Radical Sustainability in Urban Environments

Exploring the need for innovation in urban greening.

A critical analysis of the rise of 'radical sustainability' in the context of urban green infrastructure, the research project explores current policy in urban greening practices, methodologies, and looks at a current model which is operational in Salford, Greater Manchester, England. The multidisciplinary team made up of an urban geographer, a contextual studies scholar, and an illustrator, also present a visual methodology framework which could be replicated in future studies.



Fig. 1 Illustration of the visitor and garden centre (Source: Adelina Court, 2019)





Fig. 2 Illustration of the community growing raised beds. (Source: Adelina Court, 2019)











Fig. 3 Illustration of the on-car park farmer's market. (Source: Adelina Court, 2019)

Fig. 4 Illustration of the community growing raised beds. (Source: Adelina Court, 2019)



Fig. 6

Illustrative diagram showing the process of generating the visuals: site visit, informal interview, and observational sketching (1), interpretation of sketches against existing planning documents and photos (2), and generation of final visuals, respectively (3). (Source: Adelina Court, 2019)

In the supporting paper the authors have discussed the ways in which radical urban food growing in cities can be facilitated. Having begun with an overview of the practice, we reviewed current policy tools and discussed the current scenarios facing UA, with special consideration given to the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. This paper will now present an urban farming and social enterprise project set up in the heart of one of the region's most deprived areas. The case study aims to highlight and reflect on the use of an observational methodology in geography paving the way for an observational technique which may help to provide a greater sense of place for the project in case.

Background and Objectives

Incredible Education CIC are 'a social enterprise specialising in health and wellbeing programmes that are delivered through horticulture and forest school activities' (Incredible Edible CIC, 2017). Having built on successful forest school and horticulture initiatives such as 'We Dig Salford', 'Oakwood Academy Horticulture' and other forest school initiatives across Salford, the enterprise has identified the Cleavleys Plant Nursery as a suitable location for a food growing and forest school project. The proposed 'Cleavleys Plant Nursery' site is situated adjacent to the eponymous Cleavleys Running Track in Winton, Eccles – a town in the metropolitan borough of Salford, UK.

The proposed site for the Cleavleys Plant Nursery envisages horticulture education facilities, a community growing site, a community garden centre and café, and integrated workshops and classrooms within the framework of Forest School education. The objective of the project is to assess observational hand-drawing as a tool to convey information in human geography, the concept of sketching as 'concentrated seeing' (Heath et Al, 2018), and, ultimately, its value in securing funding for the Cleavleys scheme.

overgrown section has only been possible via drone footage captured by the site management. Access on the day of visit was possible via the footpath adjacent to Worsley Brook which snakes around the perimeter of the site. During the hour-long visit which served the role of a field research exercise, immediate sketches generated on an iPad Pro, photographs, and audio data (informal interview with site manager) were collected. During the visit, a baseline sketch of the site was drawn up digitally by using a pre-supplied technical plan of the site (see Fig.5); in addition, thumbnail sketches in each approximate location were completed to serve as an aide-memoir for the further stages of visual development. In the initial field observation phase, the two initial steps of generating visuals involved collecting audio and visual information along with sketching in the presence of site management. While precedent photographs had been provided by the site management, the emphasis was on interpreting the sketches and audio information which constituted a natural, subjective, and immediate narrative of the site's potential.

Following the site visit, the information collected was collated and drawn up by corroborating information from the thumbnail sketches, audio, and video recordings. Figure 6 illustrates this by a three-stage process, from field observation through to the completion of visuals.



Fig. 5 Overview of site with artist's own notes made during site visit. (Plan Source: Urban Vision, 2018)

Methodology

Observational drawing is a visualisation method which has been used extensively in physical geography, sciences, archaeology, and architecture as a tool for field investigation (McMurrough, 2015 cited in Heath et. Al, 2018). Whilst spaces only exist through representation (words, images, or data), the predominance of text-only representation – as opposed to visual methods - has been obvious in the field of geographical studies. The act of drawing in situ has been missing from the arsenal of observational methods, despite it instinctively lending itself to the study of geography and its inherent physicality. There have been practices strongly in favour of hand-drawn visualisation in architecture - notably in the work of Burch (2014) - where sketching as a method has been taken to the level of a niche skill. The site visit conducted by the illustrated (Adelina Court) on the 1st of May 2019 aimed to establish an understanding of the scheme and initiate interaction between the artist and the site manager. The current site comprises of a car park and a triangular area which is heavily overgrown with large trees and wild grass, following years of neglect. The overgrown area had previously been a garden centre which closed indefinitely in 1992. Ever since, there has been no on-site maintenance and as such, observation of much of the

Results

To date, the site has been cleared and initial ground preparations have enabled a forest school and associated facilities to be built (see figure 7). In doing so, lan has created an urban haven to facilitate social prescription, the selling of produce and other activities. Every Thursday, the site is opened to the public who can purchase fresh vegetables and fruit at discounted prices. With the area being in a deprived part of Salford and health rated as poor in the area, such a service provides much needed access to fresh food; as St Clair et al (2020) argue, urban agriculture can have the greatest impact in areas which rate poorly in terms of their fresh produce intake. The impact of the visuals on the site's development has been predominantly felt in the funding stage. Their use in promotional material (featured on the project website landing page) has been instrumental in linking the early vision for the site to the progress. Due to the pandemic and inevitable lockdown, it has not been possible to gather data to show the real impact and therefore, this area of the project is ongoing.



Figure 7: the forest school on the site (Source: Michael Hardman, 2020)

References

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