Regeneration Songs: Sounds of Investment and Loss in East London

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What is regeneration? What is ‘placemaking’? The transformation of undervalued, derelict post-industrial land or the displacement of existing communities in favour of tabula rasa development, with no connection to heritage and what has gone before? The impact of global capital and foreign investment on local communities is described interchangeably as regeneration or placemaking and is increasingly felt across London and in many other British, European and North American cities.

Since the 2012 Olympics was awarded to the UK capital, east London has been at the heart of the largest top-down urban regeneration strategies in civic history. At the centre of this has been the local municipal government, Newham Council, which was to become home to the Olympic site – and their proposal: an ‘Arc of Opportunity’ for developers and investors to join them in transforming 1,412 hectares of Newham. The place-marketing plan was encapsulated in a short promotional film produced by Newham Council, London’s Regeneration Supernova, which was screened at the 2010
Shanghai World Expo as an investment prospectus for foreign developers and businesses.
This is but one example of the way places are turned into stories for packaged investment opportunities. What becomes of heritage and how is it repackaged for investment and place branding? What is the impact of these programmes on existing communities and how do the people living there relate to the marketing narratives?
From Elephant & Castle in south London to Poplar in the East, housing estates and local neighbourhoods are being transformed into developments of luxury apartments and privately owned estates of upmarket restaurants and bars. What becomes of the local community and its past, present and future, in this context? This paper will define placemaking and consider the impact placemaking strategies have on heritage and existing communities.

• Author(s) Biography (200 words each):
Anna Minton is Reader in Architecture at the University of East London and Program Leader of UEL’s MRes Architecture. She is the author of Big Capital: Who is London for? (Penguin 2017) and Ground Control: Fear and happiness in the 21st century city (Penguin 2009/12). She is a regular contributor to the Guardian and a frequent conference speaker and broadcaster. Between 2011-2014 she was the 1851 Royal Commission for the Great Exhibition Fellow in the Built Environment.
With artist Alberto Duman, she is the co-editor of Regeneration Songs: Sounds of Investment and Loss in East London (forthcoming Repeater 2018). Regeneration Songs emerged from a Leverhulme Trust 2016 artist in residence project by artist Alberto Duman, hosted by Anna Minton at UEL and based on the silent film, ‘London’s Regeneration Supernova’. This prompted the first output of the residency and saw Alberto work with local artists and musicians from the area to record an album’s worth of soundtracks to the film. The second part of the project is the publication of Regeneration Songs which includes contributions from writers, artists, academics and journalists.