Chapter 25

From social housing to upscale regeneration: the pitfalls of residents' participation in Dublin

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In recent years, many cities have set up urban regeneration projects in run-down or depressed areas through a range of policy initiatives. Urban regeneration schemes are initiatives that combine urban planning and the resolution of social, economic, and environmental issues to create new, vibrant urban spaces while still preserving the unique spatial characteristics of the area. Lately, these schemes usually involve the creation of favourable conditions to attract private investment as part of a strategic plan to draw wealth to a particular urban area (Boyle et al. 2018). In the process, rents and property values escalate, changes are made to the character and culture of particular neighbourhoods, and communities are displaced to give way to development (Kearns & Mason 2013, Marco et al. 2020). While this is a description of what has been termed 'gentrification' – often used negatively to describe the displacement of local, poor communities – dramatic changes in the urban landscape bring new challenges to scholars and local activists trying to understand and interfere in the processes and impacts of urban regeneration. The experience in Dublin is illustrative of a rich assortment of regeneration initiatives and it poses the classic question: urban redevelopment for whom? (Fox 2001). Particularly in the inner-city central areas, urban regeneration projects, in combination with rapid changes and a prolonged economic crisis, have contributed to the removal and dispersal of working-class communities, permanently dismantling original social structures (Hearne et al. 2014, MacLaren & Kelly 2014). Community participation has been an often overlooked element in those regeneration projects, a fact that has attracted criticism from urban planners, residents, and campaigners.

I here focus on a case of decision-making for affordable housing: the property-led regeneration of a social housing complex in Dublin, O'Devaney Gardens. In my interpretation, while the rhetoric of community participation has become an integral element of urban planning, competing perceptions are hindering the realisation and implementation of the long struggle for affordable housing in Dublin. Community participation has often been undermined by the state, as shown in the highly neoliberal land use and developments that have been part of the Irish government's agenda since the 2000s, and this has been forced on vulnerable, poor, working-class inner-city communities over the years (MacLaran et al. 2007, MacLaren & Kelly 2014). The O'Devaney Gardens estate has been at the centre of a heated debate about the use of public land for private development while Ireland is in the midst of a serious homeless and housing crisis. This chapter provides insights into the complex relations between urban development contradictions and the interactions between private capital, the state, and local residents. Supported by the emergent literature on urban and housing regeneration, this work contributes with critical insights into market-led urban regeneration, decision-making, and the implementation of urban regeneration in social housing scholarship (Della Spina et al. 2020, Hearne & Redmond 2014, Watt 2021). Empirically, this study provides evidence on the conflict around valuable land being used for urban housing developments, given how Dublin, a vibrant and attractive European city, is the setting for a host of conflicts in contemporary urban planning, such as liveability problems, growth management issues, the lack of affordable housing, and gentrification (Norris & Hearne 2016, Punch 2009).

The analysis presented in this chapter draws on content analysis, a method of qualitative data analysis that involves the examination and coding of textual data for patterns and themes. As a research tool, content analysis is useful to identify patterns and understand underlying themes in the collected dataset, allowing the author to draw conclusions about the data and also providing a structure to the data that can be used to identify relationships and trends (Bengtsson 2016). The data consist of publicly available policy documents, media reports, policy statements, and previous scholarship on urban regeneration that has engaged with the original residents of O'Devaney Gardens. In particular, the study uses reports obtained from the Dublin City Council (DCC) Housing Land Initiative

Programme database, where documents regarding the urban regeneration of O'Devaney Gardens can be accessed. They comprise feasibility studies, maps, agreements, background information reports, manuals, and letters.

This text is organised as follows. In the next section, I present a critical overview of the literature on inclusive urban regeneration. Next, I focus on the study's methodology and provide some background information on Dublin's history of urban development and the impact of the public–private partnership (PPP) redevelopment model on regeneration projects, which scattered the O'Devaney Gardens community. I then move to an analysis of policy documents in order to shed light on the regeneration plans and the process of community disintegration under such plans, showing how the opportunities for affordable housing change or decrease during the different phases of the development. In the discussion, I examine urban regeneration in Dublin in terms of economic growth concerns and the opportunities for sustainable and inclusive regeneration in the city. In the conclusion, I reflect on my findings and consider avenues for further research.

Urban Regeneration And Collaborative Decision-Making

Public participation in urban regeneration encompasses strong interaction between the state and civil society. The literature on urban regeneration has highlighted several processes of socio-spatial change as part of larger urban transformation processes. Urban regeneration is a multidisciplinary research area, covering fields such as policy-making and practice, city planning, urban design, sustainable housing, transportation, economics, and community development (Leary & McCarthy 2013). An urban area targeted for intervention is often considered by planners in an integrated manner: the physical connections among city areas (transportation, access), the management of funds from different sources (i.e. the private sector), and integration between the policies of different policy area departments and between levels of local and national administration (Mendes 2014).

Regardless of its degree or intensity, urban regeneration is associated not just with improvements but also with functional development and deliberate attempts to counteract the forces and factors that are the cause of urban degeneration (Mendes 2013). In the classic definition of Roberts

and Sykes (1999: 17), urban regeneration is a comprehensive and integrated vision and action that leads to the resolution of urban problems, seeking to bring about lasting improvements in the economic, physical, social, and environmental condition of an area that has been subject to change. The authors refer to regeneration as a proactive response to urban problems in light of the need to plan the built environment and also economic, social, and environmental factors. This chapter uses this definition as the point of departure for understanding the regeneration process.

As one of the main strategies to address inner-city decline and deprivation, urban regeneration involves attempts to reverse that decline by improving both the physical structure and, more importantly and elusively, the economy of those areas (Weaver 2001). As noted by Jones and Evans (2013), urban planning is often viewed as one of the incentives of economic growth, and while the valorisation of economic prosperity can be a powerful tool to improve social well-being and the recovery of the physical conditions of the cities, economic interests can override social ones. Regeneration projects often include the integration of social and environmental factors, often through partnerships between different public and private organisations. However, while gentrification is not an automatic result of regeneration, the literature has highlighted that regeneration often attracts private capital as a strategic factor in the redevelopment of the cities, which increases property values, contributing to urban fragmentation and the segregation of the urban space (Albet & Benach 2018, Della Lucia et al. 2016, Mendes 2014, Pérez et al. 2018). Godschalk (2004) refers to gentrification as a conflict between competing views on how to preserve poorer neighbourhoods, which results in new or renovated buildings for those on higher incomes, thus exacerbating the inequality and social exclusion that the regeneration was supposed to address.

Consultation and Participation in the Regeneration of Social Housing Estates

Community consultation and public participation are vital to ensure open and transparent housing development decisions in residential neighbourhoods (Kenna & O'Sullivan 2014), so collaborative decision-making is another significant aspect of urban regeneration. The involvement of multiple stakeholders and multi-spatial needs adds a layer

of complexity to decision-making and implementation (Wang et al. 2014, Zheng et al. 2015). The involvement of a multitude of actors often requires that decisions be negotiated and modified to provide sufficient incentives for action by participants whose objectives differ and one way to handle this is via collaborative decision-making and a shared responsibility for implementation (Rhodes & Murray 2007: 79).

The literature has shown that the political complexity of urban regeneration can be addressed by a participatory planning approach but, without substantive knowledge and engagement, participatory decision-making is annulled (Mayer et al. 2016). Superficial participatory planning – which will be further discussed in this study – often degenerates into a one-sided, superficial venting of frustration, as communities are frequently included when planning is already at an advanced stage or when important decisions are actually made elsewhere (Wyman & Shulman 2002). Administrators and developers are inclined to avoid the hassle of participatory decision-making processes and these often seem an 'obligatory ritual' (Mayer et al. 2016). This is one of the reasons why collaborative decision-making is frequently not present in final projects, especially when participatory processes are disconnected from central decision-making processes (Vergara et al. 2019). As suggested by Cortese et al. (2019: 140), urban regeneration requires innovative ways of governing that include the voices of all the stakeholders affected, in line with the complexity of social problems and in combination with transparency.

Over the past few decades in Ireland, community participation in urban regeneration has dramatically increased. In Ireland, participatory practices first emerged in the early 2000s, when the government started to focus on bringing together citizens, local government, and non-governmental organisations to create a more inclusive process of urban development. These processes are often characterised by attempts to generate public engagement, civic dialogue, and collective decision-making (Whyte 2014), even if they are frequently implemented to comply with legal requirements (e.g. statutory consultations) (Shannon & O'Leary 2020). Notable projects include the regeneration of the Fatima Mansions complex in Rialto (Dublin), the Dublin Docklands regeneration programme, and the Cork City Northwest Quarter Regeneration Plan.

Social housing has been an important part of Irish urbanism since the early 1900s. It underwent several changes throughout the 20th century, from the building of local authority housing in the 1920s and 1930s to the

introduction of housing associations and the housing action plan in the 1980s and 1990s. In recent decades, the ideology driving social housing interventions has shifted to a more neoliberal approach, with an emphasis on privatisation, marketisation, and reduction of investments in social housing (Lima 2021, Lima et al. 2022). Conflicts over valuable land for urban housing developments are often observed in PPPs that plan to offer mixed-tenure housing (social housing and private sector housing). This shift has been further influenced by external forces, such as the global financial crisis of 2008, which led to a decrease in public spending and the widespread introduction of market-based approaches to urban regeneration (Hearne 2020, Norris & Redmond 2005).

Taken together, the studies examined support the notion that the processes of urban regeneration are complex and involve a myriad of stakeholders. A way to cope with so many conflicting interests is through collaborative decision-making, but this often takes place superficially. In addition, the conflicts over the use of urban land and the gentrification process further influence the processes of urban change. In the next section, I examine urban regeneration within Ireland's urban policy, with emphasis on the process of urban regeneration under PPPs in the case of O'Devaney Gardens, and I demonstrate how the lack of collaborative participation in decision-making and conflicts over the best use of public land have made the area a new political battleground in the dispute on affordable housing.

Background For The Research And Case Study

The story of O'Devaney Gardens and the PPP exemplifies the cycle of investment and disinvestment in Ireland. Constructed in 1956 in the Stoneybatter area of Dublin's north inner city, O'Devaney Gardens was a public housing development with 278 apartments, constructed, managed, and owned by Dublin City Council (DCC), the municipal local authority. The neighbourhood is originally one of the most disadvantaged inner-city areas and was largely mono-ethnic (white, Irish) but the districts surrounding the apartment complex contain a mix of housing tenures, commercial and residential development, and (particularly in recent years) higher-income and more ethnic groups (Norris & Hearne 2016). Stoneybatter has seen many transformations over the years. Initially a largely working-class neighbourhood in which residents were mainly employed by the adjacent Guinness Brewery factory and Jameson's Distillery (Kearns 1996), today the area has attracted many new property developments, sleek restaurants and

themed bars and shops, due to its mixed-income, ethnically diverse population, varied services, and close proximity with the Phoenix Park and Dublin's city centre.

Dublin's inner-city areas were heavily affected by unemployment in the 1970s after a period of deindustrialisation and economic downfall and further undermined in the 1980s (MacLaren & Kelly 2014). In this period, a heroin crisis was concentrated in Dublin's inner-city areas and outer estates where poverty, multi-generational unemployment, high population density (particularly of young adults), and abandonment of public services and structural building decay were the most present (O'Gorman 1998, Punch 2005). As a response to these issues in disadvantaged urban neighbourhoods, the Irish state carried out improvement schemes from the mid-1980s on to promote socio-economic regeneration and improvements to dwellings and public spaces in run-down estates. Targeting in particular estates built during the 1960s and 1970s, DCC's Remedial Works Scheme and the Area Regeneration Programme were implemented to redevelop deprived inner-city areas from the mid-1990s onwards (Norris & Redmond 2005). These programmes had some positive impact in inner-city neighbourhoods, such as Fatima Mansions and Dolphin House, but have been criticised because of the many separate funding streams and difficulties in raising money for multifaceted urban redevelopment schemes (Norris & Hearne 2016, Punch 2009).

In the mid-2000s, O'Devaney Gardens and another seven inner-city housing estates were earmarked for demolition and rebuilding, to be funded by PPPs. In a PPP, the state contracts a private company to design, build, and sometimes finance and/or maintain a public service or infrastructure. The local government invited private developers to regenerate neighbourhoods as mixed-tenure estates. In this scheme, a private developer would receive free public land to build and sell properties on the private market while also providing new social housing units on the same site (Hearne 2009). O'Devaney Gardens' residents demanded to be involved in the plan for the site. A forum for discussion was created and talks about regeneration began, with the community rejecting being at the will of private developers. However, their interaction with DCC and developers was largely one-sided, with little space for meaningful citizen engagement. The plans for regeneration started in 2003 and the process of regeneration has been criticised by residents' representatives and community workers as lacking any significant community participation, with the mechanisms of the

redevelopment process making it difficult for the community to influence the process (Russell & Redmond 2009).

In the late 1990s, residents of O'Devaney Gardens in Dublin started a campaign to improve their neighbourhood by providing better community facilities. However, in 2003, DCC revealed plans to redevelop the area under a PPP, which included demolition and rebuild, in disaccord with what residents had been lobbying for. Residents quickly mobilised and tried to lobby to influence the plans, but the developer withdrew in 2008 due to a lack of economic viability, causing the plans to be abandoned. This led to the break-up of the community, in contrast to the successful PPP redevelopment of Fatima Mansions (Norris & Hearne 2016).

With the collapse of the property market in 2008, which had serious consequences for Ireland, including an IMF financial rescue package, urban regeneration projects were suspended, and thus funding for social housing, together with the hopes and expectations of the community, quickly vanished (Norris & Hearne 2016). The project remained in limbo until a series of feasibility studies were released and developers were invited to tender, once the economic crisis subsided in the mid-2010s. In 2017, in the context of the post-crisis situation and the economic recovery, talks about the urban regeneration of O'Devaney Gardens were reinitiated, but with several changes to the original plan. The main stumbling block to the new regeneration plan was that some local councillors wanted the redeveloped O'Devaney Gardens to be a public rent-only estate, whereas DCC wanted the proposed 479 planned units to be a mixture of social and private housing (Sirr 2016). The tendering process for a new regeneration project started in 2015, as Dublin councillors moved to revive the regeneration effort as part of the Housing Land Initiative. Most of the buildings on the site were torn down in 2016, and when the last residents were re-housed in 2018, the remaining apartment blocks were demolished.

A motion was put forward in 2016 by the Workers' Party councillor Éilis Ryan stating that the redeveloped site should be 100% public mixed-income housing, including 50% homes for people on the housing waiting list and the other 50% for those struggling to pay rent in the private sector. The motion was approved but later rescinded because councillors were afraid this model would concentrate poverty and the area would become a 'ghetto'. After that a new local election took place in 2018 and new councillors were

elected, and a new regeneration proposal emerged. The new plan includes 30% social housing, 20% affordable housing, and 50% private-purchase housing, while the total number of new homes has increased to 824 units. Former residents and housing activists were not involved in the discussion of the new plan, which has reignited an intense public debate about the best use of public land. In late 2019, progressive-leaning councillors attempted to rescind a EUR 7 million deal with the developer Bartra,[1] alleging the 20/30/50 project was approved based on misleading information, such as 1) the price tag for the affordable homes (the upper bracket for the affordable homes was EUR 420,000); 2) the poor use of state land, with developers making a large profit from public land (around EUR 67 million while the site was sold to developer Bartra Capital for EUR 7 million); and 3) the low amount of social housing (192 units). In November 2019, the newly elected councillors wanted to vote to alter the deal with Bartra, alleging it was a bad deal. The deal was approved anyway by 61.5% of the councillors, so a sideline informal deal was achieved with the developer, who agreed to lower the price of the affordable homes and offer 30% of the private homes for sale to an Approved Housing Body (housing association) for a cost-rental scheme. The housing minister Eoghan Murphy, however, later stated that this informal deal was invalid and that there was no funding for acquiring extra social housing units.

Research Findings – Urban Regeneration And Community Disintegration

- Weakened Community Structures

The contradictions between the vision for the city held by planners, developers, and residents and local needs and values initially fed into the emergent patterns of community organisation and collective action (Punch 2009). Most of the communities earmarked for redevelopment cooperated with the PPP in Dublin but neighbourhoods differed significantly in terms of their strength and lobbying capacity to shape PPPs (Norris & Hearne 2016). While some communities such as Fatima Mansions demonstrated a very strong capacity to resist top-down regeneration and shaped the process, others had weaker organisational structures. O'Devaney Gardens residents failed to influence the DCC plans for the redevelopment of their area due to a lack of engagement between the residents and the DCC. Despite the residents' attempts to engage with the Council, they were unable to effectively communicate their needs and concerns to the Council. Consequently, the Council failed to adequately consult with and engage the

residents on the plans for the redevelopment of the area. As a result, the Council was not able to take into account the views of the local residents and the plans for the redevelopment of O'Devaney Gardens did not reflect the local community's needs and preferences. Thus, when the PPP collapsed as a result of the economic crisis between 2007 and 2008, the community was left 'devastated' (Norris & Hearne 2016: 41), considering many residents were already relocated and some of the buildings made vacant and boarded. With all of the residents dispersed, there were even less opportunities for them to participate and influence the redevelopment strategy supposedly created for their benefit.

Notwithstanding the serious deprivation and social issues in the estates assigned for regeneration (O'Gorman 1998, Punch 2005), most of the communities affected shared a strong connection and pride, with varying potential for community organisation and resistance (Bisset 2008). Even with a weaker tradition of community mobilisation, previous scholarship has presented evidence of the emergence of new organising agents with objectives relating to the regeneration and improvement of O'Devaney Gardens. The existence of community representatives is due to the establishment of the regeneration project (Hearne 2009, Rhodes & Murray 2007). Residents' representative groups were created specifically in response to the possibility of regeneration so as to better position themselves in relation to the city council. As described by Norris and Hearne (2016), O'Devaney residents began organising for improvements to their neighbourhood in the late 1990s when an ad hoc group was created to campaign for the provision of better community facilities and the redevelopment of the area without the need for demolitions. The story took a further twist with the state's engagement with urban regeneration via PPPs, the most overt expression to date of the infection of urban policies by neoliberal ideologies, as the residents' representatives were informed that PPP funds were to be used to finance and deliver the redevelopment of public housing stock and the revitalisation of the area (Punch 2009).

As a reaction to the new regeneration plans, the community hurried to appoint their own representatives and pushed for a process of greater consultation and communication with people to let them know a redevelopment was going to happen. During the discussion phase of the PPP in 2003, the DCC attempted to transfer the maintenance and management of the housing stock to the private and charity sector. Residents opposed the possibility of a large part of the site being given over

to high-density private apartments, and an agreement between DCC and community representatives was achieved in which the initial level of public housing units was to be maintained and they were to remain city council tenants (Hearne 2009). Work on implementing the PPP moved quickly, and despite descriptions of community consultation in policy documents,[2] there is very little evidence that the consultations and community participation were meaningful (Hearne 2009, Indymedia Ireland 2005, Norris & Hearne 2016). Without a clear indication of when the redevelopment would start, a significant number of people wanted to leave between 2007 and 2008. The area had deteriorated substantially, and residents were frustrated with the conditions on the estate, the delays in the project, and their lack of involvement in the ongoing negotiations over the future of the project (Hearne 2009).

– The Fragmentation of the Consultation Process

An examination of policy documents shows that consultations with statutory environmental authorities, other interested parties, and the public through the statutory planning application should take place, as established in the guideline 'Quality Housing in Sustainable Communities – Best Practice Guidelines for Delivering Homes, Sustaining Communities'.[3] A policy context report informs us that the O'Devaney Gardens community 'has actively engaged in the formulation of the development proposals through a range of community-based activities and initiatives co-ordinated by Dublin City Council',[4] while other reports state that feasibility studies were prepared in consultation with residents of the complex (Environmental Impact Statement Section 2). Some community feedback and consultation indeed took place in the first PPP attempt (2003–2008). According to reports, some work had been done by local community regeneration boards (involving development workers, residents, and DCC officials). This is confirmed in the detailed work by Hearne (2009), which presents an account of a model of social and physical regeneration that allowed residents and stakeholders to pressure the state into accepting significant resident participation in the regeneration, with residents participating in consultation and receiving technical support. Policy documents state that local residents were active participants in the elaboration of the original master plan for O'Devaney Gardens (Environmental Impact Statement Section 2) but the extent to which the spaces of direct participation for influencing the design of the project really empowered residents is unclear. Similar research in other inner-city Dublin

estates has shown that consultation and resident participation did not help residents to assert their agenda or to meet the minimum necessary EU guidelines in relation to resident consultation (Hearne 2009).

The redevelopment of O'Devaney through the PPP regeneration scheme was susceptible to failure because it was substantially contingent on the property market. During the 2008 economic downturn, the PPP project for the regeneration of the flats complex collapsed. Even though the preferred bidder in the PPP for O'Devaney had signed the contract, the developer Bernard McNamara withdrew from its commitment and later declared bankruptcy. Once an estate has been earmarked for regeneration, de-tenanting is likely to occur over a period of time, resulting in vacancy, boarded housing units, and dereliction. Deserted and filled with expectations, residents continued to suffer from vandalism and became the fated losers in the process. Residents were angered at the injustice of their estate being allowed to fall into disrepair while banks received a huge financial bailout from the Irish government (Hardiman & Metinsoy 2019), indicating much about the character, values, and priorities of the state when it came to urban redevelopment. Only the PPP in Fatima Mansions was completed. Abandoned communities in O'Devaney Gardens, and also in St Michael's Estate, reacted with great anger and frustration, resulting in a series of protests in front of the city council offices to draw attention to the human cost of the collapse of five PPP regeneration deals (Russell & Redmond 2009). The collective outpouring of anger evolved not just because of the significant time and expectations invested in the regeneration project but also because of their vulnerable situation, behind which lay long years of struggles, achievements, and losses (Punch 2009).

- Focus on Relocating Residents Rather Than Keeping the Community in Place

Third, there was an overemphasis on the relocation of residents and demolition instead of focusing on sustaining the living conditions for existing communities. To enable the first phase of the rebuilding, the partial demolition of the complex took place before the collapse of the PPP. DCC moved out some 100 tenants (out of 278) from residential blocks to the north of the estate to facilitate the redevelopment, leaving 93 units occupied (Planning Reg. Ref 3607/10).[5] Long-term residents and community leaders left as vacant dwellings were being used for anti-social activity and little maintenance was being carried out. The remaining residents

requested to be transferred to other social housing and were relocated elsewhere. In 2012, DCC announced that the redevelopment plans were being cancelled due to a lack of funding after 15 years of discussion and planning (Bohan 2012). The process of de-tenanting and selective transfer was used by DCC to wipe the community clean and start afresh, without any opposition (Hearne 2009). This ultimately led to the devastation of this community (Norris & Hearne 2016).

In the next section I examine the opacity around the new redevelopment plans and the lack of inclusion of the community's voice in the new proposal for O'Devaney Gardens.

Participation In Urban Redevelopment And Land Use Conflicts: A Discussion

In urban regeneration planning, citizen participation is a key element for successful regeneration projects. The experience of urban regeneration initiatives in O'Devaney Gardens shows that the redevelopment strategy had very negative consequences for residents. Even with attempts to influence the shape of the redevelopment in its early stages, their weak mobilisation structures meant that they were not able to resist and shape the regeneration project imposed on them. The result is that local social networks are now weak. Demolition and clearance did not solve the underlying problems that caused the decline of the community, and gentrification and private housing make physical renewal more challenging (Rohe 2009).

The principle that citizens should take part in collaborative decision-making in urban planning has gained acceptance since the 2000s, a fact now reflected in Irish legislation, which commonly includes area-based community participation in planning efforts. However, the ability to have an effective influence on the general public when it comes to urban planning has been diminished with the increased reliance on joint ventures between the state and private capital (PPPs), a strategic alliance forged between urban planning, the economic boosterism lobby, and the property-development sector to reinvent the image of the city (MacLaren & Kelly 2014: 30). As noted by MacLaran et al. (2007), in the Irish political environment the collaborative participation of citizens is an official requirement, but critical attention must be focused on the formal structures of inclusive participation and on the manner in which the

commitment has been realised. MacLaran et al. (2007) were referring to community participation before the economic crisis in their writing. However, as the years have passed, the nature of the government's commitment to community participation in planning remains questionable.

In the face of rhetorical commitments to community participation in the project plan for O'Devaney Gardens, the role of local residents and stakeholders is limited to consultation. Policy decisions are taken elsewhere, a policy practice in which participation is undermined by the state. As previously mentioned, the current redevelopment project references community participation as having 'an active say in how the community is developed'.[6] This participation structure included, in the first phase of the project (2003–2008), a Regeneration Board composed of resident representatives, DCC officials, elected local councillors, and other key stakeholders. It was a forum that met on a quarterly or bi-monthly basis to discuss the master plan in the first phase of the project, according to the policy documents.[7] These documents do not state when the meetings took place and what they discussed or decided. In the current revised redevelopment scheme (2017–), the Land Initiative Regeneration report establishes that the 'new O'Devaney Gardens Regeneration Consultative Forum'[8] will meet every two months, which involves an independent person acting as chair, one DCC official, two city councillors, six residents from the relevant local estates, and two community groups.

A DCC Monthly Management Report from June 2019 states that a consultative forum and meeting has been set up[9] but, in practice, there is little to no information about who is taking part in the O'Devaney Community Consultative Forum, how often they meet, or what is discussed at meetings. The few members identified by media sources complained about the vagueness of the plans and the lack of community voice (Finnan 2018). A report from 2018 states that the forum met on five occasions in 2017 but no further details were available.

The first known public consultation event occurred in October 2018, hosted by DCC – the Next for O'Devaney workshop – involving citizens, municipal administration representatives, and architects in interactive activities. According to its final report, the aim of the workshop was to gather local residents, interested parties, community groups, and key stakeholders in order to explore the community's 'view for the development'. It was supposed to be the 'final round of consultations with the local community' to inform them about 'the brief for the developers to be appointed for

O'Devaney Gardens'.[10] Attendees watched presentations and shared their hopes and expectations in a one-off event. The consultative forum, however, has no statutory power, just like the previous Regeneration Board. In order to ensure the economic viability of the regeneration project and profits for private developers in the PPP regeneration, there is no guarantee that communities' needs and wishes will be 'briefed' to those tendering. The key word is 'consultative', which has often served to effectively marginalise the views of dissenting residents and to depoliticise a highly political agenda (MacLaren & Kelly 2014). Previous research has highlighted how PPP 'consultation' processes involved prompting residents on the necessity to reduce their aspirations in relation to the quantity of social housing and community gain provided in the regeneration plans (Hearne 2009).

In a period of rising house prices, housing shortages, and increasing homelessness, the market-based approach of using the increased value of land to regenerate old social housing in the inner city through PPPs demonstrates the particularly strong role of the private sector as the main housing provider. The policy practices discussed in this study have sustained and legitimated the process of gentrification and working-class displacement in Dublin. Neoliberal ideas of 'regeneration' in the current conflict about the use of state land have to be viewed in light of a long-established process of defining regeneration solely in terms of economic growth concerns (Jones & Evans 2013, Mendes 2014, Pérez et al. 2018). Addressing the conflicts among the various stakeholders in the process of land-use allocation requires time and commitment, and with the short time between awarding the tender to developers and the commencement of construction it is unlikely that a more engaged public consultation will take place. For a community now detached and scattered, the rocketing value of inner-city land affects the continuation of social housing in these areas. A highly political neoliberal land-use and development agenda has been forced on vulnerable, poor, working-class inner-city communities (MacLaren & Kelly 2014) and, in the case of O'Devaney Gardens, the majority of the original residents are no longer present to demand social housing.

Conclusion

This research examined the complex relations between competing views on urban regeneration and the interactions between private capital, the state,

and local residents, with the story of the redevelopment of O'Devaney Gardens as a case study. This study has shown that the Irish central government and DCC remain committed to PPPs as the preferred mechanism to deliver urban regeneration. With the economy starting to show signs of recovery, PPPs are again a key component of urban regeneration as controversial plans to build a mix of social and private housing are again on the table. The research has identified the key issues in urban regeneration and community disintegration: the weak community structures, the fragmentation of the consultation process, and the focus on the relocation of residents rather than sustaining the community. Together these findings reflect the market-driven approaches to social regeneration, which have given way to a land-use conflict over the best use of publicly owned sites with high potential for housing development. While these developments are much needed, the revised version of the O'Devaney regeneration imposes higher residential density without relevant public consultation, as the project is once again dominated by a private housing scheme in an area that used to be a social housing estate.

The opportunity for affordable housing changed or decreased during the different phases of the development. In the early 2000s, funding was available and some level of engagement with the government took place. The O'Devaney Gardens community's needs however were not fully attended to and by the post-2008 period the PPPs collapsed. With the economic recovery around 2015, a new wave of plans ensued, with even less community engagement since many of the original residents had already left and a much stronger role for private developers and for-profit housing construction was included.

  A meaningful process of citizen participation and collaborative decision-making could promote the cooperation of multiple stakeholders and reduce the conflict around land use and housing tenure allocation. The PPP model is still heavily based on the cyclical market approach, and the regeneration programme proposed for O'Devaney Gardens failed to capture the long history, rich culture, and social networks of the inner city in order to promote social regeneration and sustainability, as the regeneration consultation process itself disempowered residents. Instead, the rich diversity of these communities was used to facilitate the process of gentrification and displacement. Considering Ireland's success with direct participation in the Citizen's Assembly, people in Ireland have played an important role in the political framework of the country and the results have promoted a series of social changes, including new legislation in

several areas, such as reproductive rights and same-sex marriage. However, this success does not yet apply to the area of urban planning.

Furthermore, this research sheds light on current strategies of urban regeneration taking place in other contexts. The analysis presented, although limited to a case study, allows for a reflection on the enormous financial commitments and private sector interest in urban regeneration, which raises several issues in relation to both social and spatial justice, legitimacy of decisions, and impacts on local communities. The participatory dimension in the perspective of urban regeneration, although present in form of consultation, is commonly held hostage by being undervalued in relation to economic growth opportunities, in which participation in collaborative decision-making as an urban and housing policy component has effectively remained a residual practice. In addition to the participatory element, one of the major issues is how redevelopment affects the opportunities for affordable housing.

This work contributes to the literature on urban regeneration and collaborative decision-making by adding to the understanding of the underlying dynamics of urban regeneration and how different actors interact in the urban policy context. These findings could be of interest to scholars and policy-makers interested in how contemporary decision-making approaches and policy-making processes need to be more inclusive to allow for the advancement and encouragement of a sustainable and fair process of regeneration. As a result of this study, further research might be conducted on the specific roles and agendas of private developers in redeveloping inner-city areas.

NOTES

1. Bartra is an Irish property group that is heavily involved in the development of social housing in Ireland. Due to delays in planning permissions, renegotiation of contracts with the Dublin City Council, and deferral of the start date for the new development construction, Bartra has been criticised and threatened to have the contract taken away (see: https://dublininquirer.com/ 2022/12/21/as-developer-still-has-not-built-homes-at-o-devaney-gardens-councillors-call-to   -take-back-the-land). The latest update at the time of the writing is that construction was set to commence in February 2023 (see:

https://www.irishtimes.com/ireland/2023/02/10/odevaney -gardens-redevelopment-to-start-this-month/).

2. O'Devaney Gardens Environmental Impact Statement Section 2, Characteristics of the Proposed Development.
3. O'Devaney Gardens Environmental Impact Statement Section 3, Planning Policy Context.
4. O'Devaney Gardens Environmental Impact Statement Section 3, Planning Policy Context (page 8).
5. O'Devaney Gardens Environmental Impact Statement Chapter 1.
6. O'Devaney Gardens Environmental Impact Statement Section 4: Human Beings (page 4).
7. O'Devaney Gardens Environmental Impact Statement Section 2: Characteristics of the Proposed Development (page 11).
8. O'Devaney Gardens Land Initiative Regeneration Project report (page 24).
9. Report No. 209/2018. Members of Dublin City Council Report of the Chief Executive Monthly Management.
10. Next for O'Devaney report (2018, page 4).

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