

Summary: 23 May 2013: Men do development; Women do regeneration – discuss!

1. Introduction by Liane Hartley and Rachel Fisher

There had been an emerging view that the process and thinking behind regeneration was broken. This had resulted in Liane setting up her own business, and the creation of the “Urbanistas”. There was a difference in attitudes to regeneration between men and women.

Liane had started her new company ‘Mend’ after giving up the safety of a full time job. The responsibilities and roles needed a fresh look and there was a business model increasingly emerging around the social agenda. The business was built around its own values, principles and beliefs and had been built up around social intelligence and networks.

The wider group of interested people came together at HOK a year ago to discuss **women’s** experience of setting up and new ways of doing business together collaborating on information and contacts. New models and new networks in the property, regeneration and urban environments had to reflect that cities are social. The idea was to blend the personal and the professional.

Urbanistas provides a safe space for women to explore their ideas more fully. PechaKucha (20 slides x 20seconds) approach was utilised at Hackney based charity, Bootstrap, for the second meet. Women tend to set aside a part of themselves and obscure their nurturing side in the work place. They need to be themselves. The meets are social occasions and there are 70 women in the network so far. They can bring a project along that needs a bit of help, or an idea that the group may help to get something started. Faith, trust and bravery are needed – the outcome is unknown. Crowd sourcing can help make new things happen in a fluid and open way. Some projects were already starting (Dalston Soup (based on Detroit Soup), Taxi Driver brain). There was an opportunity to ask for help and then an obligation to do so if you offered.

There had been a clinical approach to development; an interrogative approach was needed to regeneration. With a blending of personal and professional understanding there was no need to leave your personality at home. Women do work differently. We all should be disruptive.

2. Key points made in discussion

- The key was to concentrate on social: social sustainability and intangibles were a response to the assaults on regeneration. There was work by the New Economics Foundation, Tim Jackson at Oxford Brookes and the Young Foundation which helped understand complexity of creating new communities. Another set of more subtle and social values: women used this as the platform to advance. Urbanistas was a fantastic initiative and should argue for a broad definition of urban design.
- There were some contrary examples where projects led by women had been extremely expensive huge failure. However without more understanding of the projects this could not simply be attributed to gender differences: often community based ideas had to chase the money and suffered mission creep. Whatever the leadership projects had the usual milestones, processes and constraints especially if reliant on government funding.
- There were interesting case studies. In Australia mineral extraction – seen as a macho male environment – found that women were just as productive because they used the huge machinery more effectively. In the banking sector there had been substantial segregation: often resulting in legal challenge. Regeneration has always combined social and physical elements but the key question should be about who benefits. This was important in the Olympic legacy
- Even Forum members could sometimes slip into stereotyped views of gender roles and should avoid making assumptions about the contribution from young women. Ownership of change should be with people who live in the community. Why does the networking approach of Urbanistas have to be for women only?
- There were other dimensions needing to be rethought eg cyclists versus motorists. Small businesses were important make up the majority of the workforce with most businesses employing fewer than 10 people.
- Regeneration is not the same as development. Everyone has to work with institutions with money and power. There is a huge demand for the right skills: it helps to link those that have them with those that don't.
- Women's networks are set up because of the lack of senior women. Men have had networks for many years that do not involve women – golf and rugby – and much more clubbable. Women need to have a place to discuss issues that is sympathetic.
- There are signs of change and optimism. Urbanistas projects, of course, engage men as well and there is fun along the way, sometimes in saying the unsayable