaigner, Baroness Helena Kennedy, will chair the conference. The attendance fee is £60 (plus VAT).

Wired in

Professor Wilson's work inspired the second series of the celebrated TV series, *The Wire* and the other CCWB event is a talk by Anmol Chaddha, one of Professor William Julius Wilson's research assistants on what it can teach us about urban problems and solutions. *Wire* fan Detective Chief Superintendent John Carnochan, from Scotland's Violence Reduction Unit will also speak at this event in the Teacher Building, St Enoch Square, Glasgow on Thursday 28th October from 5.15 to 7.00. Tickets are just £6 including VAT and can be booked on-line or reserved by phone (0141 221 2626).

More information on both of these events can be found by visiting the CCWB website: www.centreforconfidence.co.uk



Urban Imaginings 9

In the ninth of his regular columns for Scotregen, Alex Law reflects on a recently translated 1947 novel, *Alone in Berlin*, and its fresh perspective on internal resistance in Nazi Germany.



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Limousine for Adolf?

In their 1978 rock-reggae song 'White Man in Hammersmith Palais', the Clash sang about the malevolent atmosphere hanging over British cities in the year before Margaret Thatcher came to power. With the National Front winning increasing numbers of votes, fascism seemed a real danger of becoming a respectable alternative to democracy. As the song put it: 'If Adolf Hitler flew in today/They'd send a limousine anyway'. At the time, however, movements like Rock Against Racism and the Anti-Nazi League made fascism unacceptable among large swathes of Britain's urban youth.



What, though, if conditions make collective resistance impossible? This is the theme of Hans Fallada's celebrated 1947 novel, *Alone in Berlin*. Just translated into English

last year, it ranks as one the greatest of all books dealing with resistance to the Nazi state.

Alone in Berlin is based on a real but little known case of individual wartime resistance that Fallada came across in the Gestapo files just after the war. Two obscure individuals dropped postcards proclaiming anti-Nazi sentiments in public places. In Fallada's novel they feel protected by the anonymity of Berlin. In the end, however, the whole exercise proves futile as the Gestapo pursue them.

Fallada's heroes in *Alone in Berlin* only move into clandestine opposition after a personal tragedy befalls them. A more consciously-organised underground resistance against mass apathy is fleetingly introduced. They reason that despite the fact that Hitler's regime seems unassailable, a gamble has to be taken that it is historically doomed.

Fallada knew what he was talking about. He had tried to find a way to stay alive under fascism without becoming totally compromised.

"Fallada...tried to find a way to stay alive under fascism."



Battling with his own problems of morphine addiction and alcoholism, he was arrested briefly after being denounced by neighbours as politically and racially suspect.

Fallada's high-wire act, balancing between personal and artistic integrity and appeasing Nazi critics, is apparent in the new translation of *Wolf Among Wolves* (2010). Written in 1938, the novel concerns the corrupting experience of Berlin during the hyper-inflation of 1923. In the city every vice is available for sale and currency devaluation fosters nihilistic individualism. To protect himself from Nazi attacks, affronted at another insult to their ideal of the German people, Fallada appended an apologetic note to the book about its subject matter.

What now?

Fallada had earlier achieved notoriety among Nazis. His 1932 novel *Little Man, What Now?* appeared the year before the Nazis seized power. A bestseller, quickly made into films in Germany and in Hollywood, *Little Man* deals with the crumbling world of urban middle class workers, a new social group stuck helplessly between the two major classes in society. Fallada's depiction is far from the Nazi ideal of the upright, patriotic lower middle classes.

Fallada also spent time in and out of Nazi insane asylums. During one incarceration he wrote *The Drinker*, where he details the collapse into utter degradation of Berlin's lower

middle classes, paralleling Fallada's own struggle against moral turpitude under the Nazis.

Despite overwhelming odds, Fallada contends that individuals are obliged to resist evil rather than send limousines to appease it.



It Ain't Easy Being Green



Housing is a key element of regeneration, both as a fundamental necessity and as a driver for wider related activity. In the latest of a regular series of Scotregen columns, the SFHA's David Stewart reflects on a recent study visit with the Housing Energy Efficiency Learning Network.



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It was Kermit the frog who famously said “It ain’t easy being green”, however a recent study trip to Fyne Homes headquarters on the Isle of Bute left me with the impression that not only is it important and desirable to be green, it might just be easier to achieve than Kermit suggested, provided that you set your heart on it.



The reason for the trip was that it was part of the Housing Energy Efficiency Learning Network’s programme. The network aims to share practice and learning among people working on addressing energy efficiency and fuel poverty, and the visit to Fyne Homes was a chance to learn from an organisation that had done a huge amount for the communities that it served.

Unfortunately some idiot had scheduled the trip for the Glasgow Fair, promising sunshine and ice cream (yes, it was me). Readers who have spent any time in the west coast of Scotland won’t be surprised to learn that our visit coincided with the wettest day of the summer so far.

The weather, however, could not detract from our interest in the excellent work that Fyne Homes have undertaken in Argyll. Peter MacDonald of Fyne Homes gave an excellent presentation on the history of the organization, focusing on its commitment to sustainability, low

carbon development and working to benefit their community. These included the recent completion of the first fully accredited Passivhaus in Scotland and the associations learning experience from a highly insulated housing development - it wasn’t enough to specify and design a low energy building – tenants had to be on board and educated in how the building and its heating system were designed to be used, and all of the housing association staff had a role to play in this

After lunch we went out to look at some of the practical schemes that Fyne Homes and its wholly owned social enterprise Fyne Futures have developed:

Recycling

This project started 5 years ago with one man collecting empty cans and bottles, cycling a bike with a trailer around pubs in Rothesay. Successful grant applications have allowed it to expand, and it now collects 450 tonnes of recycling per year. And if that weren’t sustainable enough, the trucks that collect it run on biodiesel.

Biodiesel

A very Scottish twist on being sustainable, biodiesel is used oil from restaurants and chippies that is processed and can then be used to power vans and trucks. Fyne Futures now also has a training centre where they can show people from around the UKn how to make biodiesel.

Bute Produce

This scheme aims to provide affordable, fresh produce to residents of the island. The project provides green box deliveries of fresh fruit and vegetables, and already employs three people. There is also a scheme that educates children about the benefits of fresh fruit and veg, and how to grow your own – the “Ferry Club.” The project uses recycled water, electricity generated by a wind turbine and the tractor runs on biodiesel.

Fyne Homes are also running Towards Zero Carbon Bute, a scheme that aims to reduce carbon emissions on Bute by 25% by providing energy advice and help in applying for grants to householders.

The association have also developed plans for a wind farm to generate clean electricity and provide a source of income for the association and the community that it serves – perhaps allowing Fyne Homes to continue to develop houses and serve its community in a climate where funding is likely to be substantially reduced.

In spite of the wet weather, the trip left us all feeling inspired by what Fyne Homes had achieved for the communities it served, and with a strong desire to learn from how they went about it. Of particular interest, in the current climate, was how the association had become so much more than a developer and landlord and how some of its projects were either working towards being self sustaining or in the case of the wind generation scheme, might provide funds to subsidise the development of affordable housing and activities that benefit the community.

To join the Learning Network, email David at the address above or visit www.partnersinregeneration.com.

Creating a Fruitful Scotland

The Commonwealth Orchard is a Scotland wide initiative aiming at helping children, families, schools, community groups, housing associations and developers of housing and public buildings to include fruit trees in the urban landscape. The project involves children and local communities in planting a network of small orchards across Scotland to create a grassroots legacy of the 2014 Commonwealth Games. Here, project director, John Hancox, explains the thinking behind this fruitful enterprise.



John Hancox

**Director
The Commonwealth Orchard**

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What is the Commonwealth Orchard?

On one hand it's about reintroducing fruit trees to urban areas and creating edible places. It's a novel idea – growing your own fruit on trees in the city – but it's not exactly new. It may surprise people to learn that much of what is now the city centre of Glasgow was built on an ancient pear orchard, planted by monks from Glasgow Cathedral around 1100. And the same is true of other Scottish cities. Look at old maps and you'll see the evidence of ancient orchards. And more



recently – through the Orchard Streets, and Orchard Roads you can see poignant reminders of a fruitful past.

But the Commonwealth Orchard isn't just about fruit trees. It's really about people. It's people planting fruit trees in public spaces, for the benefit of the wider community. You could say it's about creating fruitful places and people connected by areas of common ground, which they have helped to create. It's about creating fruitful lives.

Our experience has been that planting these Commonwealth Orchards can help to draw the community together. It gives people a stake in their local environment, and create links between divided communities. What that means in practice is that we have worked to plant orchards with Catholic and non-denominational schools working together. Or old people and children planting together, or mainstream schools and special needs schools. We have also recently worked with Edinburgh Mela – linking multiethnic community members. While it's not overtly billed as an anti-sectarian or an inclusion project – it does quietly bring people together – and has considerable value for community development.



Our way of working is very hands on. People really value the chance to get their hands dirty and do something practical to make their local environment better. We work to inspire and help local people do it by themselves so they feel a strong sense of ownership.

Reclaiming the meaning

The original concept of Commonwealth dating back to medieval times is worth revisiting. While it now has shades of Empire, the old word Commonwealth was the community looking after itself, and after the poor and sick of the parish. It's a deeply democratic concept of resilient communities supporting their own people. Reclaiming this meaning of Commonwealth and building on that spirit is the surest way to build a fruitful future.

There is also the simple truth that food you grow and pick yourself tastes better and that is an experience everyone should enjoy. If you'd like to help us plant the Commonwealth Orchard, or have suitable sites available, we'd be delighted to discuss how.



The Helix Project

The Helix is an ambitious environmental improvement project to transform under-used land between Falkirk and Grangemouth into a high quality greenspace. The first phase of the project, due to be completed in 2013, will create:

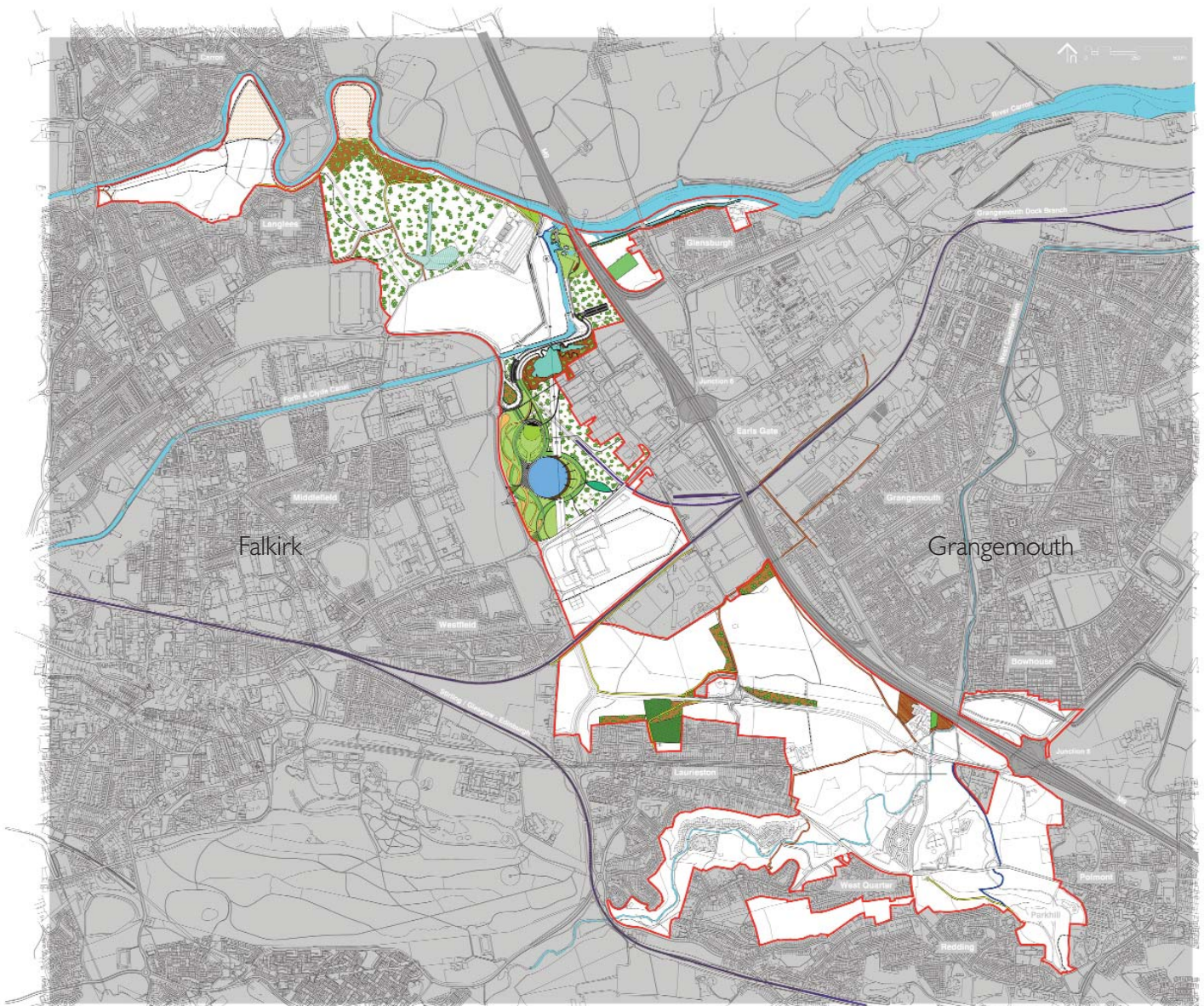
- a central park with a lagoon
- paths and cycle networks connecting local neighbourhoods
- new woodland areas
- a new canal link connecting Grangemouth and the Firth of Forth into Scotland's extensive canal network
- the Kelpies™: two 30-metre high structures in the shape of horse's heads
- public artworks

The Helix site covers 300 hectares, an area equivalent to the size of 270 football pitches.

The project is being driven by a partnership of Falkirk Council, British Waterways Scotland and Central Scotland Forest Trust through a body called the Helix Trust, which is committed to engaging the community in the design and encourages local people to participate in the creative process.

The project has been awarded a £25 million grant from The Big Lottery Fund as part of its Living Landmarks Programme.

In this article, Christian Barnes from Vista Projects, who is developing the project with landscape architect John Kennedy, describes how the Helix Trust has helped local people to take a lead role in the development of the Abbotshaugh Sentinel, a new earthwork that will be created within community woodland.



Green Solutions



Christian Barnes

**Director
Vista Projects (UK)**

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The Helix was one of 313 entrants for a one off Big Lottery grant of £25million. Our role was to contribute to the bid with a programme of community based public art/public realm proposals called 'Sentinels'. We devised an approach in which we simply ignored the competition and imagined an ideal scenario of a design competition directed and led by an empowered community acting as its own client.

Rather than being 'consulted' about it after the appointments were made, the members of the client group would be responsible for the appointment and be supported in every way possible by us. The competition, rather than being a process in which competitors would finally meet the client after the winner had been declared, would instead be a recruitment process where relationships would be built to provide the foundation for an iterative design process within which local intelligence would be shared.

There is a sense of excitement as the appointment process now nears completion. We have been overwhelmed by the panel's commitment to the project and the intelligence, fair-mindedness and diligence with which they have approached the project. It far surpasses anything we have seen in the professional sector. We have also been fortunate to find a committed partner in Grace McDonald, Head of Community Engagement, for the Helix Trust who has smoothed our way.

We worked first to develop a brief for the project conceived as a landscape treatment/earthwork intended to catalyse renewed



community engagement with the community green space known as Abbotshaugh woodland. The creative brief was drafted for, and amended by the community group. It emphasised place-making and community engagement and received more than 40 expressions of interest from a range of applicants from architectural firms (including a Stirling prize winner) to individual sculptors. The community panel poured over this material for hours, writing detailed comments and notes. It helped them to clarify their thinking about the woodland and the right approach for a creative intervention there.

In June it was decided which five artists would be offered honoraria to participate in a charette held in the woodland and in the nearby Dawson Centre on David's Loan. The interviews/charette were conducted over a two day period in July, preceded by briefings and tours of the Helix area. The panel led a walking tour of the area in the Abbotshaugh woodland and around the local community. The day provided a good opportunity for the artists to absorb the thinking of panelists and community members and for community members to meet and discuss ideas with the artists.



The following day the charettes were broken into two sessions which allowed for five and a half hours of unprepared discussion followed by an interview, led by the community panel. During the charette the public were admitted and free to become involved.

We met again in August to confirm the panel's preferences and we are waiting now for formal processes to be completed for the Helix to confirm an appointment in September.

When we started work on the project we had the luxury of imagining an ideal project where a community would take responsibility and control of an aspect of its own cultural regeneration. The project and the panel has filled us with new optimism and hopefully established a new approach to the public commissioning of artists that can be adopted elsewhere.



Special Feature - Green Solutions

Building a greener future

In this article, SURF Chair Ian Wall highlights the success of the August 2010 Scottish Housing Expo.



One of the most important initiatives for many years in considering how we should build (and refurbish) housing for the future of Scotland has taken place in Inverness.

The Housing Fair led, by the Highlands Housing Alliance and given strong support by the Scottish Government, built 52 houses ranging from a country cottage through terraced and detached houses to a flat block. Set in an overall plan, which starts to implement the shared space principles in the Government's new Planning Advice, it experimented with different ways of minimizing energy consumption within the buildings whilst providing a wide range of new architectural designs from the austere to the exuberant.

The scheme was open for all of August and was understandably very popular with both the general public and those with a practical interest. It is a shame that it was not open for longer and more widely advertised but in many respects the exhibition is only one part of the benefit that will accrue. As the houses are occupied (some are for sale and some are for RSLs), we will continue to learn about their performance in use both technically and socially and incorporate the results in our practice. In addition, there are two smaller scale, similar projects currently in hand, one by BRE and the other by GHA, which will support the Expo's work.

The idea came from Finland where it is a regular event used to explore a wide range of issues. If Scotland is serious about building houses that are cost effective in construction and use, whilst providing accommodation that meets modern needs and the social setting that aids the development of communities, then a regular Housing Expo moving around the country is essential. There are some weaknesses in this first example but these are in themselves part of the valuable outcome that will allow the next one to be even better. All involved in this great project deserve our thanks and congratulations.

Further information:
www.scotlandshousingexpo.com



Big Cuts and the Big Society

In the latest of a regular series of columns from the Poverty Alliance, Peter Kelly explores the Big Society and the early policy signals from the UK Coalition Government.



Peter Kelly

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After 100 days of the Coalition Government, a clearer sense of its priorities over the next five years is starting to emerge. Without doubt, the key goal is reducing the deficit. This is no surprise – there was political unanimity prior to the elections about the need for deep public spending cuts. The only real debate was about when and how deep. However, the Coalition is now going well beyond anything discussed during the election campaign, with departments expected to reduce spending by 25-40%. That these cuts will hit those already struggling is beyond doubt (see for example, the analysis carried out by Browne and Level for the Institute of Fiscal Studies).

This is hardly a positive political agenda, so in recent weeks the Coalition has been putting more energy into displaying its 'progressive' credentials. From the Poverty Alliance's perspective, it is difficult to see the progressive intent in freezing child benefit, restricting housing benefit and lowering rates of increase for benefits overall.

The Big Society

So where is the fairness in the Government's programme? Step forward the Big Society, which the UK Government has said will put power into communities, devolve more responsibilities from central to local government and give the voluntary sector and social economy organisations the opportunity to deliver more public services.

What are we in Scotland to make of the Big Society? Some commentators have seemingly embraced the idea, welcoming the possibility of developing our own version. They are less than optimistic, however, about the ability of the main political parties in Scotland to genuinely embrace a shift in culture that would require the state, both local and national, to give up power and position.

The ideas so far outlined in the Big Society are familiar: have a look at

the ideas and rhetoric in the Labour Government's 'Communities in Control' White Paper in 2008. Or perhaps the SNP Government's Community Empowerment Action Plan. Rhetoric is easy; achieving genuine 'empowerment' is a little more challenging. Whilst many in positions of power talk about the need to devolve power to citizens, or for decisions to be made with our communities, few have taken the necessary steps to make it happen.

We do well to remember the failed efforts to devolve power to communities that have taken place over the last 13 years. Grassroots organisations that have attempted to get involved in Community Planning in Scotland need little reminding of the difficulties in devolving power to communities. The current proposals are unlikely to be successful without significant new resources to enable groups and organisations to take on a greater role.

The Cuts

This brings us back to the cuts. It is not so much that the Big Society is being used as a cover for the programme of cuts, but rather that the cuts programme makes the Big Society almost impossible to deliver. Community and voluntary organisations, which help sustain a vibrant civil society, are already seeing their funding melt away and cuts to the welfare system will put unbearable pressure on many organisations and individuals. It is not the 'big state' that threatens these groups, but cuts that many have already endured for years.



*photograph by
Marcus Howaston*

“The current proposals are unlikely to be successful without significant new resources to enable groups and organisations to take on a greater role”

It is by campaigning against these cuts and by calling for genuinely open and accountable institutions, locally and nationally, that we will re-invigorate civil society and put real power into the hands of local communities.

The Numbers Game

Dr Stirling Howieson, at the University of Strathclyde, is interested in numbers. From understanding the ‘big bang’ to managing your credit card repayments, numbers hold the key to everything. Here in his regular column, he offers some more interesting figures...



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206 GigaWatts – beam me up Scottie!

Scotland is famed for its engineers. From James Watt to Scottie on the Starship Enterprise, fretting over his dilithium crystals, we have a long and distinguished tradition.

So how are they approaching the challenges of sustainable power generation in their own back yard? A recent annual lecture by the Institute of Engineering addressed these challenges. The speaker succinctly outlined the possibilities and potentials for renewable energy exploitation in and around our hills and coastline. In terms of wave, wind and tidal stream Scotland is the Saudi Arabia of zero carbon power generation. One estimate for wave and tidal stream alone, predicted that over **206 GigaWatts** could be produced in our sea lochs and islands. This is an impressive figure given that the current UK average demand is circa **40 GigaWatts** with a **60 GW** winter peak.

Unlike wind power, tidal stream is entirely predictable and therefore does not require ‘understudy’ power capacity. Lowering these devices below the wave turbulence makes storm damage less likely. If a proper level of investment in R&D is forthcoming (say about 5% of the subsidy enjoyed over the last **60** years by the nuclear industry), Scotland can punch well above its weight. When combined with reduced demand

(e.g. insulating our energy profligate building stock, building new ‘eco’ dwellings and switching all lamps to the new generation of LEDs), we surely have a big part of the answer to achieve the set carbon reduction targets.

What surprised me were the questions posed by these expert engineers. The audience ignored the lecture content and proceeded to discuss – at some length – the possibilities for carbon capture; a technique currently being developed to grab some of the CO₂ from traditional power stations and bury it in rock beds recently vacated by oil. Partial carbon capture will be a planning condition if the new coal fired power station muted for Hunterston is ever to achieve consent. Why the ‘Saudi Arabia’ of renewables should be considering building such a power station – reportedly to be fired by imported Columbian coal brought across the ocean in tankers burning bunker oil - is of course, the more pertinent question.

That is not to say that geo-engineering techniques should be ignored. After all, it is **250** years of geo-engineering that has caused the problem in the first place. Whether it is carbon capture, global dimming by

injecting measured quantities of sulphur dioxide into the stratosphere or mid-ocean cloud generation by churning the surface, all may have to be tried to buy humanity a bit of breathing space.

If the environmental sceptics eventually turn out to be correct, the eco lobby will have wasted some valuable time and resources. If, however, they are wrong, and global warming continues at its

current rate, we will flip - given the likelihood of a mutually reinforcing feedback loop releasing the methane locked in our ocean sediments and tundra - to a entirely new ecosystem that will, at the soft end, see famine, mass migration and global conflict; at the hard end, the inability of humans to survive in significant numbers. The stakes could not be higher, but changing human behaviour and attitudes is proving exceptionally difficult.

If this audience of Scottish engineers is a barometer of public attitudes, we are in real trouble. These engineers sought a precise answer to the wrong question. For them, this appeared to be a much more satisfying outcome than an imprecise answer to the right question.

The stakes could not be higher, but changing human behaviour and attitudes is proving exceptionally difficult.

Neighbourhood environments and health behaviours – what does research tell us?

Health scientists generally agree that disadvantaged neighbourhoods experience a greater burden of ill health and unhealthy lifestyles than other neighbourhoods. In this issue's regular column from colleagues at the substantial housing, health and regeneration research project, GoWell, Dr Jennifer McLean examines the evidence on whether neighbourhood amenities in disadvantaged areas amplify this problem.

greater in deprived areas, and that a higher density of tobacco outlets is associated with higher rates of smoking. Again, we lack similar evidence for Scotland, although there is evidence from Glasgow that smoking is associated with living in a neighbourhood with a poorly rated physical environment and poor amenities.³



General access to amenities

A recent study in Glasgow asked the question 'Do poorer people have poorer access to local resources and facilities?' An examination of the distribution of more than 40 types of facilities and resources in Glasgow city, found no consistent patterning by area deprivation.⁴ Instead, the authors suggest that the age, history, location, and residential/commercial mix of different areas are important.

In summary

A number of international studies have found links between area deprivation and the availability of amenities that might discourage healthy lifestyles. However, the very detailed analysis from Glasgow has found evidence that the assumed link between amenity distribution and poverty should not be taken for granted. It is complicated by a whole range of additional factors, and changing health behaviours in poor communities will undoubtedly involve more than just removing environmental barriers.

This article is based on a literature review (most of the studies reviewed were not connected with GoWell). The full Briefing Paper (including references) will be available shortly on the GoWell website.

For more information on GoWell visit www.gowell.org.uk or contact the GoWell Communications Manager on 0141 287 6269.

¹ Ellaway *et al.* The socio-spatial distribution of alcohol outlets in Glasgow city. *Health & Place* (2010), **16**:167-72

² Macintyre *et al.* Out-of-home food outlets and area deprivation: case study in Glasgow, UK. *International Journal of Behavioural Nutrition and Physical Activity* (2005), **2**:16

³ Ellaway & Macintyre. Are perceived neighbourhood problems associated with the likelihood of smoking? *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health* (2009), **63**:78-80

⁴ Macintyre *et al.* Do poorer people have poorer access to local resources and facilities? The distribution of local resources by area deprivation in Glasgow, Scotland. *Social Science & Medicine* (2008), **67**:900-14



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Numerous theories have been advanced to help explain why ill health is more prevalent in our poorest communities. One theory suggests that people in deprived areas have more access to amenities that discourage healthy lifestyles. For example, are there more off licences in poorer areas? What about fast food outlets? Or maybe disadvantaged areas simply have less or poorer amenities across a whole range of services – leaving residents generally disadvantaged. We have assessed the evidence.



Alcohol outlets and poorer areas?

Studies from North America and New Zealand have found that alcohol outlets are indeed more common in

deprived urban areas. Within Scotland, however, the pattern is less clear cut, with no systematic relationship between availability and deprivation. A Glasgow study found alcohol outlets were particularly prevalent in both the city's affluent West End and deprived East End neighbourhoods, as well as in the city centre.¹ While some of the city's more deprived areas contained high concentrations of outlets, others contained very few.

Fast food outlets and poorer areas?

Observational studies have found independent associations between living in a low income or deprived area and the prevalence of obesity and the consumption of a poor diet. Evidence from Glasgow indicates that levels of reliance on fast-food outlets is twice as high in deprived areas as it is for the city as a whole.² But in contrast, fast-food outlets do not appear to be more common in the city's deprived areas.

Tobacco outlets and poorer areas?

International evidence has shown that the density of tobacco outlets is

SURF Networking Programme Update

As SURF's Networking Initiatives Manager, Edward Harkins provides Scotregen readers with a regular update on SURF's networking programme of events.



A SURF 'Food for Thought' lunch event was held in July 2010 on the theme of 'How Can We Make More Effective Early Interventions in Vulnerable Communities to Deliver Long-Term Regeneration'.

This event followed on from the SURF Open Forum on the same theme held in the preceding May. The range of guests on this occasion contained a strong element of international contributors – including respected representatives with Canadian, African and Nordic experience. Participants' contributions were of a high quality, with time running out on discussion.

Participants were generally agreed that;

- o Much of Scottish society still carries on with an assumption that everybody grows up in a home with two parents who are fully employed, either as dedicated parents at home, or in the labour force. The realities that disprove this perspective are one justification for early intervention
- o The way in which Scotland has held to its system of starting school at age five or six has perpetuated social stratification and unjust inequality. At those ages the disadvantages are already built in for some children whilst the advantages are already built in for others – another justification for early intervention
- o There are arguments for early intervention being taken into even earlier stages – and why is it not more accurately labelled as 'prevention' rather than early intervention? There were, however, some warnings offered from the Scandinavia experience where authoritarian intervention and punitive labelling, it was claimed, is commonplace
- o The need to be pragmatic about the realities of policy and practice in the current economic scenario; perhaps best summed up by the statement, "We are driven by performance measures, budgets and sadly we are controlled by accountants..."

“ there are formidable challenges in seeking to change damaging cultures and behaviours among individual people in the face of 'the consumer society' ”

- o Nevertheless, there are grounds for optimism about much of the successes that are going on in the field of Scottish community regeneration and the role of early intervention. Even the recession was seen as a 'wake-up call' on the need to acknowledge where the old and conventional approaches just don't work and that there are alternatives
- o More controversially and in a wider public expenditure restraint context, there is a need for strong public sector leadership if the necessary resources for (preventative) early intervention are to be redeployed from other, seemingly more pressing, short-term responding to crisis needs
- o That there are formidable challenges in seeking to change damaging cultures and behaviours among individual people in the face of 'the consumer society'.

More diverse and contrasting views were expressed around arguments for and against better public policy support for people involved in very local community structures, networks and cultures as partners in public service delivery.

Ongoing discussions with SURF's partners at the Scottish Government's SCR are aimed making the best possible use of the Open Forum and networking programme in supporting policy considerations in these challenging times for regeneration. The intention is to focus closely on a limited number of regeneration policy themes over the remainder of the year 2010/11. This will involve some more targeted direction of the programme and SURF will keep readers briefed in subsequent editions of Scotregen on these developments.

The SURF Open Forum programme is funded by the SCR, with the aim of facilitating independent feedback and opinion to policy makers in Scottish Regeneration and Community Planning. Open Forum participation is open to all without charge. SURF welcomes suggestions or offers of contributions for future events with regard to the core programme themes of sustainable development and sustainable communities, and tackling poverty and inequalities through regeneration. Contact Edward Harkins; edward@scotregen.co.uk or direct line 0141-585 6850

Future Vision 7

In the seventh of a series of Scotregen columns from the International Futures Forum, Andrew Lyon and Dr Pete Seaman offer some new horizons in future regeneration thinking.



**Andrew Lyon, Converger,
International Futures Forum
(left).**

**Dr Pete Seaman, Public
Health Research Specialist,
Glasgow Centre for
Population Health (right).**

It's time to reclaim the Golden Rule!

When we began this series of 'Future Vision' columns for Scotregen, the 'credit crunch' had yet to evolve in the period of austerity as we know it today. Although we all knew it would have eventual implications for those working in the voluntary and public sectors, at that time it was seen as a private sector recession, in cause and impact. A few years and a change of government later, the problem has been re-imagined as being about a 'bloated' and 'wasteful' public sector. The opportunity the challenge presented to re-imagine and re-engineer an enlightened public sector and society is becoming fractious and oppositional.

The consensus of shared concern between those operating along the crude lines of 'public' and 'private' is beginning to look fragile, if not discarded. Then we all shared concern around moving the workless into sustained, meaningful employment, now the debates are around exactly where future job losses should be. Projects once praised in these pages for their ability to tackle deep-rooted social problems are now, by some, seen as part of the wastefulness.

Power and Love

How timely then the visit to Glasgow of Adam Kahane, a member of the IFF and an international problem-solver and negotiator based at REOS Partners in South Africa. Adam talked to us about his experience of the Copenhagen summit on climate change. His insightful and practical analysis of the failure to translate shared concern into lasting change when harsh realities hit was more optimistic than perhaps our perceptions of the summit itself.

At Copenhagen he observed two camps.

On the one hand, a Power camp, – nations who argued in terms of their need to be competitive in order to achieve their goals, alongside private sector companies concerned principally about profit.

On the other, what he called the Love camp, made up largely of third sector organisations and less economically developed nations, whose principal emphasis was on interconnectedness, wholeness, the health of the planet and its peoples. He defined Power as, 'the drive to self realisation' and Love, 'the drive to unity of the separated'.

So often, these fundamental features of human systems are viewed as opposite, leading to impasses when trying to address our more difficult challenges.

The Love camp views the Power camp as irresponsible and oppressive, while the Power camp sees the Love camp as impractical and unrealistic. So far, so familiar to our current predicament.

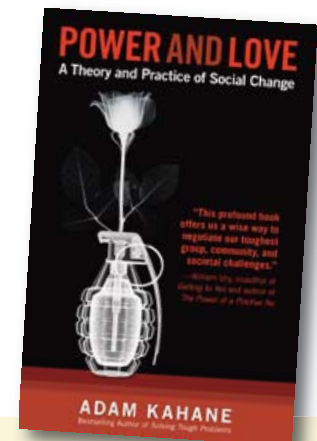
Choosing only Power or Love means we tend to get stuck. To usefully address our most

complex

challenges, such as how to re-imagine our public services, we need to find ways to choose both. How? He suggests three actions:

If you prefer Power, seek the drive to unity, if you prefer Love, seek the drive towards self realisation. Work on strengthening our weaker drive, not diminishing our strong one. The aspiration is to use all of both. Practice both until they become aspects of the same thing.

To this we add a fourth. Remember that the golden rule is not, "he who has the gold makes the rules" but rather, "treat others as you wish to be treated yourself." The rest is just detail.



Adam Kahane's books include 2010's Power and Love.



LANGUAGE GAMES

Chik Collins, of the University of West of Scotland, continues his personal look at the role language plays in social change.



The Speech of Jimmy Reid's Life

My interest in language and social change began with Jimmy Reid. For many commentators, he changed the course of British political history, in no small part due to his special facility with language.

As one of the key leaders of the Upper Clyde Shipbuilders Work-In of 1971-72, Reid contributed, not simply to a government abandoning its attempt to close some famous shipyards, but to its abandoning a whole (neo-liberal) policy agenda. Edward Heath's 'U-turn' was a definitive event in post-war British politics.

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- Copies of our quarterly Scotregen journal sent directly to you and your key colleagues.
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Get connected to a truly independent and informed network of regeneration organisations and individuals. Your support will help SURF to continue to be an effective catalyst for improving all our efforts to create successful and sustainable communities across Scotland.

To find out more and for a form to join SURF, visit our web site at www.scotregen.co.uk or contact Andy Milne directly by calling 0141 585 6848 or email him at andymilne@scotregen.co.uk.

But could one man's *language* have been so crucial to this event?

I perused the evidence and concluded that the commentators were not mistaken. Had Reid *not* spoken as he did in defining what the work-in was about – human dignity, the right to work, responsibilities to communities – and, crucially, had he *not* framed as he did the responses to the various attacks launched against the work-in over its 14 month duration, then the outcome would almost certainly have been very different.

Following Reid's death, much has been written about his oratory. His Glasgow University Rectorial Address was reprinted by *The Herald*. And of course the "no *bevvy*" speech has been widely mentioned.

But, for myself, the 'speech of Jimmy Reid's life' was made a couple of months into the work-in proper. At that point, jobs had, in effect, been promised to 2,500 of the 8,500 UCS workers, but only if they would "co-operate" with the government. This meant abandoning the work-in and accepting the closure of two of the four UCS yards, with 6,000 redundancies – and all the knock-on effects. Otherwise, ministers said, *everything* would be lost.

All the government needed was for the workers who would be amongst the 'lucky ones' to abandon their fellows. The work-in would be stone dead – and many seemed to believe that was about to happen.

Public and private language

Reid responded by contrasting the government's apparently caring *public* language of 'co-operation to save what can be saved' with the brutal *private* language of its strategists – who had since 1969 been planning to "butcher" the UCS and sell its assets "even for a pittance". Reid peeled away the veneer of civilised politics to reveal the sneering disregard of a ruling elite for the 'expendable' lives of ordinary working people.

Co-operate with that if you like, he said to the relevant workers, and they promptly declined.

Without this speech, the work-in would most probably have collapsed. Heath would not have made his U-turn. Reid's oration changed the course of events – history – and he became a celebrated figure.

The speech remains relevant today. It poses the question of our response to a contemporary neo-liberal agenda which, many might think, betrays a similar contrast between the appearance of civilised political discourse – 'we're all in this together', 'the big society', 'progressive cuts' – and an underlying disregard for the 'expendable' lives, not just of the hitherto 'socially excluded', but of the many soon-to-be unemployed and otherwise impoverished.

Reid's recommendation to the UCS workers was for a response of solidarity and non-co-operation. Complicity was beneath their human dignity.

In a sense, this idea was – in essence – 'the speech of Jimmy Reid's life'. Do not accept the unacceptable – that decisions can be made that devastate lives unjustly and with impunity – because *it's not just the dignity of those worst affected which is at stake.*



Statistics, Policy and People's Lives

Planning Aid for Scotland (PAS) is a unique and independent charity that helps people to engage in the planning process. In their latest regular Scotregen column, Petra Biberbach reviews Scottish planning reforms one year on and the first months of the UK Coalition Government.



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It's now one year on since planning reform was introduced. We've also seen the first 100 days of the UK coalition government which came to power promising reform and the "Big Society" agenda. There might not immediately be an obvious link between the two anniversaries but they both came about because previous systems were not responding well to rapidly changing economic, social and environmental changes.

PAS also understands about responding to and creating change as we move towards a social enterprise model, sharing our training, services and planning knowledge to benefit more people. We recently published new guidelines for our free advice service to include, in some cases, business start-ups, social enterprises and development trusts. This recognises their vital role in economic growth and the need to have access to professional advice at the earliest opportunity.

In terms of planning reform the enabling legislation we now have in place means a more strategic, balanced and open system, where everyone - from developers and builders, to planners, lawyers, politicians, communities, individuals and interest groups - is expected to take a more responsible approach towards the use of Scotland's land.

Reforms introduced in Scotland on mandatory community consultation for certain development proposals are also reflective of the wider issue of the type of civil engagement that our planning system promotes and are in turn about the type of society we create.

The UK coalition government has an expectation of the public and community groups to take more responsibility for public services. Privatisation and outsourcing of public services are nothing new but as the budget crisis strikes there are some potentially innovative (as well as controversial) models taking place both north and south of the border in this respect.

In England the coalition is also advocating referendums that would require 90% community support before new, small-scale development can go ahead in villages. A new campaign group down south says that instead of referendums, parish councils should be able to initiate small community-led developments "within a reinvigorated and localised planning system designed to meet local needs".

The PAS mentoring scheme, launched before the 'Big Society' was even beginning, is a good example of where initiatives from the grassroots can transform communities. The project works towards an enabling planning system, one which is not just about objecting, but is about community groups such as development trusts, creating their own places.

Knowledge transfer

From a village wind turbine, to allotments, community centres and any other community asset, this is all very much about the transfer of knowledge and embedding skills in communities not just for an individual case but also for the future.

What links all of this together, be it coalition government policy, planning reform or PAS, is the challenge for reformers to achieve culture change. Sometimes this can be elusive and it needs continually to be explored and debated. But we can't consider reform in isolation from the wider shifts in thinking taking place in Scotland, the UK and beyond. It's not just about statistics and policy, it's about people's lives – and including everyone in the process is the only route to success.

www.planningaidscotland.org.uk

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RECESSION REVISITED

A book review by Andy Milne

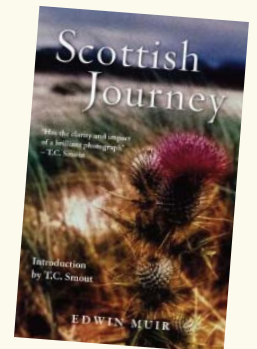
In 1935, poet and author, Edwin Muir, toured Scotland in the middle of the last great depression. His 'Scottish Journey' is a fascinating retrospective with eerie echoes of current concerns on housing, social division, and poverty (ISBN: 978-1851588411).

The core of the book concerns the impact of industrialisation, its sudden decline, and the relationship between those who have lost and those who have gained; at least materially. He is amazed at how the polite middle classes live, apparently at ease, adjacent to extreme poverty as he describes the beginnings of the tightly spaced geographic/economic apartheid that came to characterise so much of urban Scotland.

It is his take on the 'otherness' of 'the poor' that is most thought-provoking. Then and now, many criticise the damaging 'lifestyle choices' of 'the poor', Muir offers a more thoughtful challenge. In doing so he quotes Fyodor Dostoyevsky's reflections of poverty in London in 1863:

"It does not occur to us that what we are dealing with is a separation from our recognised system of society – a separation, obstinate and unconscious for the sake of salvation at any cost; an instinctive separation accompanied by horror of, and aversion to, us.."

Muir envisaged hope in the community based, cooperative activity which was reawakened after 1945. It would be interesting to know what he would make of current attitudes to 'the poor' and the extent to which we are 'all in it together' as we struggle through a more modern recession.



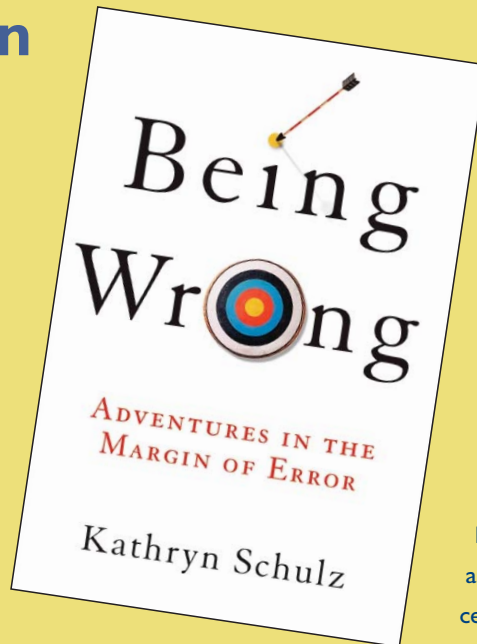
Review:

Being Wrong: in the Margin of Error, by Kathryn Schulz.

- reviewed by Edward Harkins, Networking Initiatives Manager, SURF

In 'Being wrong...' journalist Schulz urges us to recognise and respect the value of error. The conscious experience of being wrong and learning from it, she argues, creates better relationships between people, neighbours, colleagues, organisations and even nations.

Schulz's arguments may have some resonance in the U.K. regeneration field. The field is marked by the showcasing of success stories and good practice case studies - showcasing that is described as 'learning'. It is, however, more exceptional to find examples of significant learning from mistakes and failures. How often in U.K. regeneration do we hear public admissions from policy-makers, practitioners, - or community activists - that 'we got that badly wrong and we would not do it like that again'? What, moreover, would be the reaction, not least in our popular media, were that to occur?



Schulz sees a grace in admitting that you're wrong about anything. This goes against the grain of much of our contemporary culture where error is seen as feared and a cause of despair. This situation limits open exchange and learning. But Schulz wants us to reverse this so that, 'We get things wrong because we have an enduring confidence in our own minds; and we face up to that wrongness in the faith that, having learned something, we will get it right next time.'

Schulz gives insightful examples of how we deceive ourselves. This can arise from our preconceptions and prejudices - we see or conclude what we were already inclined to see or conclude. This can arise, alternatively, from our faulty memories that we much over-value. Schulz cites the case of when a group of USA students were asked for their memories of the 1986 space shuttle disaster a day after it happened and again three years later. Fewer than seven per cent of the second reports matched the first; 25 per cent were wrong in every major detail. Similar surveys after other events show similar results.

References are also made to victims of 'confirmation bias' or 'group think' or other scenarios where people hear what they want to hear and ignore inconvenient 'counterfactuals'. Yet, even Schulz, in her lengthy book, is unable to comprehensively account for why so many people persist in beliefs or activities long after the evidence has stacked up against them.

Being Wrong: in the Margin of Error, by Kathryn Schulz.
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