For Art and the Public Sphere

Art-led regeneration in Margate: learning from Moonbow Jakes Café and Lido Nightclub intervention

Loretta Lees and John McKiernan

ABSTRACT
This paper considers whether a new iconic landmark – the Turner Contemporary - is likely to be a successful vehicle for the regeneration of the English seaside town of Margate in Kent. It does so by looking at the socio-economic context of Margate, the evidence about top-down models of art-led regeneration, and the data collected in a bottom up arts initiative – Moonbow Jakes Café and Lido Nightclub intervention – which was opened at the same time as the Turner Contemporary in the Summer of 2011.
KEYWORDS: Margate, coastal regeneration, art-led regeneration, Turner Contemporary

INTRODUCTION

> 'Margate is a great example of how art can play an effective role in regeneration' (ACE, 2009).

With its 'golden sands' and 'dilapidated seaside charm', Margate, a coastal town in Kent on the south-east coast of England, is now ranked seventh in a respected international travel guide's 'must see' destinations for 2013 (The Rough Guide, 2013)! The new Turner Contemporary Art Gallery (see Figure 1) is seen by some to have played a major role in turning the town's fortunes around - 'the Turner effect'. But as subsequent media reports have demonstrated locals beg to differ. Resident Robert Spires, 41, was quoted in a number of national newspapers:

> 'If this guide causes tens of thousands of people to descend on Margate from around the world I am afraid they will be very, very disappointed…Margate is run down, half of the shops are closed or in the process of closing down, there are yobs on every corner and amusement arcades all over the place…It is not the kind of place you really want to live in, let alone go on holiday to"[1].

[1] See http://www.thesun.co.uk/sol/homepage/news/4694122/margate-top-10-world-destination.html.

FIGURE 1 THE TURNER CONTEMPORARY

In this paper we question how successful the new Turner Contemporary, funded with the public purse, will be in turning around Margate's social and economic fortunes, in light of the problematic evidence-base around arts-led regeneration and evidence from a live performance and art exhibitions space - Moonbow Jakes Café and Lido Nightclub intervention - which was set up to explore the differing aspects of the physical, emotional, political and communal change that was taking place in Margate, as an area designated for arts-led regeneration through the Turner Contemporary.

The conclusions drawn in this paper are a result of a series of detailed discussions between Loretta Lees - a social scientist who was undertaking pilot research in Margate for an AHRC project on art-led regeneration and urban social inclusion and conceptual events producer, John McKiernan – who founded the micro events company Platform-7, which through conceptual live art performance and exhibitions explores and attempts to understand social issues facing the Western world and how people live life today. Loretta Lees has reviewed the evidence base on art-led regeneration and urban social inclusion in the UK and concluded that the evidence base is both limited and poor and that better measures are needed (Lees and Melhuish, 2013). She advocates more qualitative methods of measurement such as ethnography, rather than the general quantitative measures that have tended to dominate arts evaluations, as such John McKiernan's Moonbow Jakes Café and Lido Nightclub intervention was an invaluable piece of ethnography in its own right through which to consider the efficacy of arts-led regeneration in Margate.

Margate began life as a fishing village and in the C18th it became one of the UK's first seaside resorts attracting the gentry who came from London by steamboat to enjoy the perceived health benefits associated with sea water and sea air (see Barker, Brodie, Dermott, Jessop, and Winter, 2007). It is this 'gentry' that the Turner Contemporary seeks to attract back to Margate in the C21st. The Royal Sea Bathing Hospital was built in 1791 for this very purpose, particularly as a cure for tuberculosis, and patients were conveyed down a ramp into the sea in their bathing machines. Margate developed grand Georgian and Regency buildings in the C19th and in the 1850s the Dreamland amusement park was developed. Margate became a traditional British seaside resort – it was the first resort to offer donkey rides and then introduced deckchairs in 1898. During the inter-war years a large lido was built and three new cinemas. But Margate began to decline in the 1960s, as British holidaymakers shunned traditional British seaside resorts for foreign climes Margate's grand hotels went out of business. Many of the large Georgian and Victorian

properties were subdivided into low quality flats or used as multi-occupation houses, care homes and supported housing. The local authority took the decision to fill up the increasingly empty hotels and boarding houses with social security claimants, importing more poverty into the town. The result was further decline and degeneration. According to the 2012 Indices of Multiple Deprivation, Margate Central is the most deprived Super Output Area of the 1047 in Kent, and 357th out of 32,482 in England. The wards of Margate Central and Cliftonville West, in Margate, are some of the most deprived in the South of England, together they suffer from an unemployment rate of 13% (the national average is 7.9%, the average in the South East is just 2.5%). In the poorest parts of these wards the rate is 38% with 63% of the population dependent on welfare. In addition they have some of the highest levels of crime and anti-social behaviour in the country. There are high levels of decay and dereliction among seafront properties. Out of town landlords have left a large number of properties derelict and poorly maintained, attracting squatters and problem behaviour. 82% of households in Margate Central and Cliftonville West live in privately rented flats, the population is young and transient and the flats unsuitable for families. There are also high numbers of refugees and asylum seekers. In the absence of local stone, the use of stucco in Georgian structures has left Margate's historic fabric particularly susceptible to the local salt-laden air and this is also true of later ferro-concrete structures such as the Lido which closed in the 1990s. Both aesthetically and socio-economically Margate was (still is?) in decline. Having missed out on the coastal gentrification that has transformed a number of Britain's coastal resorts, Margate set about kick starting regeneration.

COASTAL REGENERATION IN THE UK

A large number of British coastal towns, like Margate, have experienced successive decades of social and economic disinvestment and entrenched socio-economic decline (Beatty and Forthergill, 2003). A number of factors inducing the decline of British coastal towns have been identified by English Heritage (2007:2-4): i) declining visitor numbers due to competition; ii) location: coastal towns are often geographically remote from regional commercial centres, sit at the end of transport routes and as such are unable to capture through-traffic, often they cannot then rely on retail for economic health; iii) an outdated market; iv) Victorian accommodation unsuitable for modern families and young people; v) higher building maintenance due to salt laden wind; vi) high levels of multiple deprivation; vii) an ageing population; viii) negative perceptions and; ix) urban design conflicts. One solution identified by English Heritage (2007:7) is the generation of creative industries:

> 'coastal towns can offer a low cost, high quality of life to an increasingly mobile workforce, providing the supply-side conditions in which cultural and creative industries thrive. They can also provide a ready source of inspiration to artists and designer-makers. In turn, the presence of a community of artists or designer-makers can help to encourage new visitors to an area, with knock-on benefits for hotels and restaurants'.

A small number of British coastal towns have experienced a revival in their fortunes, for example, the now gentrified Brighton, Hastings, and Whitstable – the latter nicknamed 'Islington-on-Sea' (see D. Smith, 2007, on coastal gentrification). Each of these 'success' stories are different in terms of the populations and institutions involved. The need to regenerate less successful coastal towns has been identified by policy-makers. In recent years there have been a number of reports focusing on the disadvantaged socio-economic

circumstances many coastal communities in the UK have faced (e.g. British Resorts Association, 2000; DCLG, 2007; DCMS, 1999a; English Heritage, 2007; English Heritage and CABE, 2003; English Tourism Board, 2001). There is general consensus across these reports that coastal towns require a regeneration framework, with Walton and Browne's (2010: ii) *Coastal Regeneration Handbook* intending to 'maintain and extend the national debate on how to address the complex social and economic problems that are associated with English coastal resorts'.

Regeneration then has come to the forefront as the state's solution for many decaying coastal towns, and of course by regeneration, the state enacts gentrification (see Lees, 2003). Persuaded by the Barcelona model (see Balibrea, 2001; Degen and Garcia, 2012) of culture-led regeneration, policy makers in the UK became increasingly focused on the use of top down iconic architecture as a regeneration tool. *Shifting Sands* (English Heritage and CABE, 2003*)* publicised a range of examples where iconic new buildings and the imaginative re-use of historic buildings have restored confidence amongst residents and investors. Examples include the successful restoration of the De La Warr Pavilion in Bexhill-on-Sea, the development of Tate St Ives, Bournemouth Square, the Whitby Abbey Heritage Centre and the Tern project in Morecambe. Shifting Sands aimed to raise design standards within the development industry, but also to highlight the power of local distinctiveness in the built environment, and to lay the important ground work for the further promotion of coastal heritage assets. The Turner Contemporary is an example of such top down models of regeneration using an iconic building.

THE TURNER CONTEMPORARY: A TOP-DOWN MODEL OF REGENERATION

> 'A lot has happened generally around regeneration, but culture has been the real driver for what's happened here' - *Victoria Pomerey, Director of the Turner Contemporary in Margate* (interview for BBC News, 13.12.2012)[2].

The Turner Contemporary gallery, the largest visual arts venue in Kent, opened in Margate in 2011, it was intended to act as a beachhead for the regeneration of the town. The name of the new gallery commemorates the association of the town with the noted landscape painter J. M. W. Turner, and it is located on the site of a boarding house where Turner often stayed. The 3 storey, 20 metres high gallery was designed by David Chipperfield, the £17.5 million cost funded by Kent County Council, Arts Council England (ACE) and the South East England Development Agency (SEEDA[3]). Turner Contemporary has worked in the town since 2001 through exhibitions in temporary locations, such as Mike Nelson's *Spanning Fort Road and Mansion Street: Between a Formula and a Code,* an installation within an empty industrial building. From 2005-2010 the organisation ran an exhibition programme in the former Marks and Spencer on Margate's High Street.

[2] See http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-kent-20721574.

[3] Cr. SEEDA (2005) *Coasting along: a study of business impacts and regeneration in south east coastal towns*. A report from the New Economic Foundation for the South East Enterprise Development Agency.

The Turner Contemporary building was designed to be open to the local community by locating art as close as possible to the front entrance and providing primary public spaces at ground level that are visible from the street. Its architect, David Chipperfield, however, is clear that his building is not about the regeneration of a depressed area, and he laments: "you can only sell architecture in this country if you present it as regeneration…you have to justify it" (cited in Heathcote, 2011).

The original idea to create a gallery or space to commemorate Turner's visits to Margate came from local resident and former Chairman of the Margate Civic Society, John Crofts, almost 20 years ago; but Crofts passed away before seeing the realisation of his dream:

> 'In 1998, the Leader of Kent County Council and representatives of Kent Artists met to discuss the idea. At the same time, plans were being developed to create a cultural quarter in Margate's Old Town as part of a wider East Kent Cultural Strategy – the idea of a Turner gallery that would stimulate Margate's culture-led regeneration was born.
>
> In the late 1990s Kent County Council offered to fund and support the building of a new landmark gallery (later joined by Arts Council England and the South East England Development Agency).
>
> In 2001, Turner Contemporary was officially established, our Director Victoria Pomery was appointed and Droit House on Margate's stone pier was opened as our exhibition space'.
> (Turner Contemporary Website: http://www.turnercontemporary.org/about/our-history)

Before the financial meltdown in 2008, English Heritage and Arts Council England had ring-fenced funds to look at new ways of reimagining regeneration, accepting that many projects had previously failed. Margate was chosen as a test site for £500,000 of this money and Margate Arts Creativity Heritage (MACH) was launched in 2010 to support the growth of the creative sector. MACH has created a series of initiatives including purchasing the Fort Road Hotel[4] to sell on for redevelopment as a boutique hotel.

English Heritage and Arts Council England could have pulled the plug on the gallery pricking the already inflating property bubble. With prices quickly deflating an opportunity would have arose to buy up numerous parades of housing and retail stock for conversion into studios, art hubs and low cost retail spaces. Then using an artist residency programme the 'supply side conditions' that English Heritage have spoken of could have been met. There are relatively few artist studios around the Tate Modern in London, the Guggenheim in Bilbao or the Taiwan Contemporary Arts Museum in Taipei, the production and consumption of art are located in separate spheres. The Turner Contemporary could have done something different. They didn't.

[4] http://www.thisiskent.co.uk/Iconic-Margate-building-demolished-council-fails-buyer/story-11982092-detail/story.html

Before the opening of the Turner, opinion was split across Thanet District Council on the worth of such an investment. Arguments across Margate were frequent between supporters and dissenters of the new gallery, the issue created a lot of volatility in the local and wider Kent community.

Despite the claims made by Kent County Council and the funders of the new Turner Contemporary about its ability to kick start the regeneration of Margate and be a driver of social inclusion, there are some strident critiques emerging:

> 'I was in on the first discussions about the Turner project some 12 years ago...I supported the original Turner plan to build a museum for Kent (the county does not have one) with galleries attached for short term art exhibitions etc. Unfortunately due to the then Government's matching funding plans Kent County Council had to go to the Arts Council which wanted contemporary works only...The current "contemporary" management at Turner has from the moment it started alienated locals by a steadfast refusal to support local artists - they would say otherwise! I was told when asking for a week a year for local artists that "I do not want Sunday afternoon artists in an international gallery". I have myself been to the gallery and have been bitterly disappointed...There have obviously been some creative admissions figures published but for my own part the views fed back show that it is not helping regenerate the town but I would be pleased if proved wrong....I have seen this nation-wide and it's a complete waste of public money, which we no longer have' (Michael Wheatley-Ward, Fellow of the Royal Society for Arts, personal correspondence[5]).

If this is the case what is the evidence on the success of art-led regeneration?

ART-LED REGENERATION: THE EVIDENCE BASE

The evidence on the success of art-led regeneration is poor (see Hewitt, 2011; Lees and Melhuish, 2013). The instrumental role of the arts in solving social problems was justified throughout the 1980s and 1990s on economic grounds. It was argued that 'creative cities' are good for business, attracting inward investment and tourism (eg. Myerscough, 1988; BAAA, 1989; Arts Council, 1989; Wynne, 1992; Bianchini and Landry, 1994; Selwood, 1994; Landry et al., 1996). Myerscough's (1988) seminal study for the Policy Studies Institute demonstrated, through the use of a multiplier ('second' round impacts of investment), that direct spending on the arts led to spending in other sectors of the economy, which in turn enhanced wealth and job creation, and attracted companies. He claimed that for every job in an arts organization 2.8, 2.7 and 1.8 further jobs were attributable to the arts in Merseyside, Glasgow and Ipswich respectively. Soon post-industrial cities became laboratories for state-sponsored, private-sector-led investment and redevelopment focused around arts and cultural strategies. The 'creative classes' themselves were seen to revitalize economies through their boho lifestyles, values, and consumption patterns (Florida 2002), which were seen to act as a magnet for new businesses. New Labour's promotion of the

[5] Michael Wheatley-Ward has stated 'my basic views are printable and written under a "Without prejudice basis"' .

concept of 'Creative Britain' or 'Cool Britannia' was built on these premises, continuing a line of development started under Thatcher.

New Labour's agenda for arts projects and participation as part of its social inclusion strategies expanded the economic justification, in the sense that arts and cultural projects were promoted as good for the economy because they helped to draw marginalized people back into mainstream productive society, create jobs, and regenerate rundown, marginalised areas, saving money which otherwise would be directed into dealing with social/ health problems. The arts represented a low-cost approach to those issues (Matarasso, 1997; DCMS, 1999b; ODPM, 1999; DCMS, 2002).

New Labour's position on these issues was strongly influenced by the work of Comedia and particularly Matarasso's work in the mid-1990s, especially his *Use or Ornament? (*1997) which was recognized as the first large-scale attempt to reflect the real experiences of those involved in arts projects. The latter criticized the arts sector's embrace of an economic case for public funding, and the Arts Council's support for a Performance Indicator approach, arguing that the real purpose of the arts was 'to contribute to a stable, confident and creative society', not to create wealth. As Merli (2002) noted, the study subsequently 'played an important role in establishing a near-consensus in Britain' about the role of the arts in social inclusion. Merli (2002) critiqued the implicit notion of social change which did nothing to suggest how structural conditions which cause social exclusion might be addressed. Belfiore (2002) also pointed to the fact that long-term impacts on social cohesion or wellbeing were not monitored over any period of time, and that the questionnaire-generated data was often incomplete or inconclusive, thus rendering dubious the possibility of any generalized conclusions. Nevertheless, Matarasso went on to work with DCMS and QUEST (Quality Efficiency and Standards Team) on its Key Performance Indicators and the Arts Council based its response to Policy Action Team (PAT) 10 on the understandings presented in his work.

In another detailed review of the evidence Evans and Shaw (2004:28) noted that 'it is still a new field and much of the literature falls into the category of advocacy and promotion… researchers are still working out what to measure and how to measure it. These decisions are made by researchers and those who commission them, according to the context in which they are working'. Much of Evans and Shaw's review was echoed in that of Ruiz (2004) for the Scottish Executive, who concluded that 'Social impact is not only difficult to define, it is also difficult to measure in a 'hard', robust way, and although quantitative methods are necessary to measure the extent of social impact across a particular population, 'softer' qualitative research methods are required to explore the type and depth of social impact on individuals and communities'. Despite the conclusion that evidence gatherers need longer term, longitudinal, more detailed and ethnographic studies of the impact of art on regeneration and social inclusion (see Lees and Melhuish, 2013) government has already begun to step back towards the old-established economic valuation approach to culture, as a basis for justification of expenditure on arts projects. For example O'Brien's (2010) report to the DCMS, *Measuring the value of culture*, focuses 'on the need for valuation methods that fit the *Green Book's* view of value, ie. methods for measuring economic value' (p 39). The Moonbow Jakes intervention was an attempt at a more

qualitative, bottom-up ethnographic view of arts-led regeneration in Margate, a project that allowed people to enter at their own discretion and decide themselves how best to respond.

MOONBOW JAKES CAFÉ AND LIDO NIGHTCLUB INTERVENTION: REFLECTIONS FROM THE BOTTOM UP

'1st July
God bless the Turner in its awkward, anal ways.
This place is the antithesis to the Turner
Contemporary, the true ethos of Margate bubbling through.
God bless Margate'.
Visitor book Moonbow Jakes 2011

'I WENT TO THE TURNER AND SPENT
A PLEASANT HOUR
I WENT TO MOONBOW JAKES AND
SPENT THE WHOLE SUMMER'
Visitor book Moonbow Jakes 2011

FIGURE 2 MOONBOW JAKES

In the summer of 2011 a derelict greasy spoon cafe at 18 Cliff Terrace in Cliftonville, Margate, situated in a small parade that had not traded in any real sense for over 5 years, facing the sea and overlooking the enormous, virtually derelict, entertainment complex opposite - the Lido - was converted into a cafe-bar and performance space approximately 300m metres from the Turner Contemporary (see Figure 2) and later moved into the Lido itself for the final weeks of the project. The intervention came about through a completely random conversation between the café freeholder, Kelvin Quinn, and the creator John McKiernan. Kelvin was removing everything from the café and planned to paint the space white to create a gallery. At the time of the conversation, this appeared to be in line with the belief that there was an underling creative community bubbling away unseen but it later

became apparent this was purely an entrepreneurial act, a way of renting out the premises on the back of the new Turner gallery. John McKiernan wanted to represent the change that was taking place following investment in the Turner Contemporary and to reflect how local people reacted to this new public building. This tallied with Lees's earlier research into how local people react to new public buildings designed to act as beachheads for gentrification (see Lees, 2001). Lees has also written about processes of gentrification (Lees, Slater and Wyly, 2008).

Having created and run a successful coffee bar chain in South London for over decade, McKiernan wanted to use this experience to test out some previously held theories by creating a performance café intervention. McKiernan had observed the physical environmental changes in Southwark and East London during the 1990s and 2000s, which had fundamentally transformed the fabric of the existing communities, not always in a positive way. He related strongly with Richard Lloyd's book, *Neo Bohemia: Art and Commerce in the Post Industrial City*, which explored the changes that took place in Chicago's Wicker Park district during the 1980/90s and how profit-focused creative businesses were attracted to the area's perceived bohemia lifestyle. McKiernan mused on how regeneration policy during the 1990/2000s looked to use the arts as a form of fertiliser, to grow creative businesses and attract inward investment by profit making companies locating to deprived areas where many artists lived and worked. Yet, as Lloyd captures in his book, despite companies clearly benefiting from the distinctness of artists and the interweaving community that surrounds them, they often do little or nothing to assist in maintaining the social fabric.

> 'The theory of neo-bohemia invites us to rethink in ways the interrelations of lived space, subjectivity, and instrumental labour in the contemporary period of globalised capitalism and flexible accumulation.' (Lloyd, 2006, 246)

For McKiernan, policy makers either appear only able to understand wealth creation through an economic lens, thus removing the "creative" distinction that is often liberally espoused, or see the destroying of the originating fabric as the price of progress.

The former cafe was given a facelift to create a venue for exhibitions and live performances. The existing leather covered booth seating was scrubbed clean and the grease caked floor washed for three continuous days before shoes no longer stuck to it. The intention was to continue to clean the space over the period of the intervention as a representation of regeneration (see Figure 3). The first exhibition on opening was Saif Osmani's paintings of newspaper images reporting Gandhi's visit to London in 1931. The newspapers of the time attempted, in Osmani's view, to hide the fact that many people in the part of East London where Gandhi stayed lived in slums. The photos printed were of rooftops without ever showing the streets. Osmani's paintings seemed oddly apt as in preparing to set up the project McKiernan found that most local people around Thanet seemed to want to wash away any talk of this particular part of Cliftonville/Margate.

> 'I Love this place
> At last, the true spirit of Margate and Cliftonville
> is being acknowledged. The re-generation through art

by the Turner Gallery & the old town is admireable
but no point if the "SPIRIT" of art is non-apparent.
This pop up cafe/exhibition space is a real grassroots,
down to earth enterprise and is providing a
home to the Spirit of Art.
Nurturing and definitively not Bourgouise'.
Visitor book Moonbow Jakes 2011

Other activities in the cafe included international concert pianist Julian Jacobson playing a free Beethoven recital, poets sharing their work and impromptu readings around the theme of displacement. Live events took place around the streets - there was children's disco, organised by themselves, in the Lido with over 100 local kids dancing a Saturday afternoon away and various other live events that encouraged people to join in by making mosaic hearts to cupcakes. Before starting the Margate intervention McKiernan wrote the following on the Platform-7 website:

> 'Running from June to September 2011, the space will become a representation of change that often takes place following art-led regeneration and will attempt to become reflective of the way local people view and interact with this change. The ward in which the café is located is one of the most deprived in the UK. Unemployment is above the national average and the area has a large overseas population. Operating as a function café-bar the intention is to use live performance and art exhibitions to explore differing aspects of the physical, emotional, political and communal change that takes place in an area designated for regeneration. The space will engage with the ideas of shifting demographics, culinary tastes, housing stock and commercial investment, affordability, change, resistance, displacement, community, culturalism, memory and nostalgia. It is accepted that by creating this space, even for a short period of 3 months, it will be embedding itself within the narrative and the ripples will be a disruption to the order of any change already taking place. In an attempt at mitigation the project will become user dependent over the period with customers, viewers, artists and commentators influencing the direction of the space'.

FIGURE 3 INSIDE MOONBOW JAKES

In essence McKiernan performed the ethnographic research that Lees has argued for.

It was envisaged that local people would begin to take a prominent role shaping the space with McKiernan quietly fading into the background. Initially this looked positive with several locals (that is Thanetians) becoming involved, yet it became immediately apparent that this was an unrealistic expectation, quickly followed by people, quite literally, disappearing. Throughout the project there was constant flow in and out of local people. Trust seemed in short supply in Thanet with suspicion and aspersions a constant. In contrast, those who lived on the immediate roads nearby quickly became loyal to the project, many embracing the odd adventure that suddenly appeared in their derelict street, despite not being able to afford to buy even the cheapest item on the menu.

It became apparent that many Thanetians have a clear unease in trusting other people for a whole host of reasons, especially other Thanetians. Some of this mistrust surfaced in the comment books and was continuous in the conversation throughout the project. The local authority, Thanet District Council (or TDC as it were locally referred as), was loathed virtually unanimously. McKiernan found speaking to councillors a depressing affair, a lack of foresight or wider interests and a misplaced understanding of wider society, sucked away visionary dialogue. There have been many cases of corruption, self-serving and money 'vanishing' reported in the local press[6]. There were clearly many unscrupulous landlords who 'prey' on the vulnerable and less fortunate. McKiernan took up offers to visit people's homes and was shocked by the squalor often found. With rents sometimes equivalent to those found in London's Zone 2 it was clear that exploitation was taking place:

> 'The people are shouting for one thing and the council are throwing money the other way. And I didn't trust there was a solution until now'.
> *Visitor book Moonbow Jakes 2011*

Loyalty in this context was sticking with or completing a task or operation. From the beginning McKiernan was warned by local people of the flightiness of Thanetians, how they had a tendency to disappear. It was not until some way into the intervention that he could understand these warnings. Someone would arrive to become involved and say they would be back in 20 minutes and never be seen again. Although this happens everywhere it was the consistency that made it fascinating. It is important to point out that the success of the intervention was in large part down to local people coming to the aid of the project when something was needed, eg. when a freezer broke down a local shop sent over a spare to use an hour later. It was the contradiction in one moment helping, the next moment disappearing, that became crucial to an overall understanding some of the problems in Thanet as perceived by McKiernan.

> 'Its addictive coming back again and again. Wish the alternative reality could go on to build unity within our community'.
> *Visitor book Moonbow Jakes 2011*

[6] http://www.thisiskent.co.uk/Sub-head/story-12827053-detail/story.html

Unity did exist within the community on the surface but beneath the skin there were many competing entities that rendered the area leaderless. And a leader was what many seemed to be desperate for, someone who could bring various parties and factions together and create a cohesive plan to take Thanet forward. The 'Thanet They' was a term coined by McKiernan after a few weeks into the intervention. It came from the constant reference to 'they should do this', 'they should do that'. McKiernan made a point of always specifically asking who 'they' were when the word was used. But trying to pin down who 'they' were proved very difficult, it was always a vague response, sometimes being the district council or the government, sometimes some person unknown who may have had some connection at some point to the complaint being made. Although visitors and people from outside Thanet also used 'they' occasionally it was the intensity and quantity of the use of the word by Thanetians that was intriguing.

The 'Thanet They' fed into a wider issue of dependency. There are a vast amount of residents in the location of the café who depend on the state for help. Throughout the project it was clear that literacy and basic verbal communication were difficult for large numbers of people. There was the large overseas population for whom English was a foreign language, and the scale of semi-illiteracy amongst the British born residents was quite disturbing. Clearly intelligent people felt 'stupid', inferior and often intimidated by the lack of ability to read and write. In the many hundreds of conversations over the 13 weeks it was clear that poor writing and mathematical skills were a huge source of embarrassment and made many locals intimidated. McKiernan would encourage, gently push, people to write in the comments book despite their reservations on spelling and grammar, most were desperate to be heard and were surprisingly candid about themselves, impacts on their lives and how they deal with their situation. Yet the dependency culture was not limited to an educational 'underclass'. Dependency clearly ran all the way through the local society to developers, councillors and 'civic' people. Throughout the 13 weeks there was a continuous bemoaning of the need for the 'Government' to give more financial aid to Thanet. What was striking from the conversations within the café was that the money required was for physical infrastructure, improving housing stock, new buildings and attracting 'new people'; there was little or no mention of improving the human capital of those living in the area.

> 'The thing I most strongly
> Feel the "Moonbow Jakes" has
> Achieved is a feeling of belonging. A huge sense
> of community. A pinning of the people who loose
> something when you
> leave. But a seed planted
> of new beginning springing
> from a fun venture, a
> fun summertime family xxx'.
> *Visitor book Moonbow Jakes 2011*

Property developers, estate agents and landlords were a particularly interesting group who descended on the project as its popularity grew. There was a predisposition that the café

was the beginning of the 'renaissance' of the area and that it was a pioneer. Many landlords and developers, etc, became irritated with McKiernan as they were unable to work out why such a project would exist without a clear financial objective. The popularity of the café showed a 'masterstroke' in creating a business 'out of nothing', yet little thought appeared to be given to the ridiculously low prices for high quality products on offer. As a business, the price of drinks and food would be incapable of supporting such a venture long-term. These conversations brought into sharp contrast deeper issues concerning modern capitalism and the barriers to solving the present crisis within the system and finding solutions to making it more equitable. As with those he met whose mindsets were desperately entrenched with hopelessness at their situation, these conversations showed the opposite where money ruled all decision making and that little or no wider thinking was contemplated. The approach of every conversation ran into the other of John's coined phrases 'grabbing the dollar'.

'Elephant and Castle by the
Sea
And look what happened
There
Enjoy it while you can'.
Visitor book Moonbow Jakes 2011

McKiernan, like Lees, was struck on his arrival by the way that in many bars, restaurants, cafes, shops and other outlets in Margate there was a demand to pay immediately. Although paying up front is not unusual in other parts of the UK, or the world, it was the sense of 'demand' that was striking. Before the café project began the weather was glorious and many friends joined McKiernan for days and weekends by the sea and to see the new Turner Gallery. They were bemused, as were Lees and McKiernan, and occasionally surprised, to be asked to pay in advance for a meal/drink in a café/restaurant before the food or service. Too often the product supplied was inferior to what one would normally pay for the price. Many of the bars asked for payment before pouring pints or making drinks, rare in the UK.

There was also a consistency in comments from visitors and those who had moved to Margate on the demand in advance for poor quality service or goods. 'Grabbing the dollar' as soon as possible felt desperate. No major retail chain would countenance a till operative holding out their hand as a person reaches for their purse, it would be seen as rude and maybe aggressive. In Margate, it was/is normal. In return, the quality of service in many aspects was/is poor. There was a sense of doing the minimum for maximum return. For McKiernan, it was a reminder of the service and quality found in many of the state run restaurant and shops in Cuba in the 1990s.

When people from further afield entered the Moonbow café there was a very clear distinction in how they interacted with the project. Londoners and other tourists engaged with the intervention and wanted to know more about Cliftonville and the Lido. Although many commented on the state of the area few felt threatened or nervous. People from other areas of Thanet on the other hand were reluctant to enter the café, look at or participate in the art. It became abundantly clear as time passed that there was

nervousness to the project, the area and the people from other Thanetians. And it was this nervousness that was the most striking thing about the project. What appears to be lacking in Thanet is a sense of confidence among the population. Even among councillors and 'officials' the lack of confidence appeared to manifest itself in the appearance of arrogance or rudeness. McKiernan all too often witnessed people in 'official' positions with aggressive tones and posturing.

Having grown up in Peckham in the 1970s, McKiernan had personal experience of racism and aggression towards minorities by the police and local people, as did Lees growing up in Manchester in the 1980s. What was experienced in Cliftonville during the summer of 2011 was akin to this, although colour of skin was not the prime motivator, it appeared, of racist manner, it was more nuanced and complex. Police regularly and randomly stopped young people and some officers carried an air of menace. On several occasions officers would make derogatory reference to the 'Kosovans' without thinking that others might have an alternative view. The main ire of aggression, however, was towards Eastern Europeans; racism was not limited to the indigenous versus new arrivals. There were also huge racial/cultural issues amongst the immigrant communities themselves. For example, there was an almost unanimous adult dislike for the Roma community from all other sections (children under 11 appeared less bothered by ethnic background). The Roma did not appear to help the situation by not learning or refusing to learn English. Although gang culture was a real possibility from what was observed, it seems that the population is too transient for serious issues to arise.

The thing most frustrating to endure was the constant nostalgia peddled to justify much that has been observed above. 'The Foreigner' was the kicking boy for many of the ills, it was their fault that Margate was as it is. People reminisced in lyrical terms about how Margate was a town of abundance even if the eye witness accounts did not bear this out. Margate definitely had better days but it was the area of Cliftonville that was the town of abundance with the wider Margate feeding off the crumbs as people ferried between the train station and their summer pads or hotels. Indeed, it became apparent that nostalgia has blighted the area and created ardent camps on how the area should be seen and move forward. Most of the 'opinion' was based on hearsay, vague melancholic memories, myth and wishing for some unrealised past.

As people began to understand the idea behind the Moonbow Jakes project they began to open up. What was clear from the conversations, and the comment book, was that there was a feeling of abandonment in Cliftonville. Many felt that the council in particular, neglected the area. Yet, despite the many complaints, the people living within the immediate vicinity remained very positive despite obvious financial hardship. There was a strong sense of community on the surface and people did honestly appear to be looking out for one another. Only when money entered the discussion did the community falter. Tensions did exist between groups but not to the extent witnessed elsewhere and considering the hardship and cramped living many endured. Across the board a deep held resentment was voiced towards TDC, there were accusations of corruption and anger at unfulfilled promises. McKiernan's own experiences dealing with the council, confirmed many of the comments. Yet there were also many council officials who obviously cared for

the area and its people, but were hindered by a lack of policy, coherent strategies or conjoined thinking. The council seemed very distant from the people it served.

> 'Was interesting to discover this project which is asking questions about the location of the Turner Gallery in Margate. Asking questions about power and culture/art is very important particularly at the moment when we are "all in it together" (Not!).
> *Visitor book Moonbow Jakes 2011*

CONCLUSION: COASTAL REGENERATION LIMITED?

> 'I just hope that Margate doesn't become so trendy that people have to move away because property prices get too high. But I don't feel that will happen!'
> *Visitor book Moonbow Jakes 2011*

In 2011 the Turner Contemporary was awarded the 'Best Use of Arts & Culture' at the Regeneration and Renewal Awards, having been nominated by the South East England Development Agency, who were key funders of the building. The Turner sells its success in its figures about the numbers of socio-economically deprived people it has attracted through its doors to see its art, and in so doing claims to being *improving the self-confidence of poor locals:* (see the Director Victoria Pomery - http://www.culture24.org.uk/art/art383025). The marketing of the Turner has been exceptional. Grand claims and exaggeration expound. But there is a clear disjunction with what was being claimed during the summer/autumn of 2011 and what was being observed on the ground in Moonbow Jakes Cafe and Lido Nightclub intervention.

The people most singing the praises of the gallery were day-trippers and those with a financial interest in promoting Margate. Many people had recently bought, or were visiting with intention to buy, property in the area off the back of the gallery. They found their way to the Moonbow project in hope of ascertaining a better knowledge of whether this was a place where they would see their investment grow. It was clear that the jury was out on the potential success of the gallery and most of those looking to buy were either investors or those unable to purchase homes in wealthier areas. For those who grew up in Margate and Cliftonville, and among those who have truly made the area home, there was a genuine hope the gallery would bring prosperity, possible work opportunities and improve the built environment.

There is some evidence that the Turner has attracted other regeneration monies, for example, retail guru Mary Portas designated Margate one of her 27 'Portas pilot' areas to receive part of a £1.2m pot of government cash to rejuvenate its high street. And Wayne Hemmingway was recently announced as the new designer of a £10m heritage park on the Dreamland theme park site paid for by TDC. But here again there is plenty of evidence of the community fracturing and of these divisions damaging progress[7]. And it is still questionable whether focusing on the mythical past, as both Portas and Dreamland do,

[7] http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/coathangers-at-dawn-mary-portas-rocked-by-margate-walkout-8079568.html

harking back to a 'better time', is conducive to the regeneration being led by a modern art gallery and the creation of a future looking artist-led economy?

The 'Turner effect' has led to growing property speculation. This is creating major problems for the local authority in terms of improving the area as landlords sit on their property assets with little or no incentive to keep up even basic maintenance. Many streets have property that is unfit for habitation, overcrowding remains a huge issue, and there is an air of despondency. And, ironically, filthy streets, poorly maintained by the local authority enhance the view of many in Thanet that Cliftonville/Margate is a write off and does not deserve its large share of the ever-dwindling local public purse.

The poet T.S.Eliot visited Margate in 1921, he later wrote in his poem *The Waste Land*: 'On Margate sands, I can connect nothing with nothing'. It is perhaps too soon to argue definitively that The Turner Contemporary will connect nothing with nothing, will not be a catalyst for social inclusion and regeneration in Margate but the evidence (despite the property speculation) already points in that direction. The fact that Thanet's council budget has been particularly hard hit by recent government cuts (they are facing larger cuts than any other council in Kent) is especially problematic given the poor and vulnerable community therein. The location of Margate is a perennial issue, the improved rail links are still expensive, indirect and the journey time is relatively long (the quickest route from London is an hour and a half from St. Pancras). This puts off both upper/middle income commuters and tourists alike. English Heritage's hopes that 'providing the supply-side conditions in which cultural and creative industries thrive' is implausible in an area where large swathes have little or no mobile phone signal and exceptionally low broadband width. There is no Wifi infrastructure, cafes and bars lack any incentive to invest and there is a lack of public spaces where creative people can mix and potentially work together. Questions need asking as to why the Turner did not have such spaces built into its design? The poorly considered Clore Learning Studio in the Turner cannot be deemed a 'creative hub space' in any manner.

Significantly there is no evidence to support the Turner's claims in the quotation above that they have improved the self-confidence of poor locals. The new Turner Contemporary has not connected with the local, socially excluded populations. The large grey imposing wall enclosing the gallery from the main road, Fort Hill, does little to encourage in people who already find art intimidating. Drawing people into the Moonbow café proved difficult enough, even when there was clear curiosity and gentle persuasion from McKiernan. Little more than lip service has been given to the immediate local population in Cliftonville, Lees and McKiernan found more publicity about gallery events and exhibitions scattered around London than they ever saw in Cliftonville. They cannot recall seeing any marketing for the gallery in the area.

The question remains – how will the Turner Contemporary regenerate Margate, how will it engage the local community, instil confidence in it, raise aspirations, and act as a catalyst for social inclusion and social cohesion?

We believe that the arts can have a positive effect on local communities, as Matarasso (1997) argues in *Use or Ornament* :

> ‘Individual benefits translate into wider social impact by building the confidence of minority and marginalised groups, promoting contact and contributing to social cohesion. New skills and confidence can be empowering as community groups become more (and more equitably) involved in local affairs. Arts projects can strengthen people’s commitment to places and their engagement in tackling problems, especially in the context of urban regeneration’ (p.85).

A significant number of local people drawn into the Moonbow Jakes Café and Lido Nightclub intervention were from marginalised groups suffering depression, shyness, poor education, disability, low self-esteem and an overall lack of confidence. But this lack of confidence did not stifle creativity, especially among the most disenfranchised, who required it to cope with surviving the tribulations that come with being poor. Q q

> ‘If art is a form of philosophy then access to it as a space for discourse should be open to all. This is completely different from an image of culture which is incapable of taking the necessary risk, making revolt in order to question the symbolic order we are subject to. Reclaiming space to ask questions, find out what we really have in common, and affirm emerging difference is a really important thing to do right now. I think the more we think about this the more work will mutate to become a medium for real questioning, not cultural ornament, just reflecting an unquestioned hierarchy.
> Anyway good luck’.
> *Visitor book Moonbow Jakes 2011*

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