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Land Remediation in Glasgow's East End: A 'Sustainability Fix' for Whose Benefit?

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- (b) the urban greening of the neighborhood: LAND REMEDIATION; GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE; GREEN SPACE
- (c) the inequalities at stake: INSUFFICIENT AFFORDABLE HOUSING; PRIVATE CAPTURE OF PUBLIC INVESTMENT; EMPLOYMENT AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT NEEDS; (GREEN) GENTRIFICATION;

ABSTRACT

Following an industrial boom from the mid-to-late 19th century, Glasgow's East End underwent exceptional levels of industrial decline. By the 1960s, it suffered from wholesale abandonment and devaluation, visible through widespread swathes of vacant and derelict land and decrepit building structures. After several unsuccessful regeneration attempts over the decades, in 2007 Glasgow City Council (GCC) won the bid to host the 2014 Commonwealth Games in the East End. In 2008, the same area was subject to the largest regeneration project in Scotland—Clyde Gateway—rooted in sustainability discourses and the provision of new green and blue infrastructure. Clyde Gateway has invested hundreds of millions of public funds across 840 hectares of land, 350 hectares of which was defined as surplus, vacant, derelict, polluted or in need of substantial infrastructural investment. This chapter explores whether substantial benefits from regeneration are in fact trickling-down to the local community through the measures being implemented, or whether the “sustainability fix” merely operates to legitimize and accommodate the contradictory impulses of profit-making urbanism and environmentalism. In essence this chapter asks: for whom are the new businesses, jobs, homes and green-blue infrastructure, and at what cost?

Following an industrial boom from the mid-to-late 19th century, Glasgow's East End underwent exceptional levels of industrial decline. By the 1960s, it suffered from wholesale abandonment and devaluation, visible through widespread swathes of vacant and derelict land and decrepit building structures. After several unsuccessful regeneration attempts over the decades, in 2007 Glasgow City Council (GCC) won the bid to host the 2014 Commonwealth Games in the East End. In 2008, the same area was subject to the largest regeneration project in Scotland—Clyde Gateway¹—rooted

¹ <http://www.clydegateway.com/>

in sustainability discourses and the provision of new green and blue infrastructure. Clyde Gateway has invested hundreds of millions of public funds across 840 hectares of land, 350 hectares of which was defined as surplus, vacant, derelict, polluted or in need of substantial infrastructural investment. Here we explore whether substantial benefits from regeneration are in fact trickling-down to the local community through the measures being implemented, or whether the “sustainability fix” merely operates to legitimize and accommodate the contradictory impulses of profit-making urbanism and environmentalism (While, Jonas, and Gibbs 2004; Temenos and McCann 2012). In essence we ask: for whom are the new businesses, jobs, homes and green-blue infrastructure, and at what cost?

From urban decline to new urban frontier?

Glasgow's East End was once a major industrial powerhouse, but the “unplanned, unregulated operation of free enterprise” tended inexorably to industrial contraction, capital flight, mass unemployment and accelerated urban decline (Middleton 1987, 13). Extensive industrial and chemical industries brought great wealth to owners in the ‘Second City of Empire’, yet workers suffered from stark exploitation, toxic working conditions, cyclical unemployment and insalubrious living conditions. A legacy of deteriorating industrial infrastructure, contaminated vacant and derelict land and under-maintained slum housing became an intractable barrier to new investment. By 1957, several areas in the East End became part of the city's Comprehensive Development Area (CDA) scheme established to address slum housing and over-population issues and which led to the demolition of 95,000 homes citywide by 1975. But a dawning recognition of the enormous socio-economic, environmental and psychological costs of the CDA scheme—in conjunction with overspill planning to fund new residential settlements called New Towns—led to its curtailment in the early 1970s (Pacione 1995). Once tightly woven together in factory and housing settlements, inner-city urban communities and workplaces in the East End were left abandoned amidst multiple brownfield gap sites as people flowed outwards to new towns and suburbs (McDonald 1987).

By the mid-1970s, Glasgow's East End was vilified as “the most striking example of metropolitan decline in the United Kingdom” (Wannop and Leclerc 1987, 70). In response, the multi-agency Glasgow Eastern Area Renewal (GEAR) project (1976-1987) was established, a precedent to other influential UK inner-city urban renewal projects. In what became the GEAR area, corresponding closely to the current Clyde Gateway project area we examine in this chapter, the population contracted from 145,000 in 1951 to 41,000 in 1981, with GEAR doing little to arrest this decline (Middleton 1987). Between 1976 and 1984, overall unemployment in the GEAR area almost doubled, with male unemployment in Bridgeton and Dalmarnock higher than anywhere else in the region at the end of the project (McArthur 1987). GEAR had more success regarding housing: 4,000 tenements were rehabilitated, 8,000 interwar houses modernized and 2,000 council and 2,000

private houses constructed. Yet, these gains must be placed in context, since the CDA demolition program contributed to a reduction of houses in the GEAR area from 28,500 in 1971 to 15,049 in 1981. Overall, the legacy of GEAR was “an unstructured patchwork of housing, industrial, and recreational activities” amid vast swathes of vacant and derelict land (Reed 1999, 212). Major pump-priming public funding attracted scarce private investment, foreshadowing Clyde Gateway’s regeneration project.

By 2006 in the administrative ward of Calton in Eastern Glasgow, set to be the principal site of Commonwealth Games 2014² and the Clyde Gateway regeneration activity, 99.4% of the population lived within 500m of a vacant or derelict site, compared to a Scottish average of 26.6% (Gray 2008). As a result of this and other factors, East End residents have notoriously poor health conditions and low life expectancies. Today, there is still a 15-year gap in male life expectancy between the wealthiest West End neighborhoods and the most deprived East End neighborhoods (Nixon 2016; Cowley, Kiely, and Collins 2016), with public health researchers coining the term the “Glasgow effect” to indicate excess mortality in Glasgow compared to that of other similar post-industrial cities in the UK. The combined factors of deindustrialization, mass unemployment, slum housing, urban restructuring and overspill policy make the East End a prime example of their effects. Add to this the reality of very poor access to fresh and healthy food, something that has only started to change in the past few years with the operation of an open-air market in central Calton a few days a week. A Calton local explained how the deep stigmas that accompany multiple forms of deprivation in the East End have been internalized by many residents over generations: “The more that you hear from external sources how deprived and poor and how we’re all undereducated...you know the health stats are so bad and all of that might be true, but if that’s all that people see and all that gets any publicity then I think that has a massive impact on well-being.”

[Insert: Glasgow_Image_1] Derelict land in the East End: View from the Athlete's Village towards Dalmarnock train station (Photo by: Melissa García-Lamarca)

Such mental and physical health problems have been exacerbated by numerous stigmatizing discourses around the East End, especially in the period preceding the Games and the Clyde Gateway project. Conservative politicians, policy think-tanks and the media have insistently conflated the local population with environmental characterizations of the East End as redundant, decayed and worse (Gray and Mooney 2011). Such discourses have material effects as well as symbolic ones. Accusations of decay, blight and obsolescence have been mobilized to legitimize publicly funded yet privatized regeneration plans in the area (ibid.) and related exceptionality measures in planning (Gray and Porter 2015). The East End has thus been characterized as a

² <http://www.glasgow2014.com/>

depopulated and de-civilized “new urban frontier” necessitating extensive regeneration and justifying substantial public funding for essentially private economic and real estate development (Gray 2008; Gray and Mooney 2011).

Enter Clyde Gateway, whose original objectives in 2008 included the creation of 21,000 new jobs, 10,000 new housing units, 20,000 population increase, 400,000 square meters of business space and £1.5 billion of private sector investment. The remediation of vacant and derelict land is central to these ambitious plans, with an (green) “infrastructure first” approach to create the conditions for profitable investment. By 2015, Clyde Gateway had remediated 208 hectares of vacant and derelict land out of a 350-hectare target. In the next two sections we explore key sites of remediation and regeneration, examining the costs and socio-environmental outcomes thus far.

Remediating land: For whom and to what end?

Athletes’ Games Village: One of GCC’s first major interventions in the East End, in partnership with Clyde Gateway and the Commonwealth Games 2014 Organizing Committee, was the 700-unit Athletes’ Village³ in Dalmarnock along the banks of the River Clyde. A second residential phase was planned but is yet to be developed. The site’s environmental credentials include sustainable drainage systems (SuDS) infrastructure, a new district heating system and eco-housing. On top of a costly and controversial process of deal-making and land assembly, estimated at around £30 million in total (Gray and Porter 2015, 2017), the public cost of remediation on the 35-hectare site was substantial, including £7.7 million funding from GCC via the Scottish Government’s Vacant and Derelict Land Fund (VDLF) scheme. City Legacy Consortium, the public-private partnership who won the bid to construct the Athletes’ Village, were then gifted the site at nil cost by its GCC partner.

A prominent legacy of socio-environmental injustice in the Village area is the uneven implementation of the exceptional compulsory purchase powers granted in Section 42 of the Commonwealth Games Bill.⁴ Private developers were exempted from compulsory purchase powers, but they were applied in a blanket fashion on long-term residents and local shopkeepers. One family in private housing was subjected to violent eviction⁵ by more than 100 police officers in a high-profile dawn raid after mounting a much-publicized campaign along with the independent Glasgow Games Monitor 2014⁶ to resist displacement and receive a decent settlement (Gray and Porter 2015, 2017). After the Games events, the housing nestled along the River Clyde was retrofitted and sold as private market

³ <http://c-c-g.co.uk/project/commonwealth-games-athletes-village/>

⁴ <https://www.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/Bills/16291.aspx>

⁵ <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-scotland-glasgow-west-11435253>

⁶ See <https://gamesmonitor2014.org/>

housing (300 units), and the remaining interior-located housing became social housing (400 units). While in the contemporary UK housing development context this is a reasonable ratio, the site previously comprised 1,589 homes, almost exclusively social rented, in structurally-sound tenement buildings. In short, the regeneration process resulted in a significant net loss of public/social housing. Yet, the housing development is considered to be of architectural merit, despite reportedly poorer maintenance of the social housing and occasional social tensions across social and private housing tenures (Kidd and Kearns 2018).

[Insert: Glasgow_Image_2] Privatized public green space in Athlete's Village. The fence bordering the path alongside the Clyde River was meant to be removed after the Commonwealth Games, but residents refuse to do so. (Photo by: Melissa García-Lamarca)

*Riverside Dalmarnock*⁷: Clyde Gateway spent nearly £10 million pounds in the early 2010s to remediate a heavily contaminated former power plant site adjacent to the Athletes' Village and build SuDS infrastructure. This figure, however, does not take into account the extensive public funding used to buy, remediate and sell the site, a process that typifies the byzantine role of public funding in the development of the East End's land and housing market. Clyde Gateway sold the 8.9-hectare site to Link Group for £5.7 million in 2015 after extensive and costly remediation. Yet, the purchase of this land occurred through a complex and heavily publicly subsidized process, with the transaction only being possible after the original owner (Murray Estates) was paid twelve times the amount for which they had bought the land only five years earlier.

Link Group⁸, one of the biggest social landlords in Scotland, and private developer Laurel Homes⁹ are building 562 homes on the site by 2026 with an allegedly "neutral tenure mix": 206 private homes to be delivered by Laurel Homes and 356 affordable homes to be delivered by Link Group. The latter includes 50 New Supply Shared Equity¹⁰ homes (grants provided by the Scottish Government to help registered social landlords build new homes for sale, and to help low to medium income households to purchase them); 88 mid-market rent¹¹ homes (created by the Scottish Government in the mid 2010s as an affordable alternative to the private rented sector, with rents set in between social housing and private market rates); and 218 homes for affordable rent.¹² Despite the immense amount of public money poured into the site, the total is skewed towards private or intermediate (privatized) housing: 338 homes (including New Supply Shared Equity and mid-market rent homes)

⁷ <https://www.riversidedalmarnock.co.uk/>

⁸ <https://linkhousing.org.uk/what-we-do/about-link/>

⁹ <https://www.laurelhomes.co.uk/>

¹⁰ <https://www.mygov.scot/new-supply-shared-equity-scheme/how-it-works/>

¹¹ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/rent-affordability-affordable-housing-sector-literature-review/pages/6/>

¹² <https://linkhousing.org.uk/what-we-do/more-than-a-landlord/development/where-we-are-building/riverside-dalmarnock-glasgow/>

as opposed to 218 homes for affordable rent. In Scotland, affordable rent is not clearly defined—it generally means up to 80% of market rent—but appears to provide more latitude in terms of price-setting than the distinct category of “social rent” in social housing, which is more expensive than local authority (public) housing. Since the local community is deeply impoverished in relative terms, most cannot afford private homes at Riverside Dalmarnock, where sales prices range from £145,000 to £195,000.

Shawfield Business District: The 64-hectare Shawfield site is key to meeting Clyde Gateway’s targets on remediation, business space and jobs. However, the site was once home to the notorious J&J Whites Chemical Works that generated extensive, highly toxic soluble chromium (VI) contamination.¹³ An employee from Clyde Gateway told us that the site will never be “clean enough for residential [occupation] so it’s got consent for a million square feet of commercial office space”. The first 11-hectare phase of land remediation and infrastructural development benefited from over £27 million in public European, national and local authority funding, including the £4.8 million Shawfield/Dalmarnock “smart bridge” that connects—via SuDS greenway environmental infrastructure—the business district with the Dalmarnock railway station, which was itself refurbished with £11 million in public money. Despite this significant outlay, 53 hectares of deeply contaminated land still require remediation, at a projected cost of £68 million. Thus, the estimated public cost of land assembly and remediation amounts to over £92 million before building construction is even discussed.

To date, one building has been developed on site by Clyde Gateway. The Red Tree Magenta building suite, topped by a green roof garden terrace, was at full occupancy within days of its official opening in 2019. Shawfield business district is targeting commercial development in the form of the finance, insurance and real estate (FIRE) sectors and the creative industries, seeking to convince businesses to relocate to the East End with attractive rents in comparison to the city center, and a cocktail of incentives and funding support.¹⁴ However, given long-term issues with training, education and unemployment of the local population, it seems very unlikely that such businesses will provide them jobs beyond low-paid cleaning, retail and other service-based opportunities.

[Insert Glasgow_Image_3] The bridge over the Clyde River to the former site of the J&J White’s Chemical Works. The Red Tree Magenta is in the distance. (Photo by: Melissa García-Lamarca)

¹³ <https://www.glasgowtimes.co.uk/news/17473890.polmadie-burn-poisonous-time-bomb-leaves-glasgow-families-fearing-theyll-be-sold-down-the-river/>

¹⁴ <https://www.magentaglasgow.com/help-support/>

In summary, the key green-blue infrastructure developments facilitated by Clyde Gateway involve very substantial state funding to de-risk inward investment, correct market failure and underwrite essential site preparation and remediation costs so that private developers do not have to do so. The developments are primarily office/business spaces and private housing, with new employment opportunities created mainly for the business and so-called creative classes. Meanwhile, 80% of all housing constructed so far is designated for private sale or involves intermediate forms of tenure. No concrete figures have ever been given for social housing despite the evident need of the multiply deprived social demography of the area. It is difficult to see how such developments will address well-documented issues of social marginalization, ill health and poverty in the local community.

Some environmental exemplars in Glasgow's East End

More positively, the Clyde Gateway initiative includes community benefits clauses in many of its development tenders, and one of two praiseworthy projects in the area funded by a clause is the Baltic Street Adventure Playground.¹⁵ Award-winning architects Assemble¹⁶ designed this small site with local children in a model participant-led intervention. It is truly a child-led space, created for 6-12-year-old kids who are supported and enabled to act on their right to play. Addressing the local lack of play spaces (due to historic under-funding and under-maintenance), adult supervision and healthy food, the play area includes spaces where children learn how to grow, harvest and cook food. Propagate, a local collective that provides food education at the site, explained that they were “helping kids, parents and carers to grow, cook and eat vegetables, and understand where their food comes from...and about the wider kind of sustainability issues that come with that as well.” For some children, the Baltic Street Adventure Playground is their first experience preparing and eating non-processed food. The space is free access, and children can participate in day-to-day management and site development. All sorts of everyday materials are used to create the play spaces, which are the opposite of manicured playgrounds. The success of the adventure playground has attracted children from wealthier parts of Glasgow, but it is created and largely used by local children. Its development in some respects compensates for the removal of an informal football pitch across the street that was turned into an enormous car park for the Commonwealth Games, now tarmacked and largely abandoned.

Cuningar Loop Woodland Park¹⁷ is another recently created local green space benefiting local and broader Glaswegian communities. On a larger scale of 15 hectares, the park follows a “social forestry” approach, aiming to increase access to forests and wild spaces for urban communities

¹⁵ <http://www.balticstreetadventureplay.co.uk/>

¹⁶ <https://assemblestudio.co.uk/projects/baltic-street-adventure-playground>

¹⁷ <https://forestryandland.gov.scot/visit/cuningar-loop>

across Scotland. Scottish Forestry partnered with Clyde Gateway, two local councils, the National Health Service and Creative Scotland to create the Woodland Park, which was a vacant and contaminated edgelands site used as a landfill for the rubble from the nearby Gorbals slum clearances in the 1960s. The majority of park funding—£4 million of the £9 million budget—was spent on site remediation, an “invisible” cost given that the apparently wooded and green site was in reality an unused informal landfill. Scottish Forestry employs a dedicated engagement officer who works with minority groups to encourage health and well-being activities, and around £600,000 have been spent on natural play zones, boulders and bike paths aimed at attracting marginalized families who may not normally visit the woodlands. Their approach is one of “health by stealth”, encouraging widespread use of the park and meeting socio-environmental justice concerns. A bridge funded largely by GCC was key in connecting this South Lanarkshire site to the Athletes’ Village on the Glasgow side of the river. However, broader park access needs to be improved because the other main entrance/exit is poorly signposted and some distance from the park’s main amenities.

Due to the long-term fragmentation and dispersal of the community and the resulting processes of political decomposition, community mobilization in the East End has been relatively marginal. This may be one reason why such areas are chosen for large-scale regeneration, given that populations in wealthier areas have more social capital to resist unwanted processes of urban transformation.

However, the Calton Heritage and Learning Center’s Green Volunteers program is one example of a project that has been developed as a way to counteract the troubling realities that the combination of large amounts of derelict land, drug-selling and drug use bring to the neighborhood. As explained by the center’s director: “We were seeing needles being thrown in people’s gardens so they were lying under children’s play toys and we started removing them and then from there we started teaming up with community safety to get gloves and picker uppers and bags and then we started doing that [...] The police told us that anti-social behavior was going down because people could see into the gardens now, so it wasn’t such a safe place to hide so things like people using drugs in your front garden, people having sex and paying for sex in your garden stopped. There wasn’t lots of this going on but enough to create a horrible feeling.” Funded through Commonwealth Games legacy and Lottery funding, the intention of the Green Volunteers is not to replace publicly provided services but rather to help improve local health and well-being: “Our idea is that the Green Volunteers get to find out through gardening that not only do they improve the environment and the way people feel about where they live, but we get to know where the most isolated people are, we take them soup in the winter, we scrape away the ice from their front door [...] we’ll go to the shops for them whether it be the post office or pick up a prescription or whatever it might be and then we just keep in touch with them and let them know there’s people in the community that care, that know their name, that know they’re there and that they can call upon.”

Towards environmental justice in the East End?

While we recognize that the hundreds of millions of public funds spent decontaminating, remediating and providing green and blue infrastructure in the East End provide genuine environmental benefits, in this chapter we call into question who will reap them: local communities subjected to the nefarious effects of toxic environmental conditions for the last fifty years, or newcomers contributing to (green) gentrification in the East End? Notwithstanding honorable exceptions, contradictions and tensions abound in The Clyde Gateway's "sustainability fix". These include, for example, concern for community and environmental benefits while land remediation largely attracts the business/creative classes; the mobilization of public funding for unaffordable housing; and the most attractive locations within development sites—e.g. next to the River Clyde—given to the private sector. Most developments do little to address local employment and housing needs and are relatively marginal in comparison to an overall business-oriented approach that leaves genuine socio-economic and environmental justice in the East End reliant on the long-proven fallacy of trickle-down benefits.

In order for this to change, what is required is political will, a regulatory environment geared towards genuine equitable distribution and the participation of local people not just post factum but in the very planning and production of the urban environment. The Glasgow Games Monitor 2014 is one group that has attempted to raise awareness and foster such involvement but, unfortunately, the fragmentation of the area and its population through previous rounds of disinvestment, abandonment and stigmatization means that there has been limited community engagement so far. Positive lessons can be gleaned from exemplary green leisure and play spaces, such as the Baltic Street Adventure Playground and the Cuningar Loop Woodland Park, which fulfill local needs. While these processes and spaces have at least somewhat mediated the inequitable consequences of publicly funded private development in the area, much more is required.

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