

Youth Transitions and Legacies in an East London 2012 Olympic host borough.

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Introduction

London 2012 was heralded as a once in a generation ‘game changer’, it was ‘officially’ sold as being the catalyst that would finally transform the fortunes of East London and its residents; particularly with regard to housing, educational attainment and employment. Official UK Labour Market statistics since September 2011 have consistently shown that employment is continuing to rise whilst unemployment is continuing to fall. The quarterly figures for June to August 2014 indicated that the unemployment rate had fallen to 6 per cent (‘the lowest since late 2008’), and that there were 538,000 fewer unemployed people than was recorded the previous year during June to August 2013. According to the Office for National Statistics (2014) this is the ‘largest annual fall in unemployment on record’. Even taking into account regional variations, the figures suggest that in particular London and the South East are performing well; indeed London (after Scotland) was the region with the largest decrease in the unemployment rate at 0.9 per cent since the previous quarter. These buoyant UK Labour Market statistics unfortunately mask a number of key issues that are contributing to firstly increasing numbers of people in work poverty and secondly entrenched worklessness and labour market disadvantage; both issues are disproportionately affecting particular regions, localities and BAME communities (Catney and Sabater, 2015; Fisher and Nandi, 2015).

According to a number of independent analyses, whilst London as a region is economically vibrant, youth unemployment and poverty are at crisis point particularly within the eastern boroughs of the capital (NPI and Trust for London, 2013; Crowley and Cominetti, 2014 Hughes and Crowley, 2014). Despite being a major laboratory for a myriad of regeneration programmes over the past 35 years, not least the Olympic 2012 project, East London’s long history of social and economic exclusion continues into the present. As such this sub-region is blighted by acute levels of poverty, homelessness, overcrowding and associated ill health, and educational disadvantage amongst those

poorer residents. It is of course also important to note the specific impact of recent coalition government spending cuts – indeed local authorities in England will see their budgets slashed by ‘nearly 30 per cent in real terms between 2008-2015’ (Hastings et al., 2013:3)– and welfare reform on East London’s poorer communities.

This chapter – which revisits and updates the author’s previous research undertaken a decade earlier (see Gunter, 2008; Gunter and Watt, 2009; Gunter, 2010) – draws on data from an ethnographic study of youth transitions and cultures in an East London borough¹. It comprises in-depth biographical interviews with 66 young adults aged 14 -24, as well as interviews with 34 practitioners and key stakeholders including police officers, youth workers, housing officers, local residents and parents. The majority of the young informants resided in the adjoining neighbourhoods of Gulley and Dungle² – the two primary research sites featured in this ethnographic study – which are amongst the 20 per cent of most deprived neighbourhoods in England (HM Government, 2010). Nearly two-thirds (64 per cent) of the residents of Gulley and Dungle are from a BAME background (ONS, 2012). In this study approximately 10 per cent of the young respondents ‘self identified’ themselves as White British, 50 per cent as Black British or mixed (black/white) heritage, with the remainder describing themselves as White Other, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Moroccan, Iranian, Mauritian or Somalian. The chapter will also examine the way in which continued cuts to (and/or re allocations of) public expenditure has resulted in the move away from universalist to more targeted youth service provision. To this end it will include a locally situated account of the impact of local authority spending cuts and changing youth policy agendas on young people’s services in East London just prior to, and two years after, the 2012 Olympics.

Youth and Social Exclusion

Since the late 1990s, the *Teesside Studies of Youth Transitions and Social Exclusion* have undertaken a series of qualitative research projects, that have examined the long-term transitions of youth

¹ The research was undertaken in the London Borough of Waltham Forest between 2009-2014.

² All names referred to throughout the remainder of this chapter, including participants and places are pseudonyms.

growing up in the poor neighbourhoods of north-east England (see, inter alia, MacDonald et al. 1997, 2005, Johnston et al. 2000). Notwithstanding the many insights gleaned from the *Teesside Studies*, due to focussing largely on white youth in a predominantly ‘white place’, the question arises as to how relevant are the findings to ‘super-diverse’ cities and urban spaces in the UK (Gunter and Watt, 2009). It is within this context that both my current (and previous) research projects were undertaken; firstly, as a means to compare East London with the North East of England and, secondly, to revisit the same place and themes – the long term cultures and transitions of youth growing up in two multi-deprived neighbourhoods in Waltham Forest.

According to the Index of Multiple Deprivation (HM Government, 2010b) Waltham Forest is the 15th most deprived borough in England and ranks 6th in London and is also one of the most ‘super diverse’ (Vertovec, 2007; Wessendorf, 2014) areas in the country. . The borough has a poor record regarding educational attainment, in 1996 all the schools in Waltham Forest were placed under an OFSTED accelerated inspection. This was due to major concerns being raised, during earlier inspections, about the possibility of large numbers of failing schools in the borough, indeed ‘seven schools were made subject to special measures’ (OfSTED, 2000:4). As well as highlighting the poor strategic management of education within Waltham Forest, the report also went on to outline the other areas of poor performance, most notably:

.....the proportion of primary and secondary schools where the quality of education and school management requires some or much improvement is above that of statistical neighbours and national figures...The proportion of pupils achieving five or more GCSE passes at grades A*-C is well below statistical neighbours and national averages.....
...Attendance levels are below national rates and the number of exclusions is well above.....(OfSTED, 2000:4)

As a consequence of the damning findings of this Report, Waltham Forest Council took the decision in 2001 – under pressure from the Department for Education and Skills – to contract out its education service to a private company EduAction (BBC News 2001; Becket, 2001). However, a performance assessment of the Council’s education and children’s social care services carried out by OfSTED and CSCI in 2005 still found that ‘too many young people, particularly Black Caribbean boys, do not reach level 2 in their education/training by the age of 19’. (OfSTED, 2005:7). In 2007, a report about educational attainment in Waltham Forest at key stages 2 and 3 found that:

Although there has been steady improvement across both key stages since the beginning of the EduAction contract in 2001, there is still a significant gap between results for Waltham Forest and our ambition to reach national averages. These two measures in English and maths are key to the success of young people in gaining employment (LBWF, 2007:1).

Nearly 15 years after the initial privatisation of its education service, 22 per cent of children in Waltham Forest are still leaving ‘primary school without Level 4 in English and maths compared to just 10 per cent in Richmond upon Thames’ (GLA, 2013:10). Historically, low-level and no qualifications have underpinned much of the labour market exclusion and disadvantage in East London (Syrett and North, 2008) which has impacted disproportionately upon its youth population. Indeed, young people residing in East London are more likely to be recorded as ‘NEET’ when compared to those living in other parts of city (GLA, 2007). Research indicates that there is a high correlation between being NEET and ‘later forms of disadvantage and poor welfare outcomes’ (Coles et al., 2010:7) including cyclical bouts of unemployment and under employment, mental illness, homelessness and persistent offending behaviour culminating in custodial sentences.

Regenerating East London

Since the 1980s East London has experienced a long line of regeneration initiatives – beginning with the London Docklands – centred on private business, local government and Third Sector partnership

working. However, New Labour's programme of urban renewal created an even more ambitious and complex strategy to transform East London delivered through the Thames Gateway project and the London 2012 Olympic Legacy, as well as a host of smaller-scale regeneration initiatives. According to Mayor of London Boris Johnson we are already 'seeing massive economic payback for London and the UK' from the 2012 Games, and this 'is only the beginning of a process that will drive extraordinary regeneration in East London' (HM Government, 2013:6). The proposed regeneration legacy of 2012 includes the building of 11,000 new homes and creation of 10,000 new jobs on the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park and a further '70, 000 jobs for workless Londoners' (Ibid: 2013). However, it is the Convergence policy framework that represents the greatest legacy ambition of 2012:

The Mayor of London and the elected Mayors and Leaders of the six Olympic Host Boroughs have already committed themselves and their organisations to working toward achieving socio-economic Convergence between the Host Boroughs and the rest of London over the period to 2030 (London's Growth Boroughs, 2011:1).

According to the Convergence agenda private and public investment in preparation for London 2012 provided the catalyst for change across East London, and for the next 25 years the sub-region will benefit from continued further investment and economic growth. The Convergence Annual Report 2013-14 (London's Growth Boroughs, 2013), estimates that by 2030 the Growth Boroughs will have attracted 190,400 new jobs, £34bn worth of additional investment; more significantly the residents of the Growth Boroughs will 'enjoy the same levels of employment, educational attainment, housing, health or safety as other Londoners' (Ibid: 2013:4).

The 2012 Games represents both the latest and grandest regeneration project yet undertaken in East London and the UK, and whilst we are still more than a decade away from 2030 [when a more definitive assessment of its ambitious targets, and the Convergence Policy Framework, can be

undertaken], it is worth assessing the research evidence gathered so far about the impact of nearly 40 years of area-based urban regeneration in East London. Established in 1981, the London Docklands Development Corporation (LDDC) was given the developmental authority to regenerate '8½ square miles of East London', encompassing the Docklands areas of the boroughs of Newham, Tower Hamlets and Southwark. At the end of its seventeen year life span the LDDC in its Final Annual Report in 1998, proclaimed that it had amongst many other achievements: secured £1.86 billion in public sector investment and £7.7 billion in private sector investment, overseen the construction of the Docklands Light Railway, created 85,000 new jobs in London Dockland and; built 24,000 new homes, 11 new primary schools, 2 secondary schools, 3 post-16 colleges and 9 vocational training centres (LDDC, 2014). Whilst the physical transformation of the London Docklands 'urban landscape' might be considered a success story, many local people were unable to access these new jobs (Deakin and Edwards, 1993; Rhodes and Tyler, 1998; LDA, 2006). Additionally, with nearly 80 per cent of the 24,000 new homes being directly sold to 'more affluent' owner occupiers the LDDC regeneration project, 'rather than creating mixed/balanced communities there is considerable evidence of' entrenched class/ethnic 'polarisation both in incomes and lifestyles' (Bernstock, 2014:22; Cohen, 1996; Back et al., 1999; Foster, 1999).

Since the LDDC, East London has been a major laboratory for a large number of government-led area based regeneration programmes including: City Challenge, Single Regeneration Budget, Neighbourhood Renewal Fund, Sure Start, Children's Fund, Youth Inclusion Programme, Education Action Zones, Health Action Zones, Housing Action Trusts, Connexions and the New Deal for Communities. All have been concerned in one way or another with improving the life chances and experiences of those children, young people and adults deemed 'at risk' from social exclusion, by implementing preventative programmes that physically renew neighbourhoods as well as tackle employability, poor skills, high crime rates, poor health outcomes, and educational underachievement. Despite four decades of a myriad of regeneration programmes, Britain is still characterised by deep rooted poverty as well as broader socio-economic disadvantage which in addition to being largely

concentrated in ‘urban, metropolitan, and (post)industrial areas’, has also widened considerably during the past 40 years (Fahmy et al., 2011:594).

Whilst various national governments have been fixated by area based initiatives (ABIs), research evidence points to the inherent limitations of ABIs with regard to tackling poverty and wider social disadvantage (Atkinson and Kintrea, 2002; Lupton, 2003; Rhodes et al., 2005; Lawless, 2012). Fundamentally, ‘locality managerialist approaches’ (Ball and Maginn, 2004:757) to poverty and inequality fail to address the complex structural contributory factors – global economic pressures combined with national government policies – which impact upon housing, labour markets and the provision of welfare services like health and education. Whilst ABIs that rebuild and redesign dilapidated housing stock and surrounding estates ‘might encourage local people to be more positive about their local environment.....they are unlikely to sustain change with regard to people based outcomes’ (Lawless, 2012:325).

The London 2012 Legacy will more than likely fail in its grand ambitions, since this latest and largest area based regeneration initiative, like many others before it, cannot address deep rooted structural and social / economic problems of East London’s communities; which have only been further exacerbated by the Conservative (and previous Con-Lib Coalition) government’s austerity programme. Indeed London 2012 Legacy is more likely to lead to further gentrification and exclusionary displacement (Butler et al., 2013; Watt, 2013) by ‘addressing primarily the housing and consumption needs of the expanding’ number of high and middle-income households (Poynter and MacRury, 2009:148). Area-based regeneration initiatives in whatever guise or permutation are inherently piecemeal and problematic as they distract from addressing the ongoing issue of poverty and the worsening social and economic inequities within British society. These deep rooted inequalities require radical social policy interventions (Goldson and Muncie, 2006; Dorling, 2010; Rogowski, 2010) and ‘solutions focused upon a sustained commitment to the redistribution of wealth’ (Fahmy et al., 2011:612).

Poor and Extended Youth Transitions

The research findings outlined in this chapter are very similar to those presented in my previous study (although undertaken a decade earlier), characterised by continuities with regards to the young people's poor educational experiences / outcomes and subsequent poor / extended post-16 transitions. The majority of young informants in this study³ left school with no or low qualifications – did not achieve five or more GCSE A-C grades including English and Maths – and described their experiences of school in largely negative terms, most still went on to post-16 full-time study at a sixth form or further education college:

- Tyra: I got kicked out of school when I was fifteen
Int: Did you manage though to get any GCSE's
Tyra: No, but I did some other like courses when I was at the centre [Pupil Referral Unit] before coming to college.
INT: What are you studying at college?
Tyra: BTEC in Catering and Hospitality
- Kem: I left when I was sixteen.
INT: Yeah.
Kem: ... and I got, only got one GCSE ...
INT: Yeah.
Kem: ... and that was in Maths.
INT: Okay and how about you?
Solomon: I left school when I was sixteen.
INT: Yeah and what kind of qualifications did you get there?
Solomon: I got nine A to C's.
INT: Okay and yourself?
Karl: And I was sixteen as well and I got, erm, three, erm, C's.
INT: Three C's okay and did you all kind of leave school and come straight to college or did you kind of do anything else in between?
Karl: No, straight to college.
Solomon: Yeah, I came straight to college.

Whilst the majority of young informants were attending - or at some point had attended - college, there was small segment of white young males in this study who managed to find entry level jobs in the construction industry [usually through family contacts]. As noted in the previous study (Gunter

³ Current study was undertaken during the immediate lead up to, and two-year period following, the London 2012 Olympics.

and Watt, 2009:521), there is still a ‘residue of traditional male manual jobs available in London, at least for those males “in the know” and with the right social networks (see also Watt, 2003):

INT: Do you go to work or college?
Matty: I work
INT: Ok what do you do?
Matty: I’m a builder...erm I do like loft extensions, erm cement work just any type of building work that we get like...

Scott: I do bit of roofing, done scaffolding..
INT: Since you left school?
Scott: Yeah, but I’m gonna do plumbing, eventually like, get more money. That’s my plan
INT: So you thinking ahead?
Scott: Nah, not really, but my uncle he does it like, so I know like about the money [laughs] like and the job

Many of the young people were acutely aware of the link between poor educational outcomes at school and alternative post-16 transitions such as ‘working on road’ (see Gunter, 2008; Gunter and Watt 2009; Gunter, forthcoming 2016). Consequently, ‘going to college’ was viewed by the young people as an opportunity – not provided within the school environment or curriculum – to obtain the vocational skills and qualifications that might enable them to obtain professional and high salaried jobs in IT, finance, construction, hospitality, engineering, health and social care and the creative industries:

Jamal: Well I don’t think hopeful kids would be on the streets. I think, if a person left school with good, like more than five As to Cs, I don’t think they’d want to be on the streets. I think that like the systems have failed them. Because the way how schools are, it’s only now that they’ve brought in like diplomas and stuff, but you see that many people aren’t used to them yet, like because there’s BTECs now and stuff but normally it’s just like GCSEs. And I don’t think many people like that formal education, like people work in different ways. I think if they made like more jobs and training available, something that will actually help us, I think that would be better.

College & Training: Get on [and off] the bus

Whilst the young people's post-16 education and training experiences were largely positive, there was though a high drop-out rate resulting in their post school experiences mirroring a Hoppa⁴ bus ride; in that the informants continually failed to complete their college course or training placement (journeys) and would eventually start another course / placement which they would again not complete.

Emms: Yeah, I done lots of things. I went L...College. I done IT, then I flopped that. Then I went, erm to some training place and I done erm, motor skills. I got CSC card. And then after that erm I went some training place infor some IT course, and I passed that. And then after that I went N...College, sorry, to do thing, engineering. Then I done half of year, half of the year. Then after that, erm, yeah nothing after that.

Maria: At first I was doing hair and beauty at college. I did that for a little while, but I don't know, just couldn't be bothered with it and that. It just wasn't me. So I left that.

INT: What did you do after that?

Maria: I didn't do nothing really for quite a bit. I used to just be on road....doing whatever. Now though I'm doing a Health and Social Care course.

INT: What you want to do after you've finished?

Maria: Youth work most probably

Sami: First I done a construction course, I passed the level one... And secondly I done administration...This was like administration in retail, it was three courses in one... After that I went to work, I was working in a coffee shop in....So I worked there for a couple of Months...I got redundant then I looked for another job better job

INT: Are you working now?

Sami: No I'm still unemployed

Mo But I done like training at that Leap programme at TGB [name of local vocational training provider] centre.

INT: Okay yeah.

Mo: And a retail training course, it was all right once we were there but it was just full of like broken promises because you're supposed to be paid up to £200 and we haven't got that, or our certificate so, it was like a waste of time.

⁴ Smaller sized shuttle buses used by passengers (who are constantly 'hopping off' and 'hopping on') only for very short journeys.

These early college / training patterns of the young people mirrors much of the later employment experiences of East London's poorer adult residents (see also, Johnston et al. 2000, MacDonald et al. 2005) . As discussed earlier in this chapter regeneration of the Docklands resulted in the creation of new professional-managerial jobs – particularly in the financial services sector located in Canary Wharf – that locals have been unable to access due to no or low skills and qualifications (Deakin and Edwards, 1993; Rhodes and Tyler, 1998; LDA, 2006). What has been available to them are the many new post-industrial service jobs that have been created in London over the past 30 years, but which are characterised by low pay, insecurity, short-termism, part-time and zero hours contracts (Abrams, 2002; Watt, 2003; Smith, 2005; Syrett and North, 2008). This is the precarious labour market context that schools and colleges in East London are not – according to some young people – adequately preparing many of their students to enter:

Jay: I do think the school, as I just said, the way they are set up, it isn't good. How can I put it? There is no structure to it. It is like people don't know where they are going, basically school doesn't prepare you for life, it just is teaching you subjects or how to count to ten but, and that is all well and good. If you want to go down and do maths when you are older, which a lot of people do, or economics or you want to be able to count, then obviously you need to learn how to count. But there is a million other stuff that is not related to counting that they don't teach you.

Alex: No all I think they do they come in and they tell you 'go to college, college is great, you have to go to college. After college you have got so many opportunities'. Then when you go to college they tell you "oh you have to go to Uni, if you don't go to Uni you haven't got a life, Uni will give you so many opportunities". Then when you go to Uni they tell you "oh yes you have got to do your masters degree, if you don't do your masters degree you haven't got a life. There is a load of opportunities if you do your masters". There is no other options, all they talk and you can't decide either.

Assessing the school and post-16 experiences of the informants, it is clear that the formal education and training curriculum's provided by schools and colleges are still preparing too many young people to fail within East London's post-industrial economy. Moreover, the combination of neo-liberal policies and post-industrialisation and the 'recomposition of class have given education a new role in social control as the age of entry into the labour market has been raised' (Allen and Ainley, 2007:40).

Education has always been linked to social control, however, it now plays an even more significant role in the lives of young people whose experience of the labour market are very different when compared to previous generations. Rather than the traditional route into waged labour – as was the experience of school-leavers during the 30 year period of ‘full employment’ after 1945 (see Willis, 1977) – many 14-19 years olds are warehoused in extended schools/colleges and placated with a plethora of foundation level vocational courses – and the ‘promise of often receding eventual employment’ (Allen and Ainley, 2007:34).

Young People’s Services and Austerity

The impact of neo-liberal government social policies on young people’s services over the past four decades – specifically the continued cuts to public expenditure – has resulted in the move away from universalist to more targeted provision (see Davies, 2013). Multi-agency partnership working and the commissioning and delivery of early intervention programmes for ‘at-risk’ youth is central to this model of current practice. In a climate of austerity many third sector service providers, who have been particularly affected by these funding cuts, are compelled to engage with central government initiatives that have ring fenced funding attached. Similarly, Local authority service providers (who on one hand implement these cuts to front line services) have to buy into national programmes like ‘Ending Gang and Youth Violence’ (HM Government, 2011) in order to bring in extra resources. In March 2015 Waltham Forest Council proudly proclaimed, in its weekly newspaper, ‘SINCE 2010 WE HAVE SAVED £68 MILLION, BUT WE NOW NEED TO SAVE £57 MILLION MORE BY 2018’ (LBWF, 2015:2); however these savings have particularly impacted upon frontline services such as housing, adult care, children and youth services. Interestingly, whilst acknowledging its new approved budget for the 2011/12 financial year included savings totalling £35 million, the Council boasted that it had found an extra £1 million for its gang prevention programme ‘Enough is Enough’ as well as £500,000 for 16 extra police officers (LBWF, 2012). It has become evident that the Council – and confirmed in all of its annual budgets since March 2011 – is prioritising control and punishment rather than welfare and support for its vulnerable residents (Wacquant, 2009); this is

emphasised particularly by the decimating £5.9 million cuts (77 per cent of total budget) to its youth services (BBC News, 2014):

Mark: You know there hasn't been a youth service in this borough for years. I mean I don't want to get political on you, but going back to the 90s they've cut it to the bone, and now this latest one, well this now is officially the end. How can a service go from 60 FTEs [full time equivalent posts] to 12 in one week and still expect to deliver any kind of service. [*Youth Work Practitioner*]

INT: But they have invested in gangs youth work?

Mark: Don't get me started on that one. That's another thing, every day we are picking up the pieces from all this over policing of our young people, and plus with all this talk about 'cleaning things up for the Olympics' things are getting worse, if you can believe that.

INT: You mean stop and search?

Mark: Yeah. They don't learn, and like they continue to target and be heavy handed with our youth, you know everything's about drugs and gangs and what have you. All this targeted youth work stuff, its like we can only work with young people if they are in a 'gang'. I mean what the hell is a gang anyway? As my young people love to tell me, the biggest gang around here are the 'feds' [police]. All that generic youth work stuff, working with young people where they are at, empowerment, forget about that, its now all about disempowering young people. Basically we are now working for the police and the justice system.

Whilst targeted and multi-agency working has had a profound effect on the Management and delivery of youth services, clearly not all beleaguered practitioners – whether in housing, youth offending teams, or youth services – are happy about their new role as 'junior partners' to the police and other justice sector agencies.

INT: Is your work targeted?

Marvin: Yeah, it is now. My job used to be around youth achievement, where I used to work with young people across the borough. but because of the high profile cases of two young men being stabbed in the south [of the borough], all the councillors started jumping up and down about the youth service needs to be doing more. So then my job got changed and I was deployed to the south to work on the crime prevention project.[*Youth Work Practitioner*]

INT: So you work closely with the police and gang prevention team?

Marvin: I don't know about the gang team, they're supposed to be working round here, but I've never come across them and nor have the young people I work with. But I hear they have a bigger budget than we do [laughs]

INT: What about the police?

Marvin: I mean our job was to a certain extent to prevent crime, but the police I just found they got in the way. They just really did get in the way. We did a SUS panel, like workshop, and we called in some police and then we got some young people to come in and address them, do you know what I mean, and speak to them. And it was just really interesting that they, the police, had no idea what was going on, do you get what I mean? And then when the young people actually said to them, well, we want a place where we can ride our bikes, we want a place where we can play football late at night, we want a place where we can play basketball. These were the sort of questions, and they just danced around it. They, say they're interested in crime prevention but really they're not. They just come in and cause problems and leave, there is no come back for them, so they feel they can act how they like. The way I see it if you police properly, you know going back to the old community policing, where you had your community officer who walks the beat that builds relationships locally, you then wouldn't have these problems. But now its like they want to use the police to solve everything. You know, like, what's that saying, just papering over big cracks, because the problems that are there were set in motion many years ago. You're looking at people living in extreme poverty, you know you got poor schooling, poor health, followed by things like high levels of crime. So trying to prevent it, you know, is a problem. You need to change the conditions that people are living in, then that would help to prevent the other things, so it's very easy for them to go in and over police certain areas for their crime figures

Whilst the Council was proud of its award winning gangs project and constantly boasted about the increased investment in policing and crime prevention, there was an increasing amount of frustration and cynicism amongst many practitioners and community stakeholders:

Janice: Gang crime prevention. It's just politics. They're not interested in the young people, because if you was you'd change the conditions they're living in. Do you get what I mean? There's no point throwing millions at it. It's just ways for people to stay in office. They don't actually do anything. Do you know what I mean? How can I come in as a youth worker and have a young person for three hours, all right, and change the way that young person thinks, when they're going back to their situation straight afterwards. [*Housing Association Worker – Community Engagement Team*]

Conclusion

Since the early 1980s various national governments have attempted to tackle East London's entrenched poverty and urban decay via the deployment of area-based regeneration programmes such as the LDDC, City Challenge, SRB, HATs, and latterly London 2012 Legacy. With regards to the outcomes of nearly forty years of regeneration in East London, research evidence indicates that in certain instances these schemes have provided some benefit to local communities with regards to the physical transformation of localities; and this particularly relates to those ABIs – such as Hackney NDC or Waltham Forest HAT – with a remit to redevelop dilapidated housing stock / estates and the surrounding environments. Overall though, many other studies point to the fact that the long line of regeneration programmes deployed in East London have failed to deliver on jobs for poorer local residents, and instead have largely served to fuel gentrification and exclusionary displacement. Moreover, poverty and socioeconomic inequality in 'austerity' Britain has become more entrenched and widespread, impacting disproportionately upon particular regions/localities, including East London, and demographic populations such as young people and those from BAME communities.

This chapter has sought to provide a situated account of the post-16 experiences of young people growing up in Waltham Forest – and is set within the broader context of East London's political economy, particularly with regards to the implications of poverty and post-industrialisation – as well as the impact of coalition government austerity policies upon youth services in this 2012 Olympic host borough. Many of the young people in this study had left school at 16 with less than five A-C GCSE grades (including English and Maths), and even those that did achieve this national minimum standard still found their post-16 education and training experiences to be unsatisfactory. Consequently, this resulted in too many of the young respondents failing to complete their training schemes and/or college courses, however, within a short space of time they would embark upon a new scheme or course only to drop out from that. This pattern was being constantly repeated so much so that the respondent's descriptions of their post-16 experiences might best be described as a series of unplanned bus journeys that never seemed to arrive at the intended destination.

In many respects schools and colleges in East London are not able to adequately prepare or equip many of its young people – particularly those from poorer and disadvantaged backgrounds – (Allen and Ainley, 2007) with the high level skills and qualifications required for entry into those growth areas of the East London economy, such as banking, finance and ICT. Rather, many of these young peoples' future working lives will be characterised by entry level jobs, short term, part time and zero hours contracts largely within the retail and service sectors, in addition to a shortage of genuinely affordable housing, notably social housing (see Kennelly and Watt, 2012). Nearly forty plus years of UK urban regeneration [and social exclusion] policies have been unable to achieve the desired outcomes, largely because they all have failed to acknowledge exactly what the issue is; namely poverty and the deep rooted societal inequalities that require redistributive and welfare oriented social policies that are focussed upon people based outcomes. It is highly unlikely that the 2012 Olympic Legacy will filter down and improve things in East London for the better, if anything it will more than likely continue to change things for the worse with regards to the ongoing exclusionary displacement of its poorer residents.

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