

Renewal, Culture and Conflict in Urban Regeneration

A walk from Butler's Wharf to Borough Market

Designed by Dr Erica Pani

Introduction

As students in the Department of Geography and Environment, you will become comfortable with theories that conceptualise space and time as a confluence of economic, political, social and cultural processes and relations. The purpose of this walk is for you to observe and experience the outcomes of diverse culture-led regeneration initiatives, providing you the opportunity to reflect on the theoretical implications of what you discover and/or perceive.

The walk explores three themes that fit within the broad subject of urban regeneration:

- 1) the cultural production of urban space
- 2) social conflict
- 3) renewal

During your walk you will consider whether culture-led regeneration can deliver a sustainable form of local economic development or if it can only ever represent the cultural interests of a few. As Miles and Paddison comment, "The idea that culture can be employed as a driver for urban economic growth has become part of the 'new orthodoxy' by which cities seek to enhance their competitive position" (2005: 833). However, we need to be critical in our examination of the 'role of culture' in attempts to regenerate cities, as these attempts often produce outcomes that may privilege one set of users over another. As you will see, the area of the River Thames that we will cover has developed over a number of years and through a variety of mechanisms: Government-led projects, public-private partnerships, entrepreneurial projects, and property-led regeneration to name but a few. **Your task on this walk is to unravel some of these processes to shed light on the intersections between renewal, culture and conflict in urban regeneration.**

The Route:

➔ Arrive at Tower Hill underground station (District and Circle lines) and take the exit sign-posted for Tower Bridge. Cross the Bridge to the south side of the river, but take care to descend BEFORE you go all the way across. Use either the steps on the right of the bridge, or the lift on the left. If you used the steps on the right: turn left and go under the bridge via the arched walkway. If you used the lift, turn left. You should see Butler's Wharf directly ahead.



STARTING POINT

Just as you enter Butler's Wharf, there is a coffee house – a Starbuck's. Your starting point is in the adjacent courtyard.

During the 1980s a new brand of 'entrepreneurial urban policy' was introduced by the, then, Conservative Government: i.e. the Urban Development Corporation. In the nation's capital, the London Docklands Development Corporation (LDDC) was born to revitalise and regenerate some of the city's derelict wharves and docks, which had been abandoned since the late 1960s when 'containerization' changed the nature of shipping. Along the south side of the Thames, the LDDC redeveloped both Butler's Wharf and Hay's Wharf, which we'll see later. The regeneration of Butler's Wharf added to the South Bank's focus on regeneration via 'culture' and 'consumption'. It is comprised of luxury apartments situated in the former warehouses where the working classes once toiled; there are award-winning restaurants whose diners have included the Blairs, the Clintons and the Johnsons; and up until 2016 there was the Conran Design Museum that formed part of the South Bank's 'cultural renaissance'. As we will see on our walk, the site is now the residence of Zaha Hadid Architects.

⊙ **Stop One:** Courage Yard and Brewery Square act as a monument to the brewery established in 1787 by John Courage. The Square and its surrounds were developed between 1983 and 1990 by Wickham Associates as a "high-density, mixed-use urban complex". The new buildings include residences, offices and shops. On the east side of Courage Yard stands a grade II listed building: the old Eagle Wharf warehouse. In the south-west corner of Brewery Square stands a 19th C building, and the so-called "cooperage" is a neo-Georgian inter-war structure. In each Square sits a sculpture commissioned by the architects.

The regeneration of Butler's Wharf entailed extensive 'gentrification' providing, predominantly, 1 and 2 bedroom apartments, most likely, for the professional/managerial class working in the economic and commercial centres of the City and Canary Wharf (another LDDC development). When we talk of

gentrification we must be careful to define our terms. The gentrification at Butler's Wharf was not the 'organic' process described by Ruth Glass in 1964 where the middle-classes slowly took possession of several neighbourhoods in Islington from the working-class renters who lived there. Rather, the gentrification at Butler's Wharf was 'engineered' by a Government keen to encourage private money back to the inner city. Indeed, when we consider the 'international lifestyle' that Butler's Wharf provides many of its professional residents, it could be argued that they have more in common with the residents of Battery Park in New York than they do with their immediate neighbours on the other side of Jamaica Road, which we'll pass later. And they are certainly very different from the dockers that used to work on the Wharf.

Reflections: *Urban regeneration schemes that involve housing often result in gentrification, but is gentrification inevitable? As value is added to the existing building stock by its re-development, what policies could local authorities implement to foster a more mixed community of residents?*

➔ Leave the courtyard as you came in. You are now standing in what's called the 'canyon'.

⊙ **Stop Two:** On the left, leading down to the river, is Maggie Blake's Cause. The passage runs between the Anchor Brew-house Boiler-house and Butler's Wharf West. It was named after a local community activist who, during the 1980s development, fought to maintain access to the riverside for local people. This small passage celebrates her successful campaign.

➔ Turn to look along the canyon. Ahead of you is the Butler's Wharf complex. The site dates back to 1794, when a grain trader named Mr Butler rented warehouses from the Thomas family. The existing Wharf was built in 1871-1873 with some rebuilding during the 1880s/90s. The Wharf provided services that linked the importers of goods (such as tea, grain, rubber, sugar and spices) to buyers and distributors. When the complex closed in 1971, the vacant buildings were rented out for light industrial use and storage, whilst an artist community leased some of the buildings facing the waterfront. In 1980, these 'residents' were evicted to make way for the mixed-use redevelopment led by Conran and Partners. They later acted as the Master planners for the regeneration of Butler's Wharf between 1985 and 1997, under the LDDC. The buildings around you are Grade II listed. The 'canyon' formed by the two sides of Shad Thames is traversed by overhead bridges that used to link the warehouses together.

Reflections: *As you walk through Butler's Wharf, there are several things to consider. How are culture, architecture and history used to attract a certain kind of resident and consumer to Butler's Wharf? Consider the people who live here. What sort of work do they do? What life-styles do they live? What other places and processes would you connect them with – places near and far? Consider the visitors. Who is this place designed to attract? Are you in public or private space? Look around you: how is this space monitored and controlled?*

◎ **Stop Three:** Following Shad Thames takes us to the front of the former Conran Design Museum. The museum opened in 1989 and was the first museum in the world devoted to 20th and 21st Century design. The 'Bauhaus-style' reconstruction radically transformed a former banana-ripening warehouse dating back to the mid 20th Century. The style apparently reflects the 'white geometry' of Le Corbusier. The museum was a huge success, drawing in millions of visitors from around the world. However, in 2016 it relocated to larger premises in Kensington. The building now houses Saha Hadid Architects.

Reflections: *Having a museum in this area may seem a little odd given what we know about clusters. If you had to do a quick SWOT analysis of the museum – judging its potential for success or failure – what strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats would you note?*

➔ Follow the road around to the right and walk up to the intersection between Tooley Street, Jamaica Road and Shad Thames.

◎ **Stop Four:** Just beyond Butler's Wharf in Jamaica Road you will find the 'Other' residents of Southwark. Here, in what Peter Hall (2007) calls the 'pressured proletarian island', reside social housing tenants and the remnants of the working population who relied on the docks for their livelihoods. In his book, Hall juxtaposes the lives and voices of these diverse populations. He describes 'Henrietta', a single woman in her 20s with a good job who lives in Butler's Wharf. She travels often for work and her connection to the area is predicated on what the development has to offer in terms of restaurants, bakeries, bars and taxis. But her 'local world' does not extend beyond Butler's Wharf, and she finds the local people and places close-by to be repellent: "There are really expensive flats round here and then so many, you know, really nasty council estates just across the road." (Hall 2007: 79).

Hall also reveals the worlds of poorer local residents. He interviews Gary and Dawn, a couple in their 40s who have lived and worked in the area for years and were concerned with what they see as the 'yuppification' of Bermondsey. Dawn says: "This is another thing the Council are trying to do, they're trying to sell off all the housing stock and actually bring in people like that (yuppies) and really try and move all of us away." (Hall 2007: 73).

Reflections: *Why do practitioners of local economic development often promote policies that create gentrification? In terms of urban regeneration, is gentrification a problem (a "vengeful wrecker" – as Atkinson (2003) puts it) or is it a solution ("a misunderstood saviour")?*

➔ Walk along Tooley Street until we come to Potters' Fields on the right. Turn into Potters' Fields Park and walk to the back of City Hall – The ex-GLA Building (Greater London Authority).

☉ **Stop Five:** City Hall – commonly known as ‘the armadillo’ due to its shape – was designed by Norman Foster Architects. The construction was completed in 2002 at a cost of £43million. Although its unusual shape drew quite a lot of negative criticism, it was purposefully designed to save energy and thereby be more sustainable – a claim that has been shown to be false given its high electricity consumption.

Until December 2021, City Hall served as the GLA headquarters: the home of regional government in London where the Mayor had his offices and where decisions were made relating to the future strategy for London’s development. This is a good place to pause and consider the various processes and histories that make up the City. It is also a good place to stop and consider the conflicts of regeneration and local economic development that may take years to iron out. How long has London been wringing its hands over the Green Belt? How many years of negotiations did it take before Heathrow was allowed to construct a third runway?



Reflections: *City Hall is a great example of a ‘multi-purpose’ building, serving as both a seat of regional government and an architectural feature that adds to the culture-led regeneration of the south side of the Thames. What do you think about such combinations of power, politics and design? Do they help to put cities like London on the global map? Do they add to its status as a World City?*

➔ Walk along the river until you reach Hay’s Galleria and HMS Belfast.

☉ **Stop Six:** Hay’s Galleria offers us an interesting moment to think about how history is used to create attractive commercial space. When the wharf was redeveloped for shopping, the dock itself was paved over, a new roof was put on, and the brick façade was restored. Now, instead of tea clippers coming to off-load their goods, HMS Belfast (a ‘floating museum’) is moored alongside.



Reflections: *Here, it is worth considering the changing nature of work in British society. As the UK has moved away from manufacturing and industry towards a service-based economy, what has this meant for the types of jobs available for average working people? While you are here imagine for a moment that you are a dock worker.*

- > What kind of work would you find in this new economy?
- > Would it pay well?
- > Would it be stable?
- > Has the economic growth that the city of London has experienced been truly inclusive?

➔ Make your way along the river, going up the steps that take you onto the south side of London Bridge. Cross the road and turn left towards Southwark Cathedral on the right. Follow the passageway around the cathedral until you reach Borough Market – our final stop.

⊙ **Stop Seven:** Borough Market is a good place to stop for brunch. It was once one of the largest wholesale and retail markets in London. In fact, the place itself goes back to the 12th Century as a site for a market. The present day buildings were constructed in the 1850s. At that time it was one of the most important food markets due to its strategic position close to the docks and wharves. Nowadays, the market mainly sells speciality foods to the general public.

Reflection: *While in the market be sure to observe the kinds of people using the market; the types of produce on sale; and the prices. How does it compare to other markets you know? Think of this, as well, in relation to the 'resident population' who live in Southwark where extreme wealth and high levels of poverty coexist in close proximity to one another. Who do you think this market is for?*



Our walk along this part of the south bank is now complete. Ahead, towards Westminster Bridge, you'll find many other examples of culture-led regeneration – e.g. Tate Modern, the Globe and the millennium bridge. Each one of them embodies a story of renewal, culture and conflict in urban regeneration, as you'll discover in Walk Two.

Sample Resources (also see Walk Two):

Vickery, J. (2007) The Emergence of Culture-led Regeneration: A policy concept and its discontents: http://wrap.warwick.ac.uk/36991/1/WRAP_Vickery_ccps.paper9.pdf

Miles, S. and Paddison, R. (2005) Introduction: The Rise and Rise of Culture-led Urban Regeneration, *Urban Studies*, 42(5-6): 833-839.

Finkel, R. And Platt L., (2020) 'Cultural festivals and the city', *Geography Compass*, 14(9). Accessed on-line. <https://doi.org/10.1111/gec3.12498>

Atkinson, R. (2003) 'Introduction: misunderstood saviour or vengeful wrecker? The many meanings and problems of gentrification', *Urban Studies*, 40 (2): 2343-2350.

Smith, N. (1986) 'Gentrification, the frontier, and the restructuring of urban space', in N. Smith and P. Williams (eds.) *Gentrification and the City*, Boston: Allen and Unwin.

Smith, N. (2002) 'New globalism, new urbanism: gentrification as a global urban strategy', *Antipode*, 34(3): 328-50.

Hall, P. (2007) *London Voices London Lives: Tales From a Working Capital*, Bristol: Policy Press.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/London_Docklands_Development_Corporation

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Butler%27s_Wharf

https://www.ucalgary.ca/ev/designresearch/projects/2001/Urban_Regeneration/London.pdf

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-62EISd8FI>

<https://archivesoftheartistled.org/projects/butlers-wharf>

<https://southwarknotes.wordpress.com/art-and-regeneration/art-empty-southwark-industrial-buildings-1971-1979/>

<https://www.london-se1.co.uk/places/design-museum>

<https://conranandpartners.com/projects/the-design-museum/>

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/City_Hall,_London_\(Southwark\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/City_Hall,_London_(Southwark))

<https://www.hays-galleria.com>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hay%27s_Galleria

<https://boroughmarket.org.uk>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Borough_Market