Valuing the bowling alley: Contestations over the preservation of spaces of everyday urban multiculture in London

Abstract

This paper builds on 'the convivial, everyday turn' (Neal et al, 2013) by approaching the workings of complex urban spaces of multiculture as entangled with processes of urban change that are infused with judgments and contestations about what is of value. This paper explores the competing value claims made for a leisure space, a London bowling alley, used by a diverse group of people (in terms of dis/ability, ethnicity, gender, class and age) that has been threatened with demolition. The paper examines how arguments about diversity and inclusivity are deployed in these debates and how official discourses are resisted through the mobilisation of other articulations of social value. The paper argues that the combination of the hollowing out of the concept of diversity and the political and economic context results in a paradox whereby multiculturalism is celebrated as an atmosphere and generator of capital while existing physical spaces of everyday urban multiculture are at best unprotected and at worst not recognised, devalued and demolished.

Introduction

Festooned in neon and chrome Americana, the bowling alley is a lively space that also contains karaoke booths, a games arcade and pool tables. While the interior speaks of the sport's American roots, the ethnic and social diversity of the clientele offers a snapshot of contemporary London. A group of local teenagers do outlandish dances when they get strikes, irritating the serious league bowlers on the next lane who travel from across London and hail from Guyana, Slovakia, the USA and the neighbouring area of Highbury. Here work's nights out, children's birthday parties and date nights all take place along side each other. This is a complex and multi-layered place of sociability that in recent years has become symbolic over arguments about urban development in the local area, due to plans being put forward for its demolition. This paper uses the bowling alley case to examine how arguments about

the value diversity and inclusivity are deployed and contested in situations of urban development to ask: Whose vision of diversity counts?

Shifting the focus away from describing the particular qualities or impacts of spaces of 'everyday multiculturalism' (Wise and Velayutham, 2004), this paper instead examines how arguments about diversity – and the use of space by marginalised groups – are deployed to make competing *value claims* in moments of urban change. Building on Dines' identification of a discordance between 'grounded experiences of diversity' and 'a top-down, decontextualized vision of diversity contemplated by regeneration' (2009, 258), the paper brings Skeggs' work exploring value/devaluation (2004, 2014) into dialogue with research on diversity and development (Berrey, 2005. Raco, forthcoming). The paper thus aims to unpick some of the power-laden processes that underscore the production of everyday spaces of multiculture and indeed determine their future. Through this discussion the paper contributes to the 'convivial turn' (Neal et al, 2013) by further unpacking the relationship between sites of 'everyday multiculture' and their positioning in processes of urban change and neighbourhood redevelopment that are infused with judgments and contestations about what is of value. The paper also explores the limitations of the Localism agenda (specifically the Asset of Community Value mechanism) as a mechanism for preserving socially valued spaces.

The paper draws on a multi-method ethnographic research project [details removed], conducted over three years in the field. The project design has three layers. Ethnographic and visual methods have been used to explore the interactions, tensions, belongings and negotiations that the space of the bowling alley engenders. These have been complemented with interviews and the use of participatory methods inside the bowling alley to uncover how and why people use this space. Lastly, archival research and observation at meetings have been used to situate the bowling alley in processes of - and debates about - development and neighbourhood change.

Introducing the bowling alley

Originally built as a tram shed in 1872, the bowling alley sits on a busy crossroads and major transport interchange in Finsbury Park, London, between the North African cafes of Blackstock Road and the African and Caribbean beauty shops of Stroud Green Road that are yet to be squeezed out by the gentrification of the Stroud Green area. In between being a tram shed and a bowling alley, the building has been a roller rink that never opened, a cinema (notorious during the First World War for 'gambling, prostitution and "amorous soldiers liaising with loose women"' Harper, 2011), a dance hall, a bingo hall and a snooker hall.

The area is characterised by churn, of people moving through the transport system but also of different populations moving in and out - it remains 'a significant arrival point for migrant communities'[i] (Hintze et al, 2008). Finsbury Park suffers from poverty and has been recognised by the three boroughs that intersect in its centre as 'one of the most deprived urban areas in the country' (Hackney, Islington and Haringey Councils, 2013, 1) and is also characterised by sharply rising property prices, new property development and the state-led gentrification of the nearby Woodberry Down estate (Chakrabortty and Robinson-Tillett, 2014).

In 2012, arguing that the area had long suffered from a lack of intervention because of its position on the cusp of three boroughs, the local councils joined together in an effort to remodel Finsbury Park's centre. As part of the development plans the bowling alley been earmarked for demolition. However, this decision was resisted by local residents who campaigned against this through a widely circulated petition and who, using measures brought in by the Localism Act (2011)[ii], were subsequently successful in getting the building listed as an 'asset of community value'.

Unlike safeguarding measures that seek to preserve architectural heritage (such as listed buildings) the Asset of Community Value mechanism is for safeguarding places that 'further the social wellbeing or social interests of the local community'. What this asset listing does is to give the 'community' the right to delay the sale of such an

asset for 6 months while they find a way to amass the resources to bid for the building. As stated in the legislation: 'It is not a community right to *buy* the asset, just to *bid*.' (Sandford, 2015).

The campaign to preserve the bowling alley and to get it listed as an asset of community value has drawn on its mixedness and inclusivity as a social space. In contrast, the local authorities have emphasised the importance of the demolition of the building in order to create sightlines to the local park and make the area more aesthetically pleasing, as part of their vision for a revitalised town centre. Thus the site has become symbolic in debates over redevelopment, diversity and the future of the area.

Beyond the immediate locality, this case is also embedded in a wider London context where, during an era of increasing land and property value and cuts to local government funding, a range of semi-public spaces are under threat. Claims for the community value of these spaces have been mobilized in fights over preserving queer space (Alwakeel, 2015), pubs (Blunden, 2013), markets and commercial units[iii]. In these moments of contestation the social value of inclusive space is held up to challenge a change of use based on its economic value or profitability. For example, when the owners of *The Black Cap*, a historic gay venue in Camden Town, closed it down to sell to developers, Camden Council stressed in opposition to this decision, that the venue 'played an important role as a meeting point... particularly for older LGBT people and those from ethnic minorities, for hate crime outreach work and as a venue for events, consultations and forums.' Eleftheriou-Smith (2015). This is an acknowledgement that commercial spaces can have multiple uses, that they are variously invested with forms of meaning by those who use them, and that they can carry social value. The bowling alley case is thus not only embedded in a set of arguments about what is of value in a particular neighbourhood but also speaks to broader debates about how diversity, inclusivity and multiculturalism are mobilised in the context of urban change, development and increasing land and property values.

Firstly, I consider how various claims to value are made for everyday spaces of multiculture in the literature that has been characterised as 'the convivial, everyday turn' (Neal et al, 2013). Then, turning to the shift in the deployment of diversity in contexts of development, I argue that Skeggs' work on value and values can enrich analyses of the clashes between competing value and values of diverse urban semi-public spaces. Applying this approach to the case study, I then set out how approaches to diversity and community space have changed over time in Finsbury Park – drawing attention to two moments when the bowling alley site has become pivotal in these discussions. I then examine how the value and values of diversity has variously been deployed in the argument for development and has been mobilised in opposition.

The value and values of spaces of everyday multiculture

> *There were a few big parties, 7-10 people each. One birthday group (with balloons) of white people in their late 20s. Another mixed black/white group with parents and kids. One of the boys wears a yellow sweatshirt that reads 'Crazy Crew'. We buy two games in Lane 4 and start bowling. After about 10 minutes I notice regulars The Champ and Mr Vo at the bar…*
> *The music transitions from fifties rock n roll to pop reggae then gradually into Soul II Soul (Jazzie B is from Finsbury Park) to old UK Garage hits. The first dancing is from two of the 'Crazy Crew' kids (6 & 10 at the oldest?). The eldest is particularly brilliant. Once they start, the bar staff start clapping. Gradually people gather around … After about three songs a security guard comes over and gently steers the kids off the floor, it's past the time when children are allowed in the building.* Field notes, 3rd July 2015

This is a snapshot of a typical Friday night at the bowling alley. The people present range in age roughly from 6 to 60, in 'race' and nationality. The above scene is made up of different forms of space sharing and interaction, from the shared excitement of a dance-off moment, to the regular meeting of two men (Mr Vo and The Champ) who have got to know each other through frequenting the same bowling alley. The convivial atmosphere of this place is also in part conjured by the DJ, who reads his crowd well, and policed by the security guard who enforces the rules.

Famously, Putnam (2000) used tenpin bowling as both a metaphor and bellwether in his thesis on the decline in American community and the reduction in contact between people from different social and ethnic groups (in the form of 'bridging social capital'). In his account it is formalised forms of social participation across difference – as exemplified by the archetypal bowling league – that have social value. However, as the ethnographic snapshot above attests to, this particular bowling alley also engenders other kinds of socialities, the kinds of space-sharing and 'rubbing along' (Watson, 2009) that has been described in work on everyday 'multicultural intimacies' and avoidances (Fortier, 2008) in semi-public spaces (Amin, 2002; Neal et al, 2013; Watson, 2009; Wise, 2010) that act as 'zones of encounter' (Wood and Landry, 2007) between people where new competencies (Hall, 2012), tastes and sensibilities (Rhys-Taylor, 2013) are forged.

The social value of such places is presented in this literature in a way that is less moralistically charged than Putnam's 'bridging', drawing on Paul Gilroy's concept of 'conviviality' (2004) to argue that realms beyond the residential are crucial sites for considering questions of how people in cities live with difference. This turn has emerged in part to challenge the narrowly defined debates about the 'death of multiculturalism' that have been going in Europe for over a decade now (Kundnani, 2002; Cameron, 2011; Weaver, 2010) and the (successful) attempts of politicians in the UK to 'reanimate the language of assimilation' (Back, 2009, 204).

Valentine critiques early iterations of this work for being 'laced with a worrying romanticization' (2007, 327), arguing that such accounts are based on the 'contact hypothesis' – that integration and a reduction in prejudice can be achieved through contact between groups. However, while some of this literature does indeed draw on this hypothesis, returning to Gilroy's original formulation of conviviality ('the processes of cohabitation and interaction that have made multiculture an ordinary feature of urban life in Britain' (2004: xi)) offers different terms for valuing multiculture.

This is well drawn out by Valluvan (2016) in his work on young working class people from ethnic minorities living in South London. While criticising what he describes as the 'descriptive naivety' (2016, 205) of some of the everyday multiculture literature, he is also critical of accounts that try and evaluate such spaces and practices based on normative communitarian frameworks. Valluvan presents an alternative account of what the value of everyday multiculture might be, rather than trying to measure it according to a discourse of encounter. His argument dispenses with the presumption that people exist outside of such spaces in hermetically sealed groups, rather emphasising that: 'everyday multicultural practices rest on a radical and complex ability to be at ease in the presence of diversity but *without* restaging communitarian conceptions of the selfsame ethnic and racial difference.' (*ibid*, 205). Following this argument, the value of spaces of everyday multiculture is not in orchestrating contact which, as Valentine (2008) points out, can be stressful for those from minoritised groups who have experienced racism and discrimination, but in providing spaces where 'ease in the presence of diversity' can be expressed and flourish.

Perhaps another weakness in some of the everyday multiculturalism literature has been zoning in on particular spaces and identifying these as examples of everyday multiculturalism while abstracting this from their location in wider urban social processes. Examples of work that avoid these pitfall include Trimbur's (2013) study of how the reordering of the labour market and socio-economic change in New York is intimately related to the raced and classed space of a Brooklyn boxing gym and Hall's (2012) work on the urban interiors of the Walworth road which she presents in relation to the restructuring of the London borough of Southwark and changing flows of international migration.

Notably, for the arguments explored in this paper, Hall (2012) finds an alternate set of values and value operating among those who run businesses and frequent the 'ordinary street' of Walworth Road 'where high-profile spaces, high-profile customers and high property values are not the primary measures of urban success' (2012, 126). Hall argues that the longevity, diversity and adaptability of the street

offer another vision of success that is not easily measured against archetypes of the upmarket street, or the village street. Hall's work is extremely useful in highlighting the difference between what is valued at an official level and what is socially valued, what is legible and illegible to those making decisions about urban futures.

However, while diversity may be articulated as part of an *alternative* set of measures of value, it is deployed in multiple ways in tussles over urban space (Raco, forthcoming). As Berrey argues diversity is 'powerful and plastic' (2005, 143) and can thus be deployed to mean different things in the same place and to gloss over race and class inequalities. Its plasticity brings dangers and possibilities – it can obscure but it can also smooth over differences. As Lees states, pithily, 'Like motherhood and apple pie, diversity is difficult to disagree with.' (2003, 622). It is instructive then for urban scholars not to just describe the qualities, value or dynamics of diversity but also to track 'what diversity can and does do' (Ahmed, 2012, 1) in conflicts over space.

In the case discussed below, I trace both a change over time in how diversity has been conceptualized in moments of urban change and a clash over the way diversity is being deployed in arguments about the future of a building. This shift in the meaning over time I describe is not only applicable to London but has also been identified elsewhere (De Oliver, 2016, Raco, forthcoming). Drawing on his Texas case study, De Oliver (2016) has argued that the meaning of 'diversity' in urban development has moved from denoting a concern with social justice to a becoming a lifestyle amenity. Raco points out to how this is writ large in urban development projects across the EU, suggesting: 'The social and cultural diversity of urban populations has been increasingly commodified and presented as a resource that underpins contemporary economic development priorities.' (*ibid*). These promises of the ability of diversity to deliver economic development are heavily influenced by Florida's (2002) argument that the presence of immigrant communities is associated with economic development in cities. This argument has been highly influential and has been echoed by The World Economic Forum (2015, see discussion in Raco, *ibid*). In the example explored below, the vision of diversity that is advanced in

development plans is used to displace existing physical spaces of everyday urban multiculture (see also Lees 2003; Holgersson, 2014). Such plans rest on a particular vision of diversity that is far removed from the bowling alley dance off, or the street dynamics of the Walworth Road.

However, due to its plasticity, diversity can also be used in moments of urban change to push back against development plans (see Dines, 2009). In probing how 'top-down' visions of diversity are not merely rolled out onto urban space but can be resisted, Skeggs' (2014) discussion of value and values provides useful conceptual tools.

Value is a slippery concept variously conveying economic value and 'moral, cultural, qualitative, and difficult to measure' value*s* (Skeggs, 2014) but most uses of the word value contain some of both of these meanings (Skeggs, *ibid*; Skeggs and Loveday, 2012; Graeber, 2001). As we shall see in the discussion below, the *value* of diversity (economic value) and *values* of diversity (the moral, cultural, qualitative and difficult to measure) are variously invoked through discussions of the future of the bowling alley and its place in the Finsbury Park of the future. Skeggs' framework is helpful for developing an analysis of how conflicts over the future of urban space play out through clashes between competing ideas about value and values. And more specifically in this case, how the plasticity of diversity means that it can be variously deployed in these debates over value and values.

Skeggs' discussion of value/values is primarily concerned with the devaluing of people rather than place and outlines how those who are devalued push back against this through articulating other values. An instructive example here comes from her research with working class women who refused to accept their devaluation by the middle classes and instead stressed alternate values, such as the importance of care. However, this extract contains a nod towards how we might think about such values translating into or being expressed spatially:

'Those designated as improper do not internalize the norms as has been presumed … They occupy spaces not completely colonized by capital, calculation and conservativism. We see this in the protests against capital's logic, environmental struggles, the Occupy movement and small-scale local responses to support people (e.g. food banks..)' (2014, 16)

It is perhaps easier to imagine the spaces of the Occupy movement or the food bank as articulating this than a commercial space like a bowling alley. And yet do the spaces of 'values beyond value' have to be directly anti-capitalist in order to move beyond its logic? For example, what about claims for the value/s of diversity that move beyond or refuse the logic of capital? These spaces may not be anti-capitalist in orientation but may be important to fostering local socialities.

Thinking with value/s can help us to further tease out slippage and contestation between the different cultural and economic claims made about diversity in moments of urban change and is useful for scrutinizing how official mechanisms, such as the Asset of Community Value, allow claims for values to intervene in processes laden with potential economic value (the property market).

Shifting and competing discourses of community value/s in Finsbury Park

The most recent controversy over the bowling alley's proposed demolition is not the first time the building has been at the centre of discussions about the area's future. In the 1980s, concern about deprivation in Finsbury Park led to an attempt to bring derelict buildings that had previously been leisure spaces under council control for community use. A community working group, the Finsbury Park Action Group (FPAG), with the backing of Haringey, Hackney and Islington Councils put together a proposal to apply for a grant from the Greater London Council (GLC) to create community spaces in the derelict leisure spaces of the then Bingo Hall (now bowling alley) and the famous Rainbow Theatre (now the United Church of the Kingdom of God). The vision of this community space is set out in a local newsletter:

'Imagine – a place with small workshops and offices, child-minding, nursery and playgroup facilities, a small cinema, drop-in centre for information about your rights, a youth club, exhibition space, small shops for local charities – with a walk way through from the tube station to a 115 acre park — ALL UNDER ONE ROOF.

Impossible? NO'

The Finsbury Parker, June 1985.

Support for this 'multifunctional community/leisure facility' was put forward as part of the 'Improvement Plan for Finsbury Park' (1985). The vision of what this space should be reflects the zeitgeist of the 1980s London left-wing Labour councils in combining an emphasis on the rehabilitation of existing spaces with the provision of cultural and community facilities for specialist interest and minoritised groups, for example, providing a cinema space for the screening of 'ethnic films', a Women's Centre and activities for pensioners (1985, 21).

But the community group were outbid on the derelict bingo hall by a private company. The Finsbury Park Action Group tried to negotiate first with the private company and then the council to allow them to use the smaller rooms within the venue as community spaces, but were unsuccessful. This unsuccessful bid gives us a glimpse of an alternative version of the present bowling alley building, where pensioners lunch by day and young people gather by night, sponsored by both public and private funders. David, who was part of the Finsbury Park Action Group reflects back on this moment:

'we had these ideas about how it could be turned into community space, and you could create workshop studios, and you could have retail in there, and rentable performance space maybe. Eventually some of these have come to Finsbury Park, but in different guises…' (interview)

In this example, the values of providing community space for marginalised people lost out to private capital, yet – somewhat ironically – in 2012, the bowling alley became held up as the kind of valuable community space that David and his fellow campaigners were trying to create in the 1980s.

The second moment takes place in 2012 in the context of large cuts to local council budgets from the Coalition Government. In 2012 Haringey, Islington and Hackney councils joined together in an effort to remodel Finsbury Park town centre. Unlike the previous suggested intervention, this one put a greater emphasis on private developers and the construction of new buildings. Part of this plan was to demolish the bowling alley in order to increase sightlines to the park and to build two private residential towers in its place. This is part of a vision of Finsbury Park as a 'town centre with significant potential' (Haringey, Hackney & Islington Councils, 2012, 2). This possibility is linked to a palpable concern with place identity — or lack of it ('Finsbury Park lacks an identity and sense of place' *ibid*, 2). This marks a shift from the 1985 moment where it is stated that although Finsbury Park was well connected by transport that was not considered enough to make it a 'centre'.

Within these discourses of place, the way that the diverse character of the area feeds into these discussions changes between 1985 and 2012. In the 1980s, the needs of ethnic minorities and equalities issues are explored throughout the planning document in the language of inequality, exclusion and deprivation. Solutions posed include safeguarding spaces and addressing housing issues. Within this, new community spaces are envisioned as providing space for specific demographic groups. In 2012, the description of the diverse population is closely linked to being a potential asset as generators of capital (economic value):

> 'It is a busy, multi-cultural area with cafes and shops that reflect this diversity. The multicultural make up of the local community and the unique retail mix are just two of Finsbury Park key assets that reflect this diversity.

[They] are just two of Finsbury Park's key assets that should be promoted and celebrated.' (Hackney, Islington and Haringey Councils, 2012)

'The area has a number of strong attributes, including the nearby asset of a large open space (the Grade II listed Finsbury Park), excellent and improving transport links, *a vibrant entrepreneurial local community* and an attractive although degraded built heritage.' (Islington Council, 2014, added emphasis)

Unlike in the 1985 document, the needs of particular groups or equalities issues are not brought into the story, rather a free-floating 'vibrant' community, what Dines refers to as a 'decontextualized vision of diversity' (2009, 258), is evoked. The multicultural nature of neighbourhood is relayed as closely linked to consumption and capital generation but a sense of — even commodified — migration heritages and embedded histories (for example, as described by Bhattacharyya (1998), Keith (2005) Hackworth and Rekers, 2005) are absent. Meanwhile, the spaces of consumption and leisure that are celebrated as holding promise are a recently expanded art gallery and a theatre established in 2013. The bowling alley is not envisioned as part of this future.

These promises of the economic benefits of diversity have a particular purchase in contemporary London. In the context of austerity measures brought in by the Coalition government that have radically reduced the funds available to local councils manifesting in a 40% cut in funding since 2010 (Local Government Association, 2014; Sparrow, 2015) there is an added urgency to generate private capital. Within this context, the language of multiculturalism is becoming increasingly complemented by an appeal to the capital-generating possibilities of diversity (Jones, 2013). However, in the Finsbury Park case, these plans – and particular framing of a diverse community as generating economic value – have not gone unchallenged. Competing discourses of value are expressed through debates about the future of the bowling alley.

The value of diverse and inclusive space

In opposition to the councils' plans, one set of prominent local voices mobilised around the value of heritage and history in the built environment (see also Blokland, 2001; May, 1996, Jackson and Benson, 2013) focusing particularly on Victorian heritage and the space of the park itself. In public meetings and within the 2012-15 planning documents the value of the park as a resource is constantly restated ('the park is a gem' as one participant in a local meeting commented[1]). Opposition to the planning developments from these groups is more about concerns about incursions into the park's space (of the new development) and the building of high towers in place of the bowling alley than the loss of a social space or concerns about gentrification. Within these debates, the bowling alley itself is judged by whether or not it is of architectural merit. While at the 'Future of Finsbury Park conference' a local campaigner raised the possibility of getting the building listed in order to save it from demolition, this example from a local forum argues that the bowling alley does not have heritage value:

> 'It is something of a maze inside, and has been repeatedly rebuilt over the years. With the exception of one small section of ceiling all of the original heritage features have been lost. The building itself could not be described as being of architectural merit.' Comment on local discussion forum [Stroudgreen.org]

Here the bowling alley is weighed up according to whether it has heritage value which here is understood as particular and coherent architectural features.

A different case for weighing up the value of the bowling alley was made strongly in the petition aimed at saving it. The value of mixed space is reflected on in the petition text and in the comments. Drafted by a local resident, who works as a fund manager, and signed by over 5000 people, this presents a different way of valuing

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[1] The park is a contested space. At the time of writing, the Friends of Finsbury Park are opposing Harringey Council about the use of the park for the Wireless music festival. Haringey argue that the revenue is necessary during these times of budget cuts while FFP oppose on the ground of the noise, the impact on the park and the enclosure of public space during the summer.

the bowling alley as a site of diversity in opposition to the council. The petition 'Six reasons to save (the bowling alley)' begins and concludes thus:

> '1. [the bowling alley] is quite simply one of the best things about the area. [the bowling alley] offers a fun, diverse activity that brings the community together, massively enhancing the vibrancy and vitality of the area. It isn't a bland chain, it isn't an identikit. It is far more than that. It is an independent and full of character.
>
> 2. [the bowling alley] attracts an extremely wide range of people from all social & ethnic backgrounds. It is rare to find somewhere where there is a genuine "mixing" of people from all walks of life. This will never be replaced. This can't be emphasised enough. The intersection of so many people from so many backgrounds is something very rare. Don't destroy it.
>
> …
>
> 6. Youth groups, community and disability groups all use [the bowling alley] as activity where those people are given a great sense of belonging to community and take part in a great sport. Where will all these people go if [bowling alley] is pulled down?' Online petition

The campaign explicitly makes a claim for the value of multiculture and intersecting social mix in leisure space, alongside the provision of space for those with few other options, and has skillfully done this in a way that has galvanized publicity and opposition to the councils' plans. The petition provides a space for proposing alternative terms for assessing the worth of the bowling alley. While the text of the petition employs similar terminology to the development proposals – the language of diversity and vibrancy – there is a greater emphasis on the social value of mixing. Furthermore, the comments on the petition become a forum for putting forward personal accounts of this place stressing happy memories, its significance for the area, as well as the use of the space by those who do not have many other places accessible to them – the petition becomes a place for expressing the 'values beyond (exchange) value' (Skeggs, 2014) of inclusive and mixed space.

A key theme in the comments on the petition was the value of having a social space for all types of people (age, occupation, ethnicity, disability), this was often expressed alongside criticism of gentrification in the area, for example:

> 'It really is a multicultural hub that is rare in London these days. Where else would you get a DJ that does a shout out 'to the Algerians in the house'? It is a classic venue and more flats that nobody can afford doesn't help the area' Petition comment

In addition, particular groups use the space provided by the petition comments section to stress the bowling alley's importance to them. For example, its use by groups with disabilities:

> 'It is an exciting activity option for young people with special needs … which is accessible by bus from the centre I work at … It means the young people are able to enjoy a sociable activity in a mainstream environment, achieve in a sporting context and get sensory feedback from the music, lighting and décor. It is a really positive trip out which we use frequently'. Petition comment

The importance of this space for disabled young people was further emphasised in an interview with another group of carers who accompany a group of young people for a weekly bowling night. They pointed to the importance for the group of being in a public place that was outside of the daily routine of home/school/day centre. They use the excursion to give the young people practice in handling their own money, in negotiating public transport on journeys to and from the bowling alley. During their usage, this place of leisure becomes a place of care. They describe the helpfulness of the staff who accommodate the group and who will move other customers to get them lanes together ('we're never kept waiting').

The emphasis on social mixing laid out in the petition is also present in interviews with some of the bowlers who frequent the bowling alley. For The Champ, the

conviviality of the space is something to be celebrated. Comparing the Finsbury Park bowling alley to another less social bowling location he concludes:

> TC: So [the Finsbury Park bowling alley] has the element of social integrating.
>
> E: Why do you think it's so different [to the other bowling alley]?
>
> TC: I think because there is an element of different activities here. And that brings different types of people here. People who don't bowl, but they come and watch people bowl. They just sit, have a smoke, watching the world, right? And they watch good games. A lot of them watch me bowl. People who I never know, who know me by name and they say 'Oh, that's The Champ'… There are people who bowl now who never used to bowl.
>
> E: Who used to come here and just watch?
>
> M: I feel like people start bowling just by watching me and Elias bowl and then Chico, and then they become friends. One guy, one Friday night brought his family and he cooked a whole lot of Ethiopian food to feed 12! He said 'I must give you some Ethiopian food' … There wasn't a lot of us and when we went upstairs there was two tables laid out, wife came, everybody came and brought us all this food … Only bowling does that.

At face value, this bowling encounter that culminates in the sharing of an Ethiopian feast may seem like 'bridging' (Putnam, 2000) across difference but this needs to be understood in the context of The Champ's cosmopolitan life. He is an Indian Guyanese businessman working in shipping, his biography and working life spans continents and cuts across ethnicities. Plus, his regular bowling friends who he describes as being watched and admired by others, are from a range of ethnic and national backgrounds (Burmese, Ethiopian and British). The social integration The Champ describes is inter-mingling between groups that are often themselves already intermingled. Happily occupying the role of a 'public character' (Jacobs, 1962) within this convivial realm, The Champ exemplifies Valluvan's 'radical and complex ability to be at ease in the presence of diversity but *without* restaging communitarian conceptions of the selfsame ethnic and racial difference.' (2016, 205). In an

interesting twist, 'watching the Champ bowl' was listed in a London based magazine as a reason for saving the bowling alley.

Beyond these articulations of value on the petition or in the fieldwork interview, the 'asset of community value' status provides a mechanism for acknowledging this worth officially. However, despite gaining this status, the future still hangs in the balance. While the bowling alley is not currently for sale, the council's plans remain unchanged ('the long term aspiration to create a new route as part of a redevelopment of [the bowling alley] site has not been removed from the SPD [Supplementary Planning Document].' (Islington Council, 2014)). The concession made by the council is that 'an appropriate leisure/community facility use to replace the existing bowling alley must be provided at the foot of the new buildings' (Haringey Council, 2016).

Conclusion

This paper has used the example of a bowling alley that has become symbolic in discussions about what is of value in a London neighbourhood undergoing development to probe how discourses of diversity and multiculturalism are deployed in processes of urban development in times of austerity localism. The paper illustrates how the meaning of diversity and its translation into 'good' urban space can be a site of struggle. This is a pressing social question, understanding how decisions are made about the creation and preservation of inclusive and convivial spaces (Dines, 2009; Holgersson, 2014; Wise and Velayutham, 2009) is critical in the current political and economic context of the UK in which approaches to immigration are hardening, open state-sponsored public spaces are on the decline and when reported incidents of racism and xenophobia have spiked post-EU referendum (Dodd, 2016; Yeung, 2016).

The bowling alley example demonstrates how celebratory discourses of diversity are brought into these processes of remodeling urban environments while material places of diversity are excluded from the future. However, this devaluation is not

accepted but challenged by those who variously use the language of diversity to make an alternative case for the bowling alley. The petition creates a space for alternative expressions of the social value of the bowling alley by local residents and other users. The paper shows how arguments about the value of inclusive and multicultural space are not merely the subject of debate between sociologists but are keenly felt and expressed differently by a range of urban denizens.

The case made for the social value of the bowling alley as diverse, multicultural and inclusive is not given in a uniform way. For some, the emphasis is put on a particular local version of conviviality ('Where else would you get a shout out to 'the Algerians in the house''), to proving a place for a marginalized group to hang out with relative ease (we're never kept waiting'), to providing the staging for convivial encounters. Yet these expressions can be taken as an articulation of the 'values beyond value' (Skeggs, *ibid*) of this place of everyday multiculture.

The paper contributes to conceptualising how contestations of value and values play out spatially in urban processes of development. Here, the asset of community value mechanism enables an official recognition of these counter-narratives about this place's value. But in the majority of cases of asset of community value listings, the process does not get any further than registering this recognition (CLCG, 2015). The listing allows 'the community' to register what they find valuable but in order to convert this value into an intervention in the redevelopment plans, the community will have to find a large amount of money to make an offer if the building is put up for sale. The charity Civic Voice has argued that the community ownership of properties should not be used to measure the asset of community value's success: 'What should be recognised and emphasised is that people are coming together to demonstrate civic pride and what they care about in their communities.' (cited in CLCG, 2015). Another perspective is that this mechanism incorporates the voicing of alternative values (here the social value of an inclusive space) into the development process but that exchange value ultimately trumps all.

The paper thus provides an illustration of the limitations of the mechanisms of protection enabled by the Localism agenda. While the government argues that this legislation gives 'many more communities the opportunity to take control of assets and facilities in their neighbourhoods.' (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2011) what 'the community'[iv] gains is time and the right to compete in the property market. This then privileges groups within 'the community' that can get together and amass the financial, cultural and social capital needed to turn community value into financial capital. But those who have most at stake in the loss of such community spaces are often those who are excluded from elsewhere. The Asset of Community value status enables the recognition of legitimacy of claims to social value but cannot be further acted upon without capital or the means to get hold of it.

For this London-based example, the context of austerity localism is important. Are the conjuring of vibrant atmospheres to enable private sector solutions the only tools at the council's disposal during a time of government cutbacks and increasing land values? In this case a combination of the hollowing out of the concept of diversity and the political and economic context results in a paradox whereby diversity is celebrated as an atmosphere and generator of capital while existing physical spaces of everyday urban multiculture are at best unprotected and at worst not recognised, devalued and demolished.

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[i] 'The area is also a significant arrival point for migrant communities, particularly those of North African origin who are frequently housed locally, but there is also a growing number of East European migrants – the majority Polish Catholics – many of whom might be temporary residents. The Finsbury Park area also services a sizeable Jewish population in the abutting area of Stamford Hill, which is home to the highest concentration of Lubavitch and other orthodox Jews outside of Israel. This variety of white ethnicities adds to the ethnic and cultural diversity of an area that contains a large proportion of visible minorities including Pakistanis, Iraqis, Turkish (including a sizeable population of Kurds), Cypriots and Chinese. Prominent African groups include Somalis, Ethiopians and Eritreans.' Hintze et al (2008, 395)

[ii] As council resources have been cutback in the UK, the localism agenda devolved power about how to allocate these declining resources back to local authorities. Within this vision of localism, civil society was to play a key role promoting the coalition government ideal of the 'Big Society' ('We want to give citizens, communities and local government the power and information they need to come together, solve the problems they face.' (Cabinet Office, 2010, see also Lowndes and Pratchett, 2012). But as Rogaly (forthcoming) highlights, this assumes homogeneous sets of interests within a community and denies the politics of the local.

iii http://savebrixtonarches.com