'Policy Societies': policy, property, and owned persons.

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Short abstract:

This paper considers the personhood of policy. In the context of policy on housing demolition, it examines why feelings of ownership of house-property might disrupt governmental ambitions that citizens should feel ownership over policy and explores the ambivalence around what that ownership entails.

Long abstract:

In the pantheon of neo-liberal government (eg in the not-so 'New Public Management'), the idea of investing ownership in policies is central to creating legitimacy for governing strategies. When these policies involve the demolition of people's homes, feelings of 'owning policy' might be disrupted by feelings of ownership over the property that constitutes home. Whether or not a house is owned by the inhabitants, or whether it is rented from others, feelings of ownership often constitute the house as a person (as Levi-Strauss suggested in his definition of 'house society'). But can we equally understand policy as person? Does policy have properties or property-like aspects that correspond to house-property, or is it a different kind of person? This paper examines policy as person, property as person, and person as property through a study of urban regeneration policy and 'housing renewal' in the UK.

Introduction – on persons and things.

Much anthropological attention has been given to the concepts of person, object and property, and the issue of ownership rights, but perhaps less has been explicitly focused on the notion of ownership itself. Alain Pottage suggests that 'sociology and political theory are more profoundly 'juridical' than they imagine themselves to be', since they presuppose a basic division between persons and things, along the lines of Roman law (*personae*: *res*) (Pottage 2004 :4). He notes the recent concern over the muddling of that separation, as things and persons have begun to appear less separate, through biotechnologies and biomedical interventions, transgenic crops and 'new environmental sensitivities'. In particular, he suggests that '*embryos are related to their parents by means of the commodifying forms of contract and property, and yet they are also persons'* (Ibid. emphasis in original). Persons and things might appear to be naturally separate but are increasingly found to be enmeshed. It is not only proto-human things that can be thought of as persons, as Kay Milton indicates in her consideration of environmentalism. According to Milton, although generally persons are seen as having a different moral status from other objects,

> *'some nature protectionists argue that we hold moral responsibilities towards other things [as well], such as plants, species, ecosystems, life in general and the planet as a whole. In recognizing moral obligations towards these things they are implicitly according them rights, thereby defining them as the kinds of things that can have rights, in other words, as persons.'* (2002: 28*)*

This formulation radically extends the realm of personhood beyond people and raises questions of how far personhood can encompass objects, beyond living things or spirits. If a person is by definition that to which we owe moral responsibility, then in some situations it is possible to think of things like houses as having some

moral personhood. Some also have more than others, and where a house can be identified as a home, we may speculate that its personhood is more secure. In the process of moving house or inheriting a house, it is possible to conceive that the personhood of the house goes through a liminal phase and is then re-adopted by its new inhabitees. The transformation of a warm, lived-in home to a depersonalised empty shell is something of a literary trope. The forlorn state of a home deserted suggests an object stripped of its humanity, perhaps signified in ghostly form through the traces of former lives. In contexts where homes move with their inhabitants[1], the personhood of the dwelling is reinstated each time it is reconstructed, and becomes part of the kin group. I have written briefly on the phenomenon of Norwegian mountain cabins that play a significant role in uniting kin at specific times through shared presence, or that reinforce kin distinctions when cabins are to be inherited. We need not be considering the kind of House Societies that Levi-Strauss proposed to recognise that homes are more than collections of bricks but are woven into the everyday life as much as the life-crisis and the life-course.

This way of thinking links usefully to studies of socio-technology that advocate a non-determinate approach to human and non-human actants (see Murdoch 1997). Rather than start with assumptions about the personhood of inanimate objects and the scope of their intentionality, we may instead observe the ways in which they determine the activities of others. Callon described the disruptive intentionality of scallops, but Latour's speculations on the love of technology imagines engineering objects purposefully acting and reflecting on their own actions (Callon 1986, Latour 1993,1996). Although Latour does this humorously, he also provokes us into focusing our attention on how technological objects construct human thoughts and activities, and we might add how all non-human or non-animate objects can be constructed as actors rather than bystanders in the performance of daily life. Given this context, we might usefully ask not only how policy is implicated in the ownership and appropriation of knowledge, or how policy regimes produce subjects as objects of management, but how both human and non-human actors produce policy regimes and are, in turn, re-constituted by them. This is not merely to give an account of how a policy comes into being from the perspective of its writers (although they themselves constitute an often temporally and spatially extended social network), but how concrete objects, landscapes, social and socio-technical formations and assemblages produce a world where policy becomes a meaningful quantity.

This casts into doubt many of the assumptions held in policy related to housing (including not only 'housing policy', which usually refers to detailed policies on the allocation and management of public housing, but a wide range of urban and planning policies that regulate the construction, demolition and provision of both private and public housing). Rarely does such policy recognise the moral obligations related to the personhood of housing, yet recent policy has outlined a desire that the occupiers of housing 'take ownership' not only of the housing, but of the policy itself. Although I stop short of considering the personhood of the policy, the notions of ownership proposed in both policy and practice suggest a problematic opposition between owning property and owning policy. This is particularly striking when we ask how people are expected to take ownership of policy that proposes to demolish their home.

[1] I.e. rather than inhabitants moving from house to house.

Owning Policy, owning a home

> *'Our success in the longer term depends on more public bodies committing themselves to empowering the communities they work with, so that citizens can take ownership of their shared priorities and play an active part in making their communities better for everyone.'* (Blair 2006: 3)

British planning policy in the last decade at least has been heavily implicated in a discourse of ownership as much as in participation. Indeed, when New Labour came into power in 1997, it was with a fairly explicit agenda of reconnecting policy to 'the people', an approach heavily influenced by development theory. Influential politicians such as the London deputy mayor Nicky Gavron pushed hard for a consensual and inclusive approach to policy making, based on the principle that involving people in the development of policy would lead them to experience feelings of ownership over the final policy, and hence smooth its implementation. Ball identifies 5 key benefits claimed for community participation, including superior community knowledge, synergy (the 'mantra of partnership'), a direct impact on social skills and 'social capital', redistribution and participation as a merit good – a good in itself (Ball 2004: 123). He also notes the costs of participation, that are all failings of the participants, including a lack of knowledge among 'ordinary people', generating a lack of analytical attachment, and the lack of a wider perspective, and ultimately prejudice (Op.Cit). Similar trends in participative planning are found in other European countries. Woltjer summarises the key elements in planning literature identifying participation functioning both to empower citizens as a good in its own right, and to achieve improved decision outcomes (Woltjer 2002: 441). He identifies in Dutch discourse the desire for 'win-win' outcomes as the goal for participatory planning (Ibid. 446). Woltjer's conclusion is that Dutch infrastructure planners consider participatory planning '*to be effective mainly in terms of support and acceptance*', primariliy '*in its ability to generate public support'* (Ibid. 450). Hence, he argues that infrastructure planners use participatory planning as a kind of '*public support machine*', an instrumental tool to smooth the passage of large intrusive projects.

For the British government, the duality of the notion was closely tied to the concept of home ownership. By 2005, government analysis of the problems of social housing were baldly stated:

> *In 1997 the social housing stock was depleted and suffering chronic underinvestment. Social tenants had little choice over where they lived, and local authorities were sidelined and starved of cash. Too many people renting in the private sector were exploited by rogue landlords.* (ODPM 2005:9)

> *Despite the intentions of planners and politicians, the drive to build more homes, even more quickly, led to monolithic estates with too many homes that were cramped, cold and in disrepair. In the 1960s and 1970s, the worst estates had walkways in the sky that became rat runs for robbers.* (ODPM 2005: 10)

This approach locates problems lay in the underinvestment, but core to the analysis is also the current political ideology of a 'lack of choice'[2]. While it is not disputed that chronic underinvestment in housing maintenance left much of Britain's social housing stock in poor condition, it is also usually argued that the economic and employment collapse of the 1980s coupled with poor housing policy contributed to a

[2] A classic case of a political history being interpreted in line with currently fashionable ideological positions and rhetoric.

radical decline in social housing conditions. It is not generally thought among housing analysts that 'choice' of tenancy was a central problem beyond the initial slum clearances, since during the period when housing was more abundant, many tenants were able to arrange housing swaps, for example, and to manipulate housing waiting lists and point schemes to move to preferred housing[3]. Choice, on the other hand, has been a central rhetorical and political symbol of the New Labour government, heavily promoted by Tony Blair when prime minister and consistently supported by Gordon Brown as both Chancellor of the Exchequer and Prime Minister himself.

One of the diagnoses that they offered for what they believed was the failure of state housing in Britain was that tenants did not feel ownership over their housing, and hence allowed it to fall into decline. Although in policy statements, care is taken to avoid stigmatising council tenants and blame former government policy, the emphasis on 'decent housing' takes private owner-occupied housing as a tacit norm. For the New Labour government, assisting people with 'low-cost homeownership', and 'supporting individuals and families who need help to meet their housing costs' (through 'Housing Benefit welfare payments) are self-evident goods:

> *'The benefits that this brings are clear: People who are decently housed have a stronger sense of security and place. Decent housing strengthens communities and provides a better setting in which to raise families. It improves health and educational achievement and provides a long-term asset that can be passed on to future generations.* (DETR 2000: 4).

But later policy has been more explicit about the value of home-ownership. The 'sustainable communities' policy of 2005 states '*homes are not just places to live, they are assets*' (ODPM 2005: 20). This is identified as a problem, since,

> '*the three in ten households who do not own their own homes gain nothing from rising house prices. They and their children risk being left behind, missing out of the choices and opportunities that owner-occupiers enjoy*' (Op. Cit.)

Perhaps the clearest difference between this and Conservative discourse is that the latter pay less attention to avoiding stigmatisation of council tenants. In a recent report by the 'Centre for Social Justice', a 'think tank' founded by former Conservative Party Leader Ian Duncan Smith, he claimed that:

> *Over the years, our housing system has ghettoised poverty, creating broken estates where worklessness, dependency, family breakdown and addiction are endemic* (Davies 2008: 5*).*

He further criticised, 'a vicious cycle of degeneration, with social housing populated by ever more needy and dispirited individuals' (Op Cit.: 54). While Blair espoused owning policy and New Labour policy emphasized 'decent housing', Duncan Smith argued in a BBC interview that, *People with assets are more positive, more constructive, more likely to do the right thing*[4]. While we don't know what 'doing the right thing' might mean, here is a very radical philosophy of private ownership as

[3] Indeed, council tenants have described to me their strategies for moving to desired locations, and their stories suggest they have little less housing choice than those in the private sector, where no waiting list is available for desirable housing.

[4] Ian Duncan smith interviewed on the BBC Radio 4 Today programme, 2/12/08 (author's transcription)

morally privileged[5]. The press release is even more explicit, highlighting the report's assertions that:

> *The ownership of an asset encourages a series of behavioural changes. Those who own are more likely to protect their assets, to protect their position of ownership and to engage in constructive behaviours that enable their assets to be protected and enlarged: behaviours that benefit themselves, their families and the community at large.*
>
> *…Having a stake in a home is both a privilege and a responsibility. It would inculcate the values of constructive social behaviour and create, from the vicious cycle, a virtuous cycle that encourages social housing tenants to improve their family's future.* (CSJ 2008)

This is not adopted Conservative party policy, nor was it commented on by the shadow cabinet, but the rhetoric of a 'broken Britain' is the party's, and the policy of pushing social housing tenants into private ownership is a clear continuation of the Thatcherite policy of 'right to buy'. The language that links house ownership to change in behaviour is common to the ideology of new citizenship, that effectively awards the house with the agency to transform its occupants from workless broken-down families into responsible parents, community members and workers. This underlying agency of the house is vested in its particular relationship of ownership with its occupants, and it appears that it is this relationship itself which gives the house personhood. Through ownership, and only through ownership, the occupants develop feelings of obligation towards both the house, neighbours, work and eventually to the state.

While this notion is also implicit in government policy, it is tempered by the New Labour commitment to social housing through autonomous Housing Associations, rather than local government, but their emphasis has been stronger on the transformative potential of owning policy. Throughout a decade of New Labour government, the discourse spread through policy-related fields, and became embedded in planning policy and particularly in urban regeneration policy, both by state officials and those contracted to work for them, including architectural consultants and planners. However, the discourse above goes well beyond academic research suggesting that: '*Harnessing the insights, perspectives and talents of local people can improve services, the quality of democracy, and the legitimacy of council leadership'* (Andrews et al 2006: 9). By 2006, such claims had become increasingly idealised and ideological, with Department of Communities and Local Government documents suggesting a sophisticated philosophy of the connection between action and emotion:

> *A clear lesson coming through is that the act of engagement improves services and also improves people's perception of services. If people are involved and engaged in the decisions and choices made, they* ***naturally feel more ownership of the outcomes****. From their sense of ownership grows increasing confidence and the willingness to tackle further problems and take on more responsibility for the wellbeing of their communities. As this review illustrates, the ethos of community engagement is starting to become part of public bodies' organisational culture, and where citizens are able to participate with the decisions affecting their communities, they reap other benefits such as*

[5] There is little connection made, though, between owner-occupation and private landlordism, where the latter also own houses.

> *improved employment opportunities, better health and higher educational attainment. Once the approach takes root, it contributes to effective delivery and sustainable results but, most importantly, to the revival of the public realm and a new relationship of trust and shared responsibility between people and government: our shared goal for Together We Can.*
>
> (DCLG 2006: 6, emphasis added)

Indeed, this paragraph suggests an almost magical process of transformation where participation in local political debate leads to a utopian shared goal of ever-improving employment, health and education. This statement reads as a philosophy of the natural flow of emotion from participative process. It is precisely this relationship between 'harnessing' local knowledge and the production of feelings of 'ownership' that have become a mythical strand of governmental ideology. In effect, there are two parallel instances of this transformative experience, firstly through the participation or 'engagement' in policy development thought to lead to feelings of ownership of policy, and secondly through the ownership of housing, sometimes also framed as participation in the housing market, thought to create feelings of security and place, also improving health, education and employment.

These are striking assertions that deserve further investigation. Not least, through reflection on the practice of such processes observed during ethnographic research. We might anticipate that any utopian process will be confronted with difficulties when it is implemented and this case study will not disappoint on that front. However, rather than simply accuse politicians and civil servants of being naïve or unrealistic, it is important to show why the ambitions were utopian and where the confrontation with local conditions provoked resistance.

Utopian practice and the 'Policy Rush' – a slight digression which provides important context

In retrospect it sounds comical, but these idealistic ambitions for home-owning politically engaged communities failed to take account of the journey from current conditions to the utopian future. In order to create these ideal property-owning-citizens, for the majority of them the first stage of the process involved evicting them and demolishing their homes. With almost unbelievable hubris, the policy aim was to incorporate local citizens in owning the policy that directly involved the plans for demolition of their homes. Although these regeneration policies began in the 1990s by addressing council tenants, by the early 2000s they were sucking in private tenants and owner-occupiers through the 'Housing Market Renewal Programme'. The latter aimed to increase the value of assets, that is, increase house prices, by demolishing low-priced houses. That it came to fruition during a period of one of the steepest increases in the housing market was an irony that typifies what is often clumsy government intervention in markets, and had little impact on the progress of the policy.

Urban regeneration in the 1990s was premised on the vision noted above of dysfunctional structurally unsound housing estates, characterized as 'monolithic' examples of failed 1960s planning and architecture. The great socialist visions of the post-war period that produced clean, cheap and functional housing for the masses was understood to have been failed by the rush to produce more housing for less money. It is worth observing that this 'rush' effect of housing policy can also be recognized in the regeneration era. What I call '***policy rush***' can be identified as the burst of energy by state clients (be they local authorities or private investors) to

take advantage of convenient conditions produced by policy structures. 'Policy rush' is a form of fad or trend parallel to the management fads described by Abrahamson, where a new procedural arrangement, or a new constellation of actors leads to a set of opportunities that actors rush to capitalize on, with increasing numbers of agents jumping on the bandwagon once risk-takers have shown its potential. Once local authorities gained the financial and political authority to pursue slum clearance, a wave of pressure to increase the scale of their ambitions built up.

It is quite clear from the records of the housing department of Sheffield City Council that the quality of materials and rates of construction of new social housing spiraled in a fairly direct propertion between the 1950s and 1970s. Promotional materials published by the Sheffield Housing Office in the 1950s display enormous ambition and will to change, yet housing condition reports from the 1980s demonstrate the decline in building quality between the early estates in the 1950s and the later ones from the mid 1960s, most of which have now been demolished[6]. It may be easiest to understand this as a the kind of socio-technical network that Latour has outlined, assuming that we recognize that such networks are labile beasts, rather than stable structures. Rather like a wave building up height and then crashing on a beach, ending in a little ruffle of retreating bubbles, policy rushes begin slowly with the gradual putting in place of policy elements that eventually lead to a huge release of investment and energy that eventually blows itself out, either in a market crash, a rise in resistance, or recriminations of policy failure when the utopian outcomes fail to materialize, before a new policy cycle begins.

What happened particularly during the early 2000s in the UK was based on the progression of a 1980s and 90s national policy of economic growth based heavily in the construction industry. UK development policy turned away from the 1980s easy profits of 'green field development' (ie construction on previously undeveloped, or agricultural land) to an emphasis on 'brown field redevelopment' (ie demolition of existing property or redevelopment of derelict sites), and hence urban regeneration became a central focus of the development industry. The shift started with a government discourse in place that sought to improve the new urban slum conditions, to improve both the economic and social conditions on the poorest housing estates, but also and crucially to improve the buildings.

Although most developers were slow to shift from green to brown field development, they began to act as a combination of conditions appeared that included the following:

- government subsidy of demolition (often through EU Objective regional funding), pro-development policy;
- the identification of a demographic shift suggesting a rapid formation of 'households' of young, single people or couples with significant disposable wealth wishing to live in the urban centres;
- a change in the housing market leading to a boost in house prices, through a relaxation in financial regulation, allowing lenders to offer mortgages at well over

[6] Those estates that have stood the test of time are those built first in the post-war programme, with careful planning and preparation, and good-quality building materials and practices. The housing growth chart in Fig. 1 indicates the sustained rate of growth and the beginnings of decline in the 1980s.

property values and at rates of 5xsalary and more, and encouraging small investors to 'buy to let';

- the rise of financial vehicles that used property as an account-book asset making it profitable to build and/or own urban residential property even if unoccupied;
- the successful re-invention of semi-derelict urban commercial property in city centres by entrepreneurial investors[7].

Slowly, developers started to see the opportunities that urban regeneration offered, and speculative projects started to appear. The conditions were in place to encourage a significant building boom, and given that local authorities were forbidden from investing in social housing, they became increasingly reliant on the investments of private developers and financial investors. Developers thus gained increasing hold over redevelopment projects, and the interests of residents began to slide down the hierarchy of influence that characterizes local politics. In effect, local authorities were caught in a double bind. Without the prospect of profit, it was almost impossible to entice developers of any significant size to invest in social housing and public housing projects yet once the profits began to be significant, developers gained some much influence through their control of investment that councils has little leeway to dictate how development should be conducted. It must be noted also that government policy on urban regeneration tended to imagine philanthropic developers with a social conscience, yet in practice most developers were and are highly capitalized commercial enterprises with overriding obligations to their shareholders to maximize profits.

Investment and ownership under English Planning law – a short observation.

This sudden coalescence of development interests raises questions about the relationship between investment and ownership on different levels. On the one hand, the investment by developers and their financiers in embarking on substantial speculative building projects were generally designed as quick wins, and the products – generally blocks of flats – were built to be sold as quickly as possible, either to individual owner-occupiers, landlords or investment funds (the latter to be held on account books as 'assets' of increasing value, paralleling the general rise in house prices). We might also question to what extent such developers and investors began to own housing and planning policy, but what is more interesting here is the question of what it means actually to own a house or a home.

Planning policy takes various forms, but at the core is a series of Acts developed since the beginning of the 20th century. The most recent act is called the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, which succeeded the Planning and Compensation Act 1991[8]. It is clear even from the titles of the Acts that ownership of property is not inviolable. On the contrary, under Planning Law, the state is always in a position, under prescribed circumstances, to expropriate private property in the 'public interest'. While it is commonly assumed that owning ones own house gives one rights over the continued existence of the property, in fact, the law always allows the state to usurp private ownership according to the conditions included in the Act. This sheds a rather interesting light over the utopian vision of the home-

[7] See Guy and Henneberry 2002, Henneberry and Rowley 2000

[8] Planning policy in the UK is now differentiated between England and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. The policy referred to in this paper is that for England (and mostly also for Wales).

owning publicly engaged, policy-owning citizenry, if the ownership that stands at the core of their legitimacy is not guaranteed. Given the history of English democracy and the basis of citizenship in land/property ownership[9], the increasing centrality of compulsory purchase to planning law raises some paradoxes. Not least, the suggestion that owning property is more secure than renting looks less convincing.

Owning policy versus belonging

What this means in practice becomes clear in this case of a housing estate in central Sheffield undergoing 'Regeneration', that I have studied with the help of planning students on and off for several years[10]. One of a series of large social housing estates built from the 1950s onwards, the estate was built over three years in the 1960s on a steep hill overlooking the city centre. It housed approximately 8000 people at its height, in a range of 15-storey tower blocks, maisonettes and prefabricated terraced houses. When completed, it was one of the most popular estates in the city, with long waiting lists for all types of housing. Yet by the 1990s it was severely under-maintained and partly derelict. Several deck-access housing projects in the city were completely demolished in the 1990s, but for this estate, a government regeneration grant was eventually secured by the city council.

it is indicative that a search of the transcripts of formal interviews I carried out with a dozen people involved in the regeneration project not one of the residents uses the terms ownership or involvement, but the politicians (Labour party), developers and council officers use them frequently. They asserted that local residents had been involved in the political process, and noted the sometimes baffling number of difference public and private agencies and businesses who have had a role in the regeneration process. What residents repeatedly complained of was 'not being listened to', of delays in the rebuilding of housing and the lack of new housing that was affordable for younger and lower-income people, especially for former residents of the estate who might have wanted to move back after the regeneration.

This is not surprising given the history of the re-development. From a policy perspective, it was an ideal candidate for regeneration, generally considered in the city to be a 'no-go area', with a reputation as a hang-out for drug users, buildings in poor condition and a high crime-rate. Local residents were very keen for improvements and had an active tenants' and residents' association that had been active since the estate was built in the 1960s. A group of tenants formed a 'Community Forum' to work with the council to apply for governmental regeneration funding, and the process started off in a relatively promising way. Architectural consultants were hired to develop a Masterplan, and held fortnightly meetings on the estate to discuss with tenants how they saw the future of the estate. With tenants heavily involved in redevelopment in order to get government funding, it could be said that at this point tenants did feel that they owned the process. The estate was their home and they were fiercely proud of it: they had brought up

[9] The link between suffrage and ownership was key to the 'Putney Debates' of the English civil war.

[10] Methodological issues are complex in an area with high demolition, a small core population but no available housing (or funding) for residential research. Fieldwork included many interviews over several years with both residents, developers and council members and officials, attendance at local and council meetings and public consultation events, some 'hanging out' at the Community Forum offices and the creation of a 30 minute documentary film entitled 'Living Through Regeneration'.

children there, run social groups (Scouts and Guides, football clubs, social evenings and annual Reviews), and campaigned for improvements over more than thirty years. Early on in the regeneration their campaigns were partially successful. Early proposals to demolish all the pre-fabricated terraced housing were met with stiff resistance, and the council agreed to retain and improve those in best condition, partly through the offices of a new housing association. By the end of the consultation, representatives of local residents were relatively satisfied that the plans were satisfactory, if not ideal, but they recognised and mostly respected the compromises that had been made. Even so, there was clearly a battle of wills developing, as one local participant outlined:

> *To begin with they used to have design meetings every Tuesday. Used to have then at the […] church and they used to put lunch on as a little bribe. We were very clever; we knew that if they bought three designs, the one in colour would be the one the developers wanted to be chosen and the others were in black and white. The community would choose the design that they felt was best. So [the developers] weren't very pleased with what the community were asking for*[11].

However, once the Regeneration Plan had been adopted by the City Council as Supplementary Planning Guidance, action on the ground began to deviate from the ideals laid out in the plans and discussed through interminable meetings on the estate. These comments by a women who worked in the community centre in the neighbouring Victorian Park typify the views of many who lived and worked in the estate:

> *In the beginning the residents were consulted about the Master Plans, but what has happened today does not bear any resemblance to what was asked for or agreed upon*[12].

This internal view was not that put forward by local councillors, council officials or the commercial developers on the site, with a councillor arguing that,

> *The original Master Plan that we had of Norfolk Park I do believe has been more or less followed and I do think it is extremely useful*[13].

The senior council regeneration officer carefully suggested that:

> *The way [the architectural consultants] set about [masterplanning] was to very much involve the community in the development of the Master Plan and to make sure people were as involved as they could be on topics they were interested in*[14].

And the main commercial developer's Regeneration manager claimed:

> *I firmly believe that throughout both the Master Planning process and the re-development process to date that the local community has been fully engaged and consulted within that process*[15].

They did also make statements of exception to indicate their awareness that the process might not be perfect, such as the councillor's observation that for the maintenance of local democracy:

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[11] NH-HC 2006. Thanks to Hilary Corcoran for interview data.
[12] NH-HC 2006 op. cit.
[13] JD-SA 2006
[14] SM-SA 2006
[15] DC-SA 2006

> *I think it is dependent on the will within the local authority to ensure that local people in the community, which includes all the local voluntary agencies for example and the local forum, are involved and not just involved but they're actually listened to so that you don't just ask them what they want you actually listen to them, you respond to them and you change accordingly. I actually believe that that's been done, albeit I think it was a very slow process because I do feel that parts of the community believe that they weren't listened to particularly at the beginning*[16].

These interviews were carried out in the context of the filming of a documentary, and clearly the interviewees are doing Public Relations work, stressing the success of the project both for the benefit of government funders, and to maintain confidence in the project among investors. In private conversations, similar claims were tempered with assertions about the difficulty of working with people focused on their immediate problems as one of the Community Forum officers acknowledged:

> *There have been regular regeneration meetings on Norfolk Park, although I think one of the frustrations around that has often been that the meeting which perhaps was called around something quite strategic, with members of the public, sometimes gets bogged down in grass-cutting and blocked drains you know, or water running off a certain site or whatever. These are all genuine concerns in terms of quality of life but I think it has at times frustrated the regeneration team, which have turned up to try and get across maybe something that's quite important around the regeneration from a strategic perspective, but sometimes it has got bogged down in blocked drains*[17].

Yet there were more significant physical conditions that local participants felt were not being taken seriously:

> *A resident said […], 'Have you taken into consideration the wind on the estate?' It was like they were patting her on the head and saying, 'There, there old lady. We all have wind.' They wouldn't believe her that the wind on [the estate] can be extremely fierce. This went on for a few months, and all of a sudden we did have a huge gale on the estate. It was so bad that vehicles were blown over, and one of these cars belonged to someone on the design team. So all of a sudden a week later we had a wind specialist. So they were only half listing to people. It didn't seem what people were saying was going to be valued*[18].

Clearly getting people to feel that they owned the regeneration as a whole became increasingly difficult. Perhaps the most significant diversion was from the plan's timetable for development. While demolition proceeded according to plan so that it would be completed within the time that public funding was available, the construction company delayed rebuilding significantly. The consequences for the development company were highly beneficial, as the price of housing in the region began to rise dramatically and over 3 years, the prices they were able to raise on the new homes built doubled from their original estimates. Consequences for residents and former residents were more serious, though:

> *Residents were told they would be moved out of their home on a short-term basis, while their new homes were built. In reality half of the estate [population] has disappeared, because half of the new homes have not been*

[16] JD-SA 2006
[17] CN-SA 2006
[18] Op. Cit.

> *built at the same speed as the demolition. Some have moved more than once due to their 'temporary' accommodation needing to be demolished. A lot decided to move off the estate. Obviously if they have been away for 3 years plus they have made new friends, neighbours, and the children have settled into a new school, so they have made where they have moved to their new homes.*

Yet council officers continued to argue that the plan had local ownership:

> *I think having that community involvement in that has really added to that Master Plan and added to the ownership of the Master Plan from the local community*[19].

There are strong echoes here of the development project that David Mosse described in his book 'Cultivating Development'. The public face of the project was maintained through an avoidance of retrospective criticism and a determined focus on seeing the regeneration through to the development of each sub-site of the estate. A rhetorical commitment to 'community involvement' is rarely critically analysed in relationship to the totalising and homogenising concepts of community or involvement it presumes. The difficulties for many residents to participate in this 'involvement' process were pointed out by a member of the senior management of the rebuilt local primary school, who noted that,

> *The parents feel that they have been poorly consulted about the new developments. Although there has been a range of consultation evenings, the planners do not understand the fear that these parenst have in attending. Many have low literacy levels and are not comfortable entering the school*[20].

He also noted a sense of fear among local parents confronted by unfamiliar faces, suggesting that rebuilding trust would take a long time. His observations underline the former insularity of the estate, an insularity that could also be interpreted as the face-to-face familiarity that constitutes the 'sense of community' sought in ownership policy. On the other hand, a young woman interviewed by students told of the divide between old and new residents who she thought felt themselves better than council tenants. She told the students that because of this, 'there is no longer a sense of community'. An older resident echoed this: 'The spirit, I think, has gone to a large extent because of the depopulation.'

We could sum up these positions as a fundamental difference over the notion of community and ownership. For residents, although the material conditions on the estate had undoubtedly improved, and the removal of open drug dealing was clearly a benefit, regeneration had been a frustrating and dispiriting process of attack on the vibrant community of the estate. It had been threatened by the declining conditions and lack of maintenance prior to regeneration, but it was the process of regeneration itself that had evicted many of the community, friends and relations, and had demolished local amenities such as the shops and community centre, with its ballroom, bar and coffee room. In addition, all four of the pubs on the estate had closed – two being converted into evangelical churches.

While residents told accounts of local differences of opinion and disagreements over the regeneration, the project officers projected complexity, struggle, but triumph. This was recognised in government documents that promoted the estate as an

[19] SM-SA 2006, Op. Cit.
[20] PF-'Annexe A' undated.

example of successful community-led regeneration[21]. Only one developer argued differently, and this was the head of a non-profit anti-poverty development trust. He interpreted the process as a policy fashion:

> *They decide that they'll commission a Master Plan and get some fancy firm of architects to talk to all the locals and then ignore them, and we think it's a real waste of money. … everyone seems to commission Master Plans, it's completely bonkers[22].*

The ritual aspects of this approach did not appeal to him. On the contrary, he had a clear view of how to be effective:

> *What you should do is sit down a development team with the local community and then devise an implementation plan because the number of regeneration agencies, and I think it applies to [Single Regeneration Budget] programs, it applies to New Deal for Community programs[23], it applies to everybody who is winged in to some local area.*

He did not criticise the architects who worked on the project, but the fact that their masterplan bore little resemblance to practice. Indeed, the masterplan included statements on community economic regeneration and the importance of local facilities that were laudable, but were not implemented (and have still not been implemented in 2008, ten years after the process started). What, then, was the point of the process? The local councillor was explicit about the utility of masterplanning:

> *I do think it is extremely useful. I think it's mostly useful to obtain funding because if you're going to the government or you're going to any other organisation like European Funding for example, you don't just go along and say we want £40 million to develop Norfolk Park, you have to demonstrate why you need that money and what you're going to do with it. So of course you need it for your funding.*

This instrumentality was not the only purpose, and she was careful to refer to the conventional justification for masterplanning policy:

> *I think you also need it because you need to be looking at the long term future of an estate and it's not patch work. So if you've got a Master Plan for the whole estate you're not just doing bits at a time.*

What is not evident here is any attention to the experience of living in the estate, of the memory of homes demolished or to be demolished. In our interviews with residents, there were those who stressed the poor conditions of some of the worse towers that were the first to be demolished. These residents were glad to see the end of cold, damp flats with no security and failing lifts. For others, though, the memories were different, especially for those who had lived for longer in towers that had been partially restored with video-phones on the doors and coffee mornings in the lobbies. The elderly residents facing a move into sheltered housing regretted the need to move. They stressed the open balconies in the flats, the majestic views over the moors and the city, and the spacious rooms: 'it's just the view…', and commenting on the new housing, a resident said: 'It's just the balconies really …I miss the view'. Despite the extra amenities offered in the sheltered housing complex, residents remained nostalgic for their tower block flats: 'I liked us to be high up; you could look down on people then and see personal things. If you look

[21] ODPM 2005: 51
[22] JA-SA 2006
[23] Government regeneration policy funding schemes.

out of the window here, it's not part of your world.' The steep hills of Sheffield were spectacular from the flats, as another resident said shortly before moving:

> *…we had this fantastic view over the moors and this is the thing I'm going to miss at night, all the lights twinkling. You can see right from the moors all the way down to the Town Hall clock. I shall miss that…*

Few of the residents talked explicitly about belonging or about ownership. They talked about their families, social clubs they ran or joined, about the steepness of the hills, and about the view. But many of them were highly politicised and also talked about their campaigns for tenants' rights, and the frustration of not being listened to.

Owning home, owning policy – conclusions

What I have described in this paper is a radical and widespread political philosophy of personhood of both policy and housing, whereby the relationship of ownership is though to engender a transformation in behaviour, and is posited as morally superior to other relations. I have outlined how it attributes agency to objects such as houses, suggesting that the relationship of owning instills a sense of obligation to property, and that owning thus creates personhood in the house. The house becomes the organising principle of a morally acceptable society, conceptualised as a 'community' with local roots, but a broad commitment to the state through good citizenship. Good citizens can also be created through a relationship of owning to policy processes and outcomes. This is a political philosophy that posits a transformation in feelings of ownership and belonging through involvement in policy development.

Clearly the above account illustrates that this is not simple to translate into practice. There is some evidence that such outcomes may be more achievable in smaller scale architectural projects, and a lot has been learned, at least by architects, since the 1990s when projects like this were getting off the ground. Experienced architects certainly recognise the limitations to their 'visioning' exercises, as participative as they may be, and more radical architects have developed community-owned and community-directed development projects (see the Atelier d'Architecture Autogérée and Petrescu, 2007). But there is little evidence that such transformation can be achieved on anything like a general scale in longer or larger policy processes. There are many reasons why this might be the case, some of which I have elaborated elsewhere (Abram 2002, 2000). These include the problem of temporality of policy negotiations where open participation is incompatible with progression through deliberation to decisions[24]; the challenge to the authority of elected representatives through unaccountable self-selected participation; and also relate to a critique of planning theories whose notions of coherent communities or actor-equality lack substance.

What we can conclude is that both politicians, council officers and some commercial developers bought into the discourse of ownership through involvement, albeit with the limitations set at different levels. What I have not critiqued in depth here is the

[24] That is, policy processes usually aim to progress iteratively through time, through deliberation or negotiation, consultation, and decision. Open participation inevitably allows new participants to join the process at any point, when they almost inevitably want to object to decisions already made – not having been involved in the process means they are unlikely to have been incorporated into decisions (do not 'own' the decisions), and the ideal smooth flow of the process from decision to decision is interrupted, causing frustration and delay for prior participants.

ideological presumption that owning a house also automatically leads to changed behaviour, an ideology most clearly stated by the Conservative party and its partners (see Davies 2008). A critique would not be difficult, based on the ethnographic material describing the 'good behaviour' of tenants in the council estate described above, none of whom meet the description of despair and dependency claimed by Conservative ministers.

What is striking about the tenants' description of home is not that they talked about owning their homes – and indeed many of them were opposed, on political principle, to buying their properties from the council or the housing association to whom their homes were transferred. On the contrary, many of them talked about 'community spirit', and the term 'spirit' is key. As one resident suggested:

> *People still wanted to keep community spirit and have more facilities. But they have actually got fewer facilities now. They were also hoping for better housing, which some have got and some haven't*[25].

This is not the magical ownership through involvement that policy envisages, but is a long term experience of shared and personal memory, friendships, family and time passing, where associations are not the snapshot of contemporary dereliction, but are tied to longer histories of pride and pleasure. Home, in this context, is not only the house or flat that the tenant has rights to, but the spaces between, and the shared spaces among, the coffee lounges, lobbies, community centres, churches and pubs that tie the estate together. While owner-occupiers might own their flats, they cannot own the public space any more than tenants. And one might argue that they own their flats less, since for usually 25 years properties are owned by the banks not by tenants. Private owners are currently more likely to have their housing repossessed than council tenants, for example. The terrible irony of current regeneration practice is that despite the heavily embedded discourse of community involvement (or perhaps because of its weak form), urban regeneration in many cases has actually been a process of gentrification[26], whereby pre-existing long established working-class social groups have been dispersed in favour of privately renting or privately owning residents, often without local history or ties to long-standing residents. On the estate described above, much of the long-delayed private housing has been bought by landlords and rented to students, the archetypal fleeting temporary resident, not most likely to make a long-term commitment to the area. With the increased variety of local residents, with different tenancies and very different circumstances, it is more difficult to offer communal activities. As on of the Community Forum observed, 'it's not about poverty any more': there is no core shared experience on which community can automatically be formed, and new kinds of relation must be invented. If this is true, then one could argue that politicians have achieved one of their objectives – to be rid of the 'monolithic' council estates – monolithic not just in architecture, but in class and occupancy. For the former residents, personhood is not merely found in the housing they live in, but in the spirit of community that they have lived. It is over the loss of this spirit that they have felt grief, and over the death of the estate as they knew it in its happier days. The feelings of ownership they describe were much broader than the deeds of their flats

[25] NH-HC Op Cit.

[26] Some have argued that the 'real' purpose of this kind of regeneration has been to move 'problem' tenants out of sight, and to realise the potential capital of the land. The Centre for Social Justice report makes this explicit: 'While occupied by social tenants social housing has very little value. Turning tenants into owners releases the value of the home and allows the most vulnerable in our society to benefit' (Davies 2008: 70).

and houses, more closely tied to a sense of belonging, in which private ownership signified an inward individualism, the opposite of community, and a loss of social interaction that many of them lament. They do not talk of the new buildings in terms of a rebirth of the estate. But neither did many of them develop the feelings of ownership over the policies that they were supposed to adopt. I did not hear anyone say it explicitly, but one could argue that it would be turkeys voting for Christmas. Many of the older residents regretted being moved out of high rise flats, even though the move to a care-home has been very timely for some of them. What they expressed in private was anger, but what they expressed in public was more often a resigned acceptance that they would have no control over what would happen anyway.

There are two arguments here. The first is more banal, that policy and practice are severely at odds. This is not surprising, and the more utopian the policy, the further from it the practice is likely to be. We can also repeat an easy observation that political rhetoric is inconsistent and note Ball's conclusion that participative policy making represents policy over-optimism (2004: 139). But the second argument concerns the notion that housing and policy have personhood, that the personhood of housing is instilled in a relationship of being owned by its occupants that is believed to lead to changed behaviours not only within the house but between residents and between them, their employers and the state. It is also thought that policy becomes owned through some experience of involvement in its development, and that this can generate acceptance of difficult choices. Its participants will feel ownership over it, obligations towards it, thus also endowing the policy too with a kind of personhood. Policy may live or die, be cultivated or abandoned, and it may bite back with unintended outcomes. I have also indicated that the notion of community spirit may be less banal than is often assumed, and that it bears a close relationship to the utopian 'good community' that policy aspires to. That policies have been followed that have been accused of killing this spirit, show how these forms of ownership and personhood have been used inconsistently – the ownership that residents felt over their socially rented housing and neighbourhoods was destroyed in the name of creating home ownership and community. But the consistent reference to a spirit of community should only reinforce our recognition of how highly it is valued.

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