

JUSTICE IN THE GREEN

Cultivating Spaces

Mapping Sustainable Communities in Hackney, London

Synopsis

The Group's fieldwork took place over November and December 2010 and was focused on cultivating spaces in and around Hackney Marshes. The task was three-fold: a) to explore how cultivating spaces enhance the appropriation of Hackney Marshes and surrounding areas, b) to examine potentials and constraints to enhance environmental justice through cultivating, and c) to identify potentials for cross-fertilization with other activities taking place in the area. Appropriation in the context of cultivating spaces was considered as a way in which communities transform their surrounding environment into meaningful places that allow people to follow their own aspirations and needs.

In the light of the undergoing changes in and around Hackney Marshes, the intention of this study was to engage the communities in the process of considering uses and appropriations of Hackney Marshes and to provide findings from which the communities may build a response and greater understanding of cultivating activities in the area.

"Other than the volunteering days there is no formal relationship with other user groups. That is something that could change in the future"

"The biggest negative thing at this moment is the Olympics destroying a huge amount of land...and we haven't seen the end of it yet"



Findings

- The motivations why people get involved in growing activities vary. However, the wish to meet people, to be close with nature and to learn and share experiences about growing food and plants are main reasons for people to participate in gardening activities in Hackney.
- Community gardening can strengthen community bonds and people's identification with place in the area. It can bring people in touch with their environment and with the source of their food, and ultimately improve urban spaces and the local environment in Hackney by attracting life and biodiversity.
- There is potential for overlaps and cooperation with group less specialised in growing. The tree-planting project "Palas por Pistolas" by a Mexican artist in 2009 links to the arts, while growing schemes exist in schools and businesses in Hackney. New links could be forged, and existing ones extended for future cooperation.
- Lack of information about existing groups and lack of encouragements regarding possibilities for involvement as well as actual and perceived time constraints and language barriers (in the case of migrant communities) seem to main barriers that hinder involvement in gardening in Hackney.

"There's lots of unemployment in the area...people just want to get a job...it's difficult to sell gardening to unemployed people"

"It is exciting when you see something that wasn't there in the morning and you look at it and say 'wow'"

