



Photograph courtesy of Marcus Leith

Regeneration: can culture carry the can?

Fred Manson, Director of Regeneration and Environment, London Borough of Southwark, gives his own personal view on the value of regeneration and its ability to work hand-in-hand with cultural interests.

It seems rather strange to argue about whether regeneration and culture are working together at a time when so many extraordinary museums have recently opened throughout the land. In the three days after its opening, Tate Modern welcomed 100,000 visitors. It's truly remarkable what is going on. There are many connections between regeneration and culture, and my personal view is that looking at what is happening in Southwark can give us a better understanding.

When the Tate made the decision to relocate to Southwark, the second person they appointed for the project was a community development officer. They got that right. In an area like Southwark you have to be serious about dealing with deprivation and you have to treat people with respect.

Southwark is among the top ten deprived areas in the country. When the new system of scoring for schools was introduced, Southwark was at the bottom. We are now the fourth most improved school district, although we're still not far away from the bottom of the register. There is a strong correlation between deprivation and the percentage of people living in local-authority housing. We have wards where up to 90% of people live in social housing, which is allocated almost exclusively on the basis of need. This system perpetuates deprivation in alarming ways.

The government believes that areas where there is a mixed and balanced community have a greater chance of success than do those which are concentrations of

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deprivation. Therefore, if there is a means of finding people who wish to live in an area, as opposed to those who have been placed there, we are talking about tackling regeneration. I think more people might consider living in Southwark after the opening of Tate Modern than ever would before. The proportion of people in inner London living in what is called affordable housing – which means unaffordable, and therefore subsidised – is 27%. In Southwark it is over 60%. When the Tate moved to Southwark it was involved in shifting an entire economy by altering the concentration of deprivation. That is the subject of regeneration.

Real jobs with real money

Another area where the Tate will make a difference is jobs. They are real jobs in which people earn real money, doing things which give them understanding of their society and connection with it. The most important route out of deprivation is the ability to get a job. Again the Tate has done this well. A local labour agreement with the construction industry ensured that local people were employed in the building process. When they advertised for their first tranche of employees they ran a programme to train local people so that they would be, as the jargon says, job-ready, and helped with filling in application forms and interviews. One-third of the people appointed were local. There is a local labour scheme with hotels in the area. Those who have not got jobs as a result of the opening of Tate Modern know people who have directly benefited from the regeneration programme in the area. Instead of seeing something which has descended without benefit to them, they see that it is possible for them to have their share.

So culture can help an area by changing its perception of itself and its future and by the direct provision of employment, but that is not enough. Regeneration is not just about shiny buildings and employment: it is about a change of attitude and opinion. Museums are institutions, but culture is more amorphous and vague. Yet even institutions can do something to promote culture. They can influence individuals and change the attitudes of local residents.

The real contribution of Tate Modern and of culture in general is what they can do to change people. There are points in people's lives where they start to say, 'I'm going to join in with society. I'm going to take part in what is going on.' In an area of social disengagement we have a special

responsibility to see that this kind of opportunity is put forward for the people of Southwark and other areas, particularly where there is deprivation and concentrated poverty. Culture will not always do it; for many people it will be other activities such as sport, but it can come out of new museums and other arts institutions.

We wanted Tate Modern to be a good neighbour, working with the people in the area so that they felt part of the exercise. Landscape design, for example, was worked out with tremendous participation from local people, making them enthusiastic and happy about the extraordinary object opening in their neighbourhood. The Tate played it right by having an open day in mid-April when local residents rambled through the galleries long before anyone else did.

Let me give two more examples. The Photographers' Gallery, of which I am a trustee, did a programme with a school in Lambeth. They worked with text and photographs. People who went into the Photographers' Gallery would click on a screen and read about people talking about their lives. It was engaging and, for some people, it could have been a spark that made them say, 'I want to do this. I can face up to some of the situations.' My other project is Artangel. School children in three parts of the country took part in a play, *Seven Sacraments*, devised by Neil Bartlett. In each location they were encouraged to create their own scripts. Bartlett found that, while children from Brighton and Lichfield were boring and dull, those in the inner city were lively and vibrant. They couldn't read well, but they sure could talk.

You could see that they might change what they thought they could do as a result of those performances. In Southwark we are doing a lot of things about change. We are making it a different place, making people imagine that the world could be different. We do programmes with schools, we work with other galleries, and we run our own galleries where children can become engaged in things and think of a wider world. If we can do that through culture, I think culture really is able to carry the can for regeneration.



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