Representing the "Cities of Difference"
Narratives, perceptions and policies in multi-ethnic environments

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The paper is based on a case-study carried out in the Dalston area in London that is part of a broader work aimed at challenging social mixing policies – a mainstream approach to face multi-ethnic environments' problems. Some concepts used by literature that has rediscovered the potentialities of "segregated" places are mobilized to explore the distinction between the areas' "internal" and "external" perceptions and representations. As underlined by policy analysis and social sciences, descriptions and problems' framing are linked with existing tools that decision makers may mobilize to cope with them. Mixing policies rely on narratives that reflect the external perceptions of multi-ethnic neighbourhoods, based on the problematic aspects of "concentration" of "different" groups in some areas. These narratives are fostered by public debate, but research as well has used a slippery concept as concentration.
A wide range of literature has criticized mixing initiatives arguing that policy agendas should be revised: the Dalston case is used to explore if and how the researchers' ways of looking at multi-ethnic settlements could be reframed.

Keywords: Representation, Cities of difference, Dalston (East London)

1. Introduction

The paper is based on a case-study carried out in the Dalston area in London that is part of a broader work aimed at challenging *social mixing policies* – a mainstream approach to multi-ethnic environments' with a particular attention to segregation and "problematic" groups' *concentration* (Arthurson K. 2012).

Despite the different patterns of concentration that characterize the different countries, a number of common aspects in conceptualizing and pursuing mixing objectives could be underlined. In particular, social and functional mix are presented as interrelated objectives, and policies aimed at "stimulating diversity" should involve housing, retail business, services and public spaces (Demaris R., Germain A., Baque M.E., Bridge G., Fijalkow Y., Slater T., 2012). In many countries mixing objectives have mainly resulted in policies aimed at promoting mixed tenure, housing price level mix, or building type mix, to attract middle-class residents in deprived and problematic areas (Bolt G., 2009).

Social mix is considered as a key factor to enhance individual and groups' opportunities for upward social mobility for three reasons (Briata P., 2012):

- a *local development* perspective – as social mix may be helpful to change the perception of neighbourhoods "from outside", counteracting stigmatization, attracting new inhabitants, and stimulating new socio-economic opportunities for people living "inside" these places;
- a *social upgrading* perspective – related to the supposed "civilizing" influence of wealthier residents, whose presence could motivate problematic individuals and groups, thanks to the contacts with role models from a different socio-economic background;
- a *social cohesion* perspective – as the exposure to "the other" can lead to mutual understanding, learning, tolerance.

A growing body of literature has critically analysed these perspectives focussing on policy *principles* and *outcomes*. A major critical view sees these initiatives as strategies to change the neighbourhoods' image in the broader cities' contexts, establishing a relationship with new development scenarios of post-industrial urban areas, reading mixing policies as forms of public-led gentrification, carrying with them significant threats of displacement for the weaker groups (Lees L., Slater T., Wyly E. (eds.), 2008).

Despite this, mixing policies still remain the main form of intervention in segregated areas, and have progressively been extended to places where social, ethnic and economic mix could already be found [2]. Few interactions between research and policy agendas may be recognized. The paper considers previous research's critical views, and a number of gaps that may be found in this literature (table 1) as starting points for further studies.

Existing literature's gaps may be useful to identify two main families of open spaces for further research related to:

- the *connections* between the *descriptions* of problematic neighbourhoods and the consequent *forms of intervention*;
- the *possible role for the public hand* in these places.

As underlined by policy analysis and social sciences (Crosta P. L., 1998; Bobbio L., 1998), descriptions (problems' framing) and policies ("solutions") are strictly interrelated issues. In this direction, the paper argues that mixing policies *rely on narratives that reflect the "external" views of multi-ethnic neighbourhoods*, based on the problematic aspects of concentration of different groups in some areas, never exploring in depth that an "absolute" index of concentration does not exist, and concentration is defined both by *perceptions* and by *relationships* of the local level with wider levels. These narratives are fostered by public debate, but research as well has used a slippery concept as concentration (Tosi A., 2000). Some concepts used by literature that has rediscovered the potentialities of segregated places (table 1, point 3) are mobilized to explore the distinction between the areas' internal and external perceptions and representations. This distinction is proposed being aware that what is inside or outside a place is a strategic construction operated by the local and not-local actors (including the researcher) to simplify complex situations, and to prefigure some course of research and action, excluding others. The Dalston case is used to explore if and how the most common ways of looking at multi-ethnic settlements could be reframed, exploring the tensions between the insiders' and the outsiders' descriptions of a "city of difference" (Fincher R., Jacobs J. (eds.), 1998) in the context of a global city.

The paper provides an overview of Dalston, summarizes the narratives for this place mobilized by planners and politicians in the context of the local Action Plan and of the London Plan, operates a choice among different "voices" that have been collected from October 2012 to April 2013 at the local level – representatives of traders, residents' associations, cultural groups, charities and not-for-profit organisations, literature, art, blogs and press – and draws some conclusions comparing the insiders' and the outsiders' narratives with a particular attention at how the "diversity" issue is declined. The distinction between insiders and outsiders has been operated thanks to the local voices' that *see unanimously local*

authorities as "otherness" – people that do not understand local needs, or that are following "slavishly" the London Plan's directions, without caring for its consequences on the local populations.

Literature: state of the art	Research gaps
1. Critical views of *principles* and *outcomes* of mixing policies (Raco M., 2003; Kearns A., 2002; Allen C., Powell R., Casey R., Coward S., 2005)	These studies maintain a *negative image of the immigrants' and weaker groups' spatial concentration*
2. Studies that view mixing initiatives as *place-focused declinations of security policies:* an attempt from the public hand to establish forms of control in these places (Atkinson R., Helms G. (eds), 2007)	Neighbourhoods involved in these initiatives may be characterised by physical decay, and deprivation: the *public hand's will to establish forms of control is far to be illegitimated*
3. Studies that suggest *reconsidering the potentialities of segregated places* where self-regulated spaces of mutual-help and solidarity may be found. Due to the shrinking capacity of intervention of the welfare state, these relationships have a strong capacity to act and to solve concrete problems, and mixing policies may weaken or brake them (Cattacin S., 2006)	The welfare restructuring is a reality, *but this does not mean that the public hand couldn't have any role in these places*, for example managing situations of conflict or integrating and/or sustaining existing networks. Underestimating the public hand's possible role may not be helpful to explore innovative paths of intervention

Table 1. *State of the art and gaps of existing literature*

2. Dalston: places and contrasts

Dalston is located in the East End of London, an area that has been for centuries a bastion of the white working class, and a port of entry in Britain for foreign immigrants. In the last thirty years, the socio-economic composition of this part of London has seen a number of significant changes due to deindustrialization, gentrification and mixed-tenure policies (Butler T., Hamnett C., 2011). Since the 19th century Dalston's centralities have developed between Ridley Road, Kingsland High Street and Dalston Lane (fig. 1).

Ridley Road is the heart-beat of the local community due to the presence of a street market six days a week. Established in the 1880s, the market has always mirrored the changes in the ethnic composition of

the neighbourhood. Nowadays it accommodates over one hundred stalls: traditional East London fruit and vegetable sellers, *halal* butchers, African-Caribbean food (fig. 2-3). The market draws from a wide catchment area, and it is very important for the local communities due to its affordable prices, but also to its role as place of social interaction for the most deprived groups (Watson S., 2006).
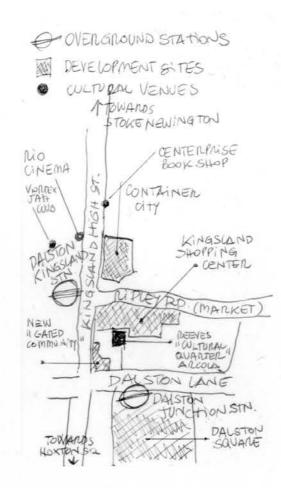

Table 1. *Dalston's main centralities and development sites*

Kingsland High Street is a typical Victorian high street where a significant number of Turkish shops and restaurants could be found. Kingsland's entrepreneurs attracted the media attention during London's disorders in July 2011, when they decided to fight back the rioters using baseball bats to defend their businesses (The Guardian, London School of Economics, 2012). A number of chain stores, and many smaller commercial activities run by immigrants may be found at the Kingsland Shopping Mall opened in the 1980s.

At the end of the 19th Century, Dalston Lane was the area's main street. Here the old train station and the Colosseum, a circus capable of accommodating 4000 spectators, could be found. Since 1964 it was converted into the Four Aces Club, run for thirty three years by Newton Dunbar, a Jamaican-born man. This was a popular venue where international stars were attracted, reflecting the evolution of Caribbean music. It was bought by the Council in 1977 and declared as redevelopment site in 1995. Despite the local communities' resistance, the theatre was demolished in 2007 to build up Dalston Junction Overground station, and a new development named Dalston Square. This is constituted by 550 flats, reserving 57 for

social rent. The first phase of this development, including Dunbar Tower, named after Newton Dunbar (without his consent), has been completed in 2011(fig. 3).

Figure 2. *Fruit and vegetable seller in Ridley Road*
Figure 3. *One of the multicultural faces of Ridley Road*

Figure 3. *New developments – Dalston Square's view from Dalston Lane*

When Barratts Homes – one of the largest residential property development companies in the United Kingdom – will complete the project, ten-storey blocks loom over Dalston Lane, with twenty-storey towers behind. The project includes a new bus station, cafés, restaurants and a new square. The London Borough of Hackney (London Borough of Hackney, 2009) has quoted this intervention in its Sustainable Community Strategy 2008-2018 as an example of "mixed community in well-designed neighbourhoods, where people can access high quality, affordable housing" (p. 52).

Traditionally a working class and immigration area, the middle-classes started to come back to Dalston in the 1990s thanks to the proximity with the City and the affordable prices of its rundown Victorian terraces. This makes Dalston a place of high contrasts. The ward is home to 10.000 people. Almost 30 per cent of the local population is Black, with Caribbean slightly outnumbering Africans, but also significant shares of Turkish and Turkish-Cypriots immigrants have to be mentioned (London Borough of Hackney, 2007). The middle-class represents the 31 per cent of the population, coexisting with high shares of semi-skilled and unskilled workers (18 per cent) and of people on state benefit, unemployed and lowest grade workers (20 per cent). More than 35 per cent of the local population has high education level, but the 26 per cent of residents have no qualifications. More than the 7 per cent of the economically active residents are unemployed.

The industrial tradition of Dalston started declining during the 1970s. Some industrial buildings have been acquired by private companies for redevelopment. At the end of the 1990s these factories have become attractive for the creative sector that has contributed highly to transform the image of Dalston: from a stigmatized inner city, despite the middle-class presence, to an epicentre for creativity. The main point of reference of the "cultural quarter" is the former Reeves Colour Paint Factory, where a cluster of small enterprises have settled. Among these, the OTO café that hosts music concerts and the Arcola Theatre guided by the Turkish-born artistic director Mehmet Ergen. Opened in 2000, the theatre – despite its success at the metropolitan level – has been able to strike root at the local level, thanks to a number of cultural activities with the Turkish community. These venues are integrated with others already rooted on Dalston such as the Rio Cinema, established in 1913 and the Vortex Jazz Club, epicentre of the area's night economy.

3. From diversity to diversification: planners' and plans' narratives

This paragraph is based on the directions for Dalston established by the London Plan (Greater London Authority, 2011), on their declination at the local level through the Dalston Area Action Plan (London Borough of Hackney, 2011), and on a number of interviews to local Councillors and planners. In line with the London Plan, Dalston is indicated in the local plan as a *Major Town Centre* and as an *Area for Intensification*. The Major Town Centres are places that already constitute a centrality at the local level, but that have potentialities to be "put on the map" of London. Ten Areas of Intensification have been identified in the London Plan. These areas, along with the thirty-three Opportunity Areas – "London's principal opportunities for accommodating large scale development to provide substantial numbers of new employment and housing, each typically more than 5.000 jobs and/or 2500 homes, with a mixed and intensive use of land and assisted by good transport accessibility (p. 297)" – constitute the backbone of the strategic vision of the London Plan. The Areas for Intensification "have significant potentials for increases in residential, employment and other uses […] but at a level below that which can be achieved in the Opportunity Areas (p. 288)". As Opportunity Areas are brownfields, the plan will cope with established residents and activities mainly in the Areas for Intensification. For these reasons, Dalston represents a good place to observe *how the development scenario of the London Plan is dealing with social cohesion and diversity* issues.

In the context of the London Borough of Hackney's core development strategy, Dalston and Hackney Central are the Borough's two main existing town centres and will be the focus for new development over the coming years. These areas' plans capitalize on major new rail infrastructure of the London Overground: "Dalston Town Centre represents Hackney's vibrant cultural and social mix and further benefits from excellent public transport connectivity. The area is in close proximity to both the City of London and the Olympic-led regeneration area within the Lower Lea Valley (par. 2)".

Among the major "opportunity sites" of the area, the completion of Dalston Square is mentioned in the plan, and a new eight-storey tower should be realised close to the cultural quarter. This project was presented in 2012 by the private developer Taylor & Wimpey with Transports for London, the public owner of the area, but provoked a strong reaction at the local level due to its "gated community" character. Developers are thus defining a new more open design. Criterian Capital, owner of Kingsland

shopping centre, is negotiating with the local authorities a redevelopment project for the mall that will go hand in hand with the construction of 600 flats over the former mall. Small businesses' owners are concerned by the real estate pressure that this intervention will create.

Two projects are related with "Ridley Road Improvement Area": a "cleansing" intervention based on urban design criteria, as well as on the redevelopment of the last part of the market where the more ethnically diverse activities are located; and the proposal for a "container city"[1] on an area that is used as market's deposit, that will accommodate 51.000 sq. ft. for studios and offices.

Describing the neighbourhood, the plan celebrates Dalston's *diversity* (mainly following ethno-racial lines, despite the residents' differences of class, ways of life, socio-economic and education condition). When prescriptions and projects are introduced, *diversity is transformed into diversification*, pursued through the attraction of new middle-class residents, offices and commercial activities catering the new populations, as if the "existing diversity" of the place was not the "right one". Diversification is a keyword for social mixing policies in the majority of Western Societies [2].

4. Counter-narratives: two voices from Dalston

Larry Julian, chair of Ridley Road's Traders Association defines himself as a "market guy". He started working when he was fourteen, in the post-war ages when Ridley Road was a "family oriented" market: "When I was younger, we all stuck together – all the traders, all the parents, the mums and dads and the kids. And we socialised together". In the 1950s, the Jewish communities started to move to Hackney, and Ridley Road was dominated by this presence. Then this community moved away, and from the 1980s it started to change into a more cosmopolitan-run market with Asian, Turkish, West-Indian and finally Eastern European traders. Among the market traders there is no longer tight-knit in and out of work-hours: "the social side of it is not as friendly as it used to be – but that's no disrespect to the new traders we've got come in. It's because they have got […] different ways of living". Larry Julian underlines that "when the traders come to the association, I always say that for me it does not matter if someone is black, white, yellow or blue: we are all market traders, and we need to be cohesive in the pressures on the Council". There is a common belief in the association that regeneration projects are not based on a real comprehension of the market's role for the local community: "for these reasons, the association decided to become part of OPEN, an organisation that has a very big backing from the people in Dalston".

OPEN Dalston – Organisation for Promotion of Environmental Needs[2], was founded in 2004 to organise forms of resistance to regeneration proposals. Bill Parry-Davies, an attorney based in Dalston, is one of the group's founders. OPEN does not have a permanent office and chooses its venues on the basis of focus, nature and places involved in its activities that are related to four main issues:

- heritage – to be brought to new life, to protect *historical and architectural diversity*;
- affordable housing – to preserve the area's *social and economic diversity*;
- green spaces – to *create environmental diversity* as Daston lacks open spaces;
- *spaces for cultural aggregation* – already operating in the area, but more could come.

OPEN Dalston has used different languages to carry out its forms of resistance to regeneration:

- the *legal language*: giving information to local communities on their rights to react when a development project is proposed (Parry-Davies B., 2012);
- *sustainable counter-projects*;
- *counter-narratives* – meetings in "contested places" with novelists, poets, journalists, musicians, film-makers narrating the local history, with a particular attention to the neighbourhoods' internal dynamics (Caless K., Budden G. (eds), 2012).

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[1] http://www.containercity.com/projects/birkbeck-mews
[2] http://opendalston.blogspot.co.uk/

OPEN opposed to Dalston Square development gaining lower densities and more flats for affordable housing; reacted to the "gated community" project leading developers to a new more open scheme; it is working with Ridely Road's traders to understand threats and opportunities of the forthcoming cleansing initiatives. And yet, these "small gains" do not represent the most interesting aspects of OPEN's experience. OPEN is an expression of the local middle-classes' main interests (this is quite evident in the heritage protection objectives), *using elitist languages*. OPEN activists are fighting to keep their local character and identity, and are frightened by the "pacification by cappuccino" perspective as it is described by Zukin (Zukin S., 2010). Despite this, *different local population*s joined to OPEN. An example is given by the campaign to save the Dalston Theatre: if OPEN leadership based the campaign mainly thinking at the protection of a relevant historical building, very different groups joined to the movement – the Caribbean community as the demolition was read as a way to destroy a part of the memory of black culture in Dalston, Arcola Theatre that was looking for a new location and Bootsrap, a local development trust committed in sustaining small businesses and community groups. Bootsrap proposed a counter-project that implied the creation of a new park over Dalston Junction Station, affordable housing (320 new flats), shops, cafes and community facilities. In this scheme the Dalston Theatre was saved and used by Arcola Theatre, a new Four Aces Club and a restaurant. They demonstrate that the project would not cost more than Barratt's Project to the local Council: that was public land and the only request was giving land for free as it was done with Barratt as well. The resistance to the theatre's destruction testify the leadership role assumed by locally rooted middle class that has been able to give voice to very different communities, interests, identities and objectives. Other "mixes" may be found in the resistance to the proposed gated community, and in the battles for Ridley Road market involving traders.

5. Conclusions

Working on Dalston it has been possible to explore how everyday multiculturalism is practiced in a global metropolis in the 21st Century. A *broad idea of culture has been adopted,* referring to class, socio-economic condition, entrepreneurial culture and ethnicity. Dalston's dynamics differ from some common narratives mobilised by research and policy agendas. For example, they may not be read through Smith's narratives on the different "waves of gentrification" (Smith N., 2002) where the first generation of creative class creates the conditions for the middle-classes' settlement. Here the middle-class arrived before the creative class, attracted by affordable Victorian terraces and proximity with the City. This area's characters may be found also in other places at least in East London [15]. The creative class and the "established" gentrifiers have been able to strike root at the local level, and the middle-class is having a leadership role for a diversified local community, becoming a point of reference for resistance to not welcomed regeneration projects.

The social side (or rhetoric) of mixing policies is based on the idea that bringing middle-classes in a place is a core point to stimulate upward social mobility in the weaker groups as wealthier residents that may have a leadership role, helping disadvantaged communities. These theories have been deeply criticized as they tend to reduce people's problems to "social pathology", neglecting that social exclusion depends on structural factors, and that exposure to otherness, and the local level initiatives may be not enough to reach socio-economic upgrading (Raco M., 2003). Despite this, *here a middle-class with at least an aggregative role could already be found.* The market and local shops are as well an outstanding resource for low-income people. Even taking these policies' narratives seriously, it could be helpful to understand if and how the public hand may capitalize existing resources. Research that has started to study public-led gentrification have been able to distinguish between established middle classes that strike root at the local level, and "new" middle classes who live "parallel lives", without "mixing" (Davidson M., 2008). Rhys-Taylor's ethnographic work on Ridley Road's market's users reveals similar dynamics with Dalston Square new residents (Rhys Taylor A., 2010).

"Parallel lives" is a recurring issue both in pro and cons narratives of mixing initiatives. On the one hand, the presences of population that do not mix in everyday life is considered as an index of vulnerability for a place (Denham J., 2001). On the other hand, tenure mix practices have demonstrated that these policies

may result in spatial proximity between different socio-economic/ethnic groups, but that this condition doesn't necessarily translates into social interaction between people of different background in public spaces, schools, services and shops (Butler T., 2003). And yet, Dalston narratives indicate that the parallel lives issue needs further investigation. As underlined by Larry Julian, when Ridley Road became a cosmopolitan market, it was no more a sort of extended family sharing job and a way of life, but this new condition does not imply disrespect and cohesion when the "traders' community" feel to be under pressure due to regeneration projects. Some studies underline how policy makers seem asking to "diverse" neighbourhoods' residents to be at the same time "cosmopolitan", and able to *express a sense of community* that, in contemporary metropolises, is not required to middle and higher classes [29]. Community is seen suspiciously when it produces self-help that may bring to self-segregation, but is recalled as a means to contrast social exclusion as well. So there is a bivalent way of looking at community bonds, and maybe only a more locally-rooted planning approach, based on an in-depth observation on how multi-ethnic and multi-cultural forms of coexistence take place in everyday life of specific places may be helpful to understand if and how local resources may be sustained or not.

Dalston's streets have been often described as a battlefield: Ridley Road's battle between right extremist and the Jewish community during the Second World War; the battle of Kingsland High Street during London riots in 2011. At the current time Dalston is "under pressure" due to the presence of Hoxton Square – one of London's post-industrial symbols of creative renaissance – on its south side; gentrified areas in Stoke Newington and Islington on its North and Western side; the Olympic areas on the Eastern side. Centerprise, one of London's most famous community bookshops and community centres, celebrating since 1977 the contribution made by people of African descent to the Western literature tradition, closed in April 2013 due to raising rents offered by the Council to community outlets, in favour of the commercial establishments which gentrification has brought to the area.

A local writer imagined a "Battle of Kingsland Road" between the fashionistas from Hoxton Square and the gentrifiers from Stoke Newington (Case P., 2012). The novel is set in the future (2020), but public-led gentrification may accelerate such a process. A number of narratives met in this job underline the divergences between a development strategy set up at the metropolitan level, and local resistance to this strategy. This paper has tried to read these resistances as lenses to detect the often hidden resources of multi-ethnic environments. These neighbourhoods fear real estate pressure, as well as *a development model based on homologation*, not sensible to "differences and diversities" that the local community seem able to *decline in a more articulated way.* Mixing policies seem not to be able to relate with the "cities of difference" as they were described by Fincher and Jacobs [14]. The paper has tried to suggest that these policies are a product of external narratives of stigmatized places, and that these narratives are not so helpful to individuating locally rooted forms of intervention, adopting a perspective more focused on "managing" individuals' and groups' coexistences, rather than creating diversity through often unsuccessful forms of social engineering.

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