

Peckham Power – can
complexity tools help us?

Anna Plodowski

Overview

- Purpose of this session – for Peckham Power, for workshop
- The Peckham Context
- The Peckham Power story in brief
- How can you help us with what we find unstraightforward?
- Questions Arising
- Over to you...

Purpose of this session

- Twofold for Peckham Power
 - **reflect on the story so far** - because **nothing** has been as expected
 - **get skilled outsider perspectives** to help understand our activities and act more effectively
- For this workshop – an opportunity to apply – or not – complexity to a real world example in a newly emerging and increasingly important area

Description of Peckham

- Area within SE London in Borough of Southwark, 3.5miles south east of Charing Cross
- 5 electoral wards: Peckham, Livesey, The Lane, Nunhead, Peckham Rye
- Traditional London working class community; 50s and 60s immigration from the Caribbean; now very ethnically diverse – 16 different ethnic groupings according to the 2001 census [black African 35.67%, white British 25.73%, black Caribbean 15.75% plus others]; non-uniform distribution
- 100+ languages spoken
- In early 1990s, Southwark was the second most deprived borough in England; Peckham the most deprived area within Southwark with multiple indicators of deprivation
- £60 million Single Regeneration Budget for period 1995-2002 focusing on demolishing and replacing housing
- Recent gentrification of Bellenden Renewal Area resulting in different geographies within general area Rye Lane West (inc but not limited to Bellenden Renewal Area); limited gentrification in Nunhead; less in North Peckham
- East Peckham and Nunhead identified as renewal areas for focused funding in 2005

Cultural Aspects of Peckham

- Pockets of “dark green” living – The Spike, recycled geodesic dome
- Two local art colleges: Camberwell College of Art, Goldsmiths; and local artistic community
- Substantial civil society activity (e.g. Bellenden Residents’ Network, Rye Lane Station Action Group etc)
- TRAs for residents of flats at least part-managed by the council
- Emerging Transition Town Peckham

What IS Peckham Power?

- “I find it both deeply pessimistic and deeply encouraging that people like this have set up Peckham Power” (T Chance, BioRegional) i.e. I really wouldn’t start from here...
- How do we describe ourselves? It depends who’s talking...
 - “Community based? Community led?”
 - Do we know? Does it matter?
- “Energy infrastructure project for all in Peckham and Nunhead” – I understand what this is, but not clear to outsiders?
- The need for fuzzy language to cover all bases, be maximally inclusive, both of people, opportunities and emergent activities
- Who are we (the Steering Group) and our “members”? Tensions of geographic remit – economic, political, cultural

The Peckham Power Story – the Start

- Peckham CRAG (Carbon Rationing Action Group)
 - very limited success in behaviour change but local councillor and some media interest
- Local councillor with legal expertise in planning
 - links to environmental NGO and understanding of energy policy strategy and security issues.
- Can we set up a community micro-generation project (esp PV) for all here in Peckham?

Initial Responses

- Reply 1 (AP) No, not the most important thing to do, conflicts with the need to power down, but I'll keep a toe in the water out of interest
- GN's emphasis on being "for all" key in creating understanding of need for financial flexibility; back of the envelope calculations
- Reply 2 (from a few local residents who said they were interested) Yes we're **very** interested - but no, it can't be done.
- Reply 3 (from a few other local residents) Hmm, that sounds interesting... would be good if we could...
- Reply 4 (from local council officer in charge of regeneration) That's interesting; let's help you with a launch event and see where it goes...
- Reply 5 (from representatives of local businesses following our presentation to community council) – We want you to be up and running now!

Peckham Power – the launch event

- Team of 4 local residents who didn't really know each other but roughly from within Bellenden Renewal area;
 - budget £2000 from local council
 - organised 3 high-quality speakers for afternoon workshop
 - publicity out 3 weeks in advance
 - Professional community facilitator involvement very helpful in designing format of event
 - some tensions around working methods (project management)
- Judging the pitch of sessions
 - too technical for some, insufficiently technical for others
- introductory lunch very successful
- Plan to establish working groups; solar thermal, PV, energy efficiency, “services”
- 85 people attended, many (40 plus) put their names down for working groups... but then didn't want to do very much afterwards:
 - “Services” – one other person interested
 - PV – only 4 of 10 people replied, all saying “no” (some due to recognising the importance of energy efficiency)
 - Solar thermal – met a few times and then fizzled out
 - Energy efficiency – ongoing saga; personalities; serious technical challenges

Peckham Power – post-launch event

- **Now what???!!!**
- Which bit of Peckham? “me and my mates” vs “others”?
- Some bizarre interviews with local students; something resonated but not as we expected
- Cllr Nardell and AP still interested in community PV project so met with green-tech acceleration entrepreneur
 - new vision of needing to act at scale and neighbourhood level
 - need for a feasibility study
- Need for a feasibility study not shared by other group members
- “services group” collapsed
- Recruitment of community activist from North Peckham; access to vast amounts of info, wider perspective, wider remit - and different cultural style
- Piggy-backing on council consultation about plans for future Peckham; workshop based on Sustainable Energy Without the Hot Air (Mackay, 2009)
- Meeting with energy company managers and council officers

Current situation – Sept 2009

- **Local council has awarded Peckham Power funds for:**
 - Energy meter project
 - “draught-busting”
 - But **not** feasibility study
- **Low Carbon Zones**
 - we told the council it was happening
 - were included as one of 3 community partners in bid for £337,000 (our share £6,000)
 - bid succesful but not yet known how much we have really got
- **Who’s going to do this, and how?** Of core group,
 - Cllr rumoured to be leaving
 - one member recently had a 3rd baby
 - another heavily involved in energy efficiency work on own house
 - two remaining will need to find employment soon...
- **Changing understanding of what makes good sense in terms of energy and CO2 investments**

How can you help us with what we find un-straightforward?

WHY are we doing this? What is our purpose?

- Do people “get” us? e.g. why a feasibility study? Probably not...
- The need to shift understanding from an individual and behavioural focus, in which I am not really a problem, to one that is more communal and larger scale and in which what I do still matters; loss of power and control?
- Need to be responsive to be effective AND need to be committed to be effective = “mistakes”?

Relationships with each other

- Different and evolving priorities of core participants: AP, GN, JK, MR, CR, LW
- Lack of trust in others’ technical expertise, especially that of women?
- Different understandings of the challenges we face e.g.
 - public events
 - feasibility study
 - energy meters

How can you help us with what we find un-straightforward (cont)?

Relationships with others

- How do we relate to the people who said they were interested?
- How do we relate to people who aren't interested in us but in whom we have an interest?
- Relationship with Transition Town Peckham
 - do we formalise our respective areas of activity into different “turfs”
 - or have a more hands-off approach
 - or combine?
 - And how do we do it?
- Local council officers – variable
- How can PVSF help us?
- Failure of civil servants to understand our situation: “would money for workshops help you?”
- Do we pursue CSR and energy company links?

How can you help us with what we find un-straightforward (cont)?

Maintaining momentum and/or focus (i.e WHAT do we do next?)

- Difficulty in recognising that we need to be doing things, and seen to be doing things, continuously, and without funds
- Challenge of deciding how to focus – “which group represents you?” – we can’t network AND organise activities
- Often beneficial developments come from non-Peckham Power activities (LW and Canal Bridge Green Fair; HS and Global Generation; friendly links with TTP enhanced via Climate Camp) – so “being more focused” may not help

Developing an understanding of HOW we can get to where we want to be

- Lack of technical expertise; desire that we can all build all our own solar thermal panels?
- Lack of understanding that we need technical expertise
- Getting our heads round councils, funders, etc etc
- Resource-activity-aims - **serious** mismatch!
- Different understandings of the ways we will achieve our aims – volunteer vs formal employment
- Constitution and formal organisation – charity or CIC?
- Can we get to big energy infrastructure activities without small-scale energy behaviour activities?

Questions Arising

- How is it possible to have change from one state space to another ie from centralised energy production to decentralised energy production?
- How can we make best use of our particularity, so that individuality is an expanding factor rather than a limiting factor?
- If enabling change involves embracing risk, how can we do this at the same time as trying to get people to act to avoid the risks of runaway climate change?
- If change occurs at the extremes, does this change the landscape for those more centrally placed?
- Are we our aims and ostensive output, or are we our processes and intermediary activities? Maybe we need to be both?
- Your input please!

Acknowledgments

- Peckham Power team:
- Cllr Gordon Nardell
- Jack Kelly
- Carl Reynolds
- Matthew Rose
- Lesley Wertheimer

- Eileen Conn

- Southwark Council: Jessica Binks, Bob Fiddik, Roger Young, Lisa-Marie Bowles, Michael Carnuccio

- Mickey Smith, Chronic Love Foundation
- southcityradio.org