

Dome Alone . . .

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The article is a critique of the approach to the project which ignores its strategic planning context. This is pursued through analysing the transport problems and the project's relationship to the surrounding community.

London's Millennium Dome on the Greenwich peninsula is the home for Britain's most important millennium festival. It is intended to 'demonstrate to the world the country's creativity and ingenuity' (House of Commons, 1997a, p.xxix). During its construction the Dome was described as the largest development project in Europe. However, despite its importance, it has been built as an isolated project, divorced from any strategic planning context. As this article will show, this lack of contextual thinking led to considerable difficulties and lost opportunities. Two issues are highlighted for discussion to demonstrate the limitations of the project's approach: its accessibility and its legacy. The article will explore transport provision for the large number of visitors to the Dome during the festivities and secondly, the procedure for determining the future use of the site beyond the year 2000.

The Dome project may appear to be an exceptional and unusual example of urban development. However this is not the case. It is illustrative of transformations that are taking place in cities throughout the world. We can expect further projects of a similar kind in London in the future, as already evidenced by the proposed Wembley stadium redevelopment. Such projects are the result of global economic and cultural changes and have been much discussed in the literature. In the post-industrial city economic survival depends upon growth in the service sector. Office developments have led this process and 'world cities' have captured the inflow of investment into the 'command centres' of the new globalized economy (Sassen, 1991). They have achieved this through the provision of developments such as Battery Park (Fainstein, 1994), Canary Wharf (Brownill, 1990) and the Tokyo Waterfront (Seguchi and Malone, 1996). However urban managers have been keen to exploit other opportunities and find niche markets for their particular cities (Harvey, 1989). As a result there has been an influx of projects oriented to other perceived growth areas in the economy. Tourism, defined as trips into a city whether for business or pleasure, has been a major growth area (Judd and Fainstein, 1999) and is linked to the development of Trade Centres, conference facilities and hotels. The orientation towards tourism encourages the idea of cities as centres of entertainment. The effect of this can be seen in the dramatic growth of Casino complexes in the US and Australia and the almost desperate measures taken by some US cities to develop new Sports Stadiums to attract top teams (Euchner, 1999). The media industry has been showing increasing interest in urban development as epitomized by the redevelopment of New York's Times Square, and it has been suggested that cities are being treated as theme parks as the global entertainment business turns its attention to the potential of existing cities (Judd, 1999). This process has been described as turning many US inner urban areas into 'Fantasy Cities' (Hannigan, 1998). Many of these new projects are located in areas of urban decline, such as old industrial areas or inner cities, and thus are seen as having a role in urban regeneration. The Dome project fits into this trend towards leisure-oriented development. It seeks to attract large numbers of visitors to its spectacular entertainment experience, located on an old industrial stretch of the Thames riverside.

The competitive ethos among urban managers, responding to what they see as the imperatives of globalization, fuels the emphasis on such projects (Hall and Hubbard, 1998). Marketing 'visions' are produced to sell the attractiveness of their cities (Ashworth and Voogd, 1990; Philo and Kearns, 1993; Gold and Ward, 1994). Central to these 'visions' is the projection of a dynamic image, often countering a detrimental industrial past. The use of sports events, cultural festivals and architectural icons are common features in this re-orientation. Thus Barcelona was able to turn the Olympic Games to its advantage in shifting this industrial city into a service economy with a high profile in urban tourism. Glasgow utilized the European City of Culture designation to promote the liveliness of the city while, more recently, another industrial city, Bilbao, has successfully attracted attention through the architecturally dramatic Guggenheim Museum. However it is not only old industrial centres that feel the need to promote themselves. London during the 1990s became increasingly concerned about losing its competitive advantage to other European cities. In the introduction to a central government policy document, the Secretary of State for the Environment warns that London is under pressure from rival cities such as Paris, Frankfurt, Barcelona and Berlin who are 'fighting harder than ever to attract investment and business opportunities' (Government Office for London, 1996, p.3). The Dome project clearly plays a part in London's promotion. It has been continually referred to by politicians as a vehicle for placing London at the forefront of world attention during 2000. The London Docklands Development Corporation said 'the New Millennium Experience will support and confirm East London's new role as a dynamic, progressive and enterprising force in London, helping to position the Capital city at the forefront of its rivals in Europe and elsewhere' (House of Commons, 1997b, p.136). Similarly the Corporation of London sees the Dome as a 'unique marketing tool for the promotion of the UK in the global marketplace, both in terms of tourism and as a location for inward investment' (ibid. p.121).

However this focus on image creation and the development of dramatic projects carries with it certain problems. Two aspects will be highlighted here. First is the problem of integrating such projects into the surrounding community. There is the danger that they will form isolated islands of wealth and activity which do not relate to the needs of the local area. Indeed they often create additional difficulties for the adjacent community. Judd has called this isolation the 'bubble' effect (Judd, 1999). The second problem is that the intensity of competition demands quick implementation of the projects. Undemocratic procedures are often employed to bypass any potential opposition and prevent delays. This also has the possible effect of alienating the local community. The story of the Dome again illustrates this general pattern - many questions have been raised over the lack of sufficient consideration of its impact on the local community. The manner in which decisions have been taken in the implementation of the Dome has raised considerable concern (House of Commons 1997a, pp. xxv - xxviii).

The degree to which the Dome project exhibits these inherent tendencies towards both geographic and political isolation will be explored. However the political context of the project raises some additional points of interest. The advent of a New Labour government, with an ideology that stresses greater local democracy, community integration and policy co-ordination, opens up a debate over whether the problems exhibited by the Dome project can be overcome in the future. Although the project was conceived under the Conservative Party government of Mr Major, the Labour Party under Tony Blair won the British election in 1997 with a large majority. This brought to an end eighteen years of Conservative Party rule and heralded the possibility of a new dawn in British politics. The conciliatory, consensus approach of New Labour contrasted sharply with the previous conflictual stance of

Thatcherism. This new ideological framework seemed to provide an opportunity for a more co-ordinated, inclusionary, and longer term approach to decision-making. However, once the new government had decided to continue with the Dome project, the need for speedy implementation gave them little time to develop this new approach. Nevertheless an analysis of the project provides important lessons for the new government. It is suggested that one conclusion from the Dome experience is that New Labour has a tough task ahead to translate the new rhetoric into practice. Their ideology contains ambiguity and does not yet provide clear guidelines for such major development projects. London returns to city-wide government for the first time since 1986 when the new Greater London Authority becomes operational on July 3rd 2000. It will be interesting to watch how this new institutional structure copes with the difficulties and dilemmas demonstrated in the story of the Dome.

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