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"People-powered regeneration": The emergence of civic crowdfunding in a post-political era

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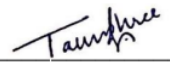
Being a dissertation submitted to the faculty of The Built Environment as part of the requirements for the award of the MSc International Planning at University College London: I declare that this dissertation is entirely my own work and that ideas, data and images, as well as direct quotations, drawn from elsewhere are identified and referenced.

Signature: 

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ABSTRACT

Civic crowdfunding, a practice through which citizens contribute to funding community infrastructure, has been expanding rapidly but remains under researched. Within the UK, the growth of crowdfunded community projects has been attributed to the emphasis on localism, and in London—where the GLA and local councils have partnered with the crowdfunding platform Spacehive—the Mayor has praised it as "people-powered regeneration". Those in support of localism claim that it deepens democracy by expanding participation, while others have argued that localism can be 'anti-political'. Paralleling these debates, many theorists have suggested that new areas for participation in urban regeneration are underpinned by a post-political agenda, which aims to build consensus while leaving out debate. This research seeks to narrow down these varied arguments and explore if civic crowdfunding tends to depoliticise the urban sphere. The research involved a critical discourse analysis of the policies and debates governing civic crowdfunding in London, and a comparative analysis of six projects on Spacehive; including interviews with project founders, members of the GLA and local authorities. The findings reveal that while there is a notable emphasis on localism and associated anti-political ideas in the discourse, such conclusions remain largely abstract, highlighting the need for an empirically focussed discussion. Here, this dissertation provides a framework for analysing the shifting relationship between civic and state actors, throughout the lifecycle of crowdfunding campaigns and the post-political tactics that may come into play. By focussing on the role of both grassroots and state actors, the research argues that depoliticization is not limited to top-down governance agents and that multiple forms of depoliticization can come into effect at a particular stage. Furthermore, civic crowdfunding itself serves as a conduit for the depoliticization of the urban sphere, by producing a type of politics that prioritises pragmatism, delivery and consensus building.

LIST OF FIGURES

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Context

Crowdfunding has transformed the alternative finance industry in the past decade, facilitating the use of micro-contributions from 'the crowd', to fund products and services (Belleflamme *et al*., 2013). Riding on the success of platforms like Kickstarter and Indiegogo, crowdfunding has received considerable attention from academics and policy makers, as a means of raising capital for companies (Baeck and Westlake, 2012). However, civic crowdfunding, a sub-type of crowdfunding, described as "the use of crowdfunding to provide shared goods and services for communities" (Davies, 2014: 7), remains under researched despite the rapid growth of civic crowdfunding platforms such as Spacehive, Neighbourly and Citizenvestor. The research that exists, mainly focuses on how civic crowdfunding offers a solution to the financial constraints around public services and its potential to enhance participatory forms of democratic governance (Warbis, 2016).

Within the UK, it has been suggested that the growth of civic crowdfunded projects can be attributed to a couple of factors: the socio-economic conditions (austerity), a renewed emphasis on localism and the availability of 'matched funding' from the government, like the Greater London Authority (GLA) in London (Gullino *et al.*, 2019). In fact, the GLA's Crowdfund London programme on Spacehive has grown considerably in the past few years and the Mayor has referred to it as "people-powered regeneration" (GLA, 2019).

Indeed, there has been a notable focus on localism within the UK and the decentralisation of planning functions to the local scale (Rodriguez-Pose & Gill, 2003; Stoker & Kings, 1996), whereby community engagement and partnerships are actively promoted in regeneration practices (Holdon and Iveson, 2003; Savini, 2010). Those in support of localism claim that it leads to a "deepening" of democracy, through the expansion of the decision-making sphere (Shah, 2000; Featherstone *et al.*, 2011). However, others have argued that localism may be "anti-political" (Clarke and Cochrane, 2013: 15) since it invokes homogenous populations where plurality exists and seeks to replace the communicative rationality of politics with another instrumental rationality like that of science.

In line with some of the debates on localism, many theorists have suggested that the new spheres for participation in urban regeneration processes are underpinned by a post political agenda (Swyngedow, 2010; Raco, 2015; Baeten, 2009). The increasing emphasis on community engagement is viewed as an attempt to promote "post-ideological" development, wherein conflicts between opposing sides are considered "a thing of the past", and agonistic democratic practices like debate and disagreement are replaced with strategies that aim for

consensus-based partnerships (Swyngedouw, 2009: 610). However, academics have cautioned against labelling cities post-political, since it implies that depoliticization is a condition that has been realised as opposed to being a tendency that has taken hold (Davidson and Iveson, 2014: 4).

Considering the various and contrasting debates on localism and post-politics, this research seeks to narrow down and explore if and how localism tends to depoliticise the urban sphere through the lens of one emerging regeneration process in London—Civic crowdfunding.

While there is a significant amount of literature on how regeneration in the UK is characterised by post-political technologies of governing, that aim to establish consensus over top-down plans, there is a lack of literature exploring post-political dynamics in bottom up regeneration. Furthermore, there is a lack of literature on the very process of crowdfunding and how the platform moulds civic and state actor relations. This dissertation contributes to bridging these gaps and will offer new insights on consensus-based governance relations in bottom up regeneration practices.

1.2 Research questions and objectives:

Based on the preliminary assessment, this research will investigate the following question: "Does civic crowdfunding serve as a conduit for the de-politicisation of the public sphere by grassroots actors, supported by the state"

It is important to note that depoliticisation implies a process and from this perspective the different phases in a civic crowdfunding campaign become important.

To answer the research question, the following research objectives are pursued:

1) Critically analyse 'what' aspects of localism and associated 'anti-political' ideas are privileged in civic crowdfunding policies and discourse.

2) Evaluate if and 'how' the process of civic crowdfunding helps civic and state actors mobilise consensus around public projects by using tactics such as:

a) Regeneration-beyond-the-state
b) Consensus building and moralising regeneration
c) Populism
d) Outcomes oriented politics

1.3 Outline

Chapter 2 begins with a review of theories related to localism and post-politics, and will situate civic crowdfunding within these. Chapter 3 outlines, the qualitative, comparative methodology used to compare six case studies on the civic crowdfunding platform Spacehive, with an aim to look at both, the 'what' and 'how' aspects of civic crowdfunding. Here, the research provides an original contribution in the form of a taxonomy of post-political tactics through which consensus during regeneration processes is effectively achieved. Chapter 4 presents the main research findings and analysis; it highlights the complex and evolving dynamics between civic and state actors during the lifecycle of crowdfunding campaigns as well as the tendency for the concept to become de-politicised. Finally, in chapter 5, conclusions are drawn on how both, civic and state actors play a role in the depoliticization of the public sphere through civic crowdfunding.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 The (Anti)-politics of localism in the UK

The past three decades have seen a growing policy emphasis on 'localism' in the UK—a concept with "fuzzy" (Clarke & Cochrane, 2013) meanings —but generally described as the decentralisation of planning functions to the local scale (Rodriguez-Pose & Gill, 2003; Stoker & Kings, 1996). At the centre of the current agenda are three key ideas: the redistribution of power from the state to citizens; a push for civic activism and the encouragement of a volunteering culture (Office for Civil Society, 2010).

The idea of Localism is generally justified as the "deepening" of democracy through the widening of decision making beyond elected politicians, a move away from top-down power (Rodriguez-Pose & Sandall, 2008), and invokes notions of social responsibility and civic enterprise (Shah, 2000; Everingham *et al.*, 2006; Featherstone *et al.*, 2011). However, critics of localism argue that the community never experiences complete autonomy in practice. Some see localism as a "spatial liberalism", oscillating between freedom and regulation for "rational and responsible actors" (Clarke and Cochrane, 2013: 13). Others, view localism as an attempt to "govern at a distance" (Davoudi and Madanipour, 2013: 555), where increased civic engagement and reduced direct state intervention doesn't necessarily lead to a reduction in "government" and "discipline". Commentators also note that an increasing emphasis on localism is proof of a long-term retreat from the notion of local councils as service providers (Leigh, 2015).

However, these arguments fail to situate localism within the increasing "neoliberalisation" of policy agendas in the UK (Waquant, 2012). Here, Haughton *et al.* (2013) argue that localism is a neoliberal form of governmentality whereby, state welfare is stripped in favour of market-led individualism. Moreover, the "new localism" (Brenner and Theodore, 2002), based on governance and partnerships has been criticised because partnerships end up favouring the educated, the wealthy, the "responsible"; excluding the inarticulate, the poor and the "extremists" (Geddes, 2000; Raco, 2000; Swyngedouw, 2010). Alternatively, there is an attempt to achieve consensus between stakeholders, which leads to a narrowing of political debate, changing little with respect to key issues (Geddes, 2000; Swyngedouw, 2009).

In light of these debates, Clarke and Cochrane (2013: 15) propose that localism may be "anti-political" in two distinct ways: it can elude politics, substituting the communicative rationality of politics with another rationality like the instrumental rationality of science. Secondly, localism tends to dissolve politics by imagining homogenous populations where

plurality exists, and imposes self-regulation instead of collective problem solving. Moreover, Baeten (2009: 248) argues that the very focus on 'local' leads to the depoliticization of regeneration since particular political demands are locked up in the sphere of the local and in doing so, disconnected from universal demands for welfare or justice.

The developments discussed above have expanded the network of actors involved in local development and understanding the practices of local governance have become increasingly important (Rhodes, 2007; Peters and Pierre 1998; Pierre and Peters, 2000). Furthermore, given the wide range of debates on localism, it is necessary to examine how localism depoliticises the urban sphere through specific development processes. Civic crowdfunding is one such emerging platform that has found space to grow within the localism agenda in the UK (Gullino *et al*., 2019: 251) and remains under researched as a relatively new concept.

2.2 Post-political regeneration in the UK: old participation agendas in a new disguise

Paralleling some of the theoretical debates on localism discussed above, many commentators have argued that the new spaces for participation in urban regeneration practices, are shaped by a post-political agenda (Swyngedow, 2010; Raco, 2015; Baeten, 2009). Notably, ideas around community empowerment and partnerships have been advocated in urban regeneration policy in London since the 1990s (Metzger, 2015; Imrie *et al.*, 2003; Savini, 2010).

Swyngedouw (2009), Haughton *et al.* (2013) and Whitehead (2007), view the heightened emphasis on community engagement as a conduit for "post-ideological" development, whereby partisan clashes are "a thing of the past". Here, agonistic democratic practices like disagreement and debate are replaced with a range of governmental strategies, that aim for consensus-based partnerships and prioritise technocratic problem solving (Swyngedouw 2009; Imrie & Lees, 2014).

While such arguments offer key insights, they risk generalising regeneration processes and theorists like Cooke and Kothari (2001), Penny (2017) and Raco (2014b) have drawn attention to the emerging power of "activist citizens, stepping outside the spaces prescribed for engagement" (Penny, 2017: 1371). Although such debates are pertinent towards getting a more fine-grained understanding, they can tend to romanticise community resistance. As Wills (2016: 14) argues, the success of community participation is reliant on "institutional inheritance" and "civic capacity" to respond on the ground.

In light of such varied debates on community participation in regeneration processes it is useful to unwrap them further, looking at regeneration projects of a specific nature and scale.

Moreover, Raco and Lin (2012: 191) have highlighted that post-politics scholars' writings on the rise of consensus-based technologies of governing, have been tackled "at a more abstract level", revealing little, for example about the different practices for mobilising consensus in varied contexts. Thus, this research provides a further contribution to empirically focussed discussions of consensus-based governance relations and post-politics.

The research synthesises the work of Swyngedouw (2009, 2010, 2014), Baeten (2009) and Raco (2012, 2016) amongst others, to create a taxonomy of post-political tactics, through which consensus during regeneration processes is effectively achieved, namely: Regeneration-beyond-the-state, consensus building, populism and outcome-oriented politics.

For Swyngedouw, a post-political institutional configuration is articulated through a specific theory: the populist discourse, and a practice: Governance-beyond-the-state arrangements (Swyngedouw, 2009, 2010, 2014). A populist discourse is defined by the idea that "all the citizens are affected by the same urban problem" and that the community is eternally united in a fight against a common enemy. A Governance-beyond-the-state arrangement (Swyngedouw, 2005, 2010) is a participatory governing model that mobilises actors functioning outside the state system to contribute to urban governance. Despite being organised outside the state, the state often plays a crucial and often autocratic role.

Raco (2012) and Baeten (2009) discuss how post-political regeneration seeks to create a consensus-based form of politics that binds all actors into partnerships, effectively locking out disagreement and limiting discussions to procedural and the technical matters (Mouffe, 2005; Swyngedouw, 2007).

Lastly, Raco and Lin (2011) highlight output-centred politics as a central feature of consensus-based governance through which all debates focus on a "what matters is what works" outlook towards governance.

The authors mentioned above, make powerful arguments about how regeneration in the UK is characterised by practices that seek to create consensus over top-down neoliberal plans. There is also considerable literature on the emerging decision-making actors like experts and transnational financial organisations (Crouch, 2004; MacLeod, 2011; Streeck, 2011; Swyngedouw, 2011), management consultants (Vogelpohl, 2018) and planning consultants (Parker, Street, Raco, & Freire-Trigo, 2014; Raco *et al*., 2016). However, there is a lack of literature on grassroots actors and how post-politics plays out in bottom up regeneration projects. This research fills that gap, by exploring how individual citizens and community groups mobilise consensus around civic crowdfunded projects. Raco (2013) argues that such processes are partially state-led and therefore when exploring the robustness of

democratic urban procedures, both the role of the citizens and the government need to be considered.

Furthermore, Davidson and Iveson (2014: 4) posit that labelling cities post-political, risks treating depoliticization as a condition that has been realised, rather than a tendency that has taken hold. They suggest looking at (de)politicisation as a process of dealing with "the conflict of conflicts" (Schattschneider, 1975) and the capacities of varied political agents to engage in this conflict. In this way, (de)politicisation may be employed by many actors and is not limited to top-down governance agents (Beveridge and Koch, 2017: 40). Keeping this in mind, future research on (de)politicisation should then focus on the techniques used to remove conflicts from the urban realm and how political agency is shaped by the boundaries of the political (Beveridge and Koch, 2017).

Civic crowdfunding as an emerging bottom up regeneration tool offers an important platform to empirically analyse these theories, since the process of crowdfunding has a temporal dimension that is repeated across different projects. This can be useful to explore how the platform shapes prescribed areas of engagement and the common political tactics used by actors working within it.

2.3 Civic crowdfunding: an emerging post-political configuration?

Civic crowdfunding has been generally defined as "projects where citizens contribute to funding community projects ranging from physical structures to amenities" (Stiver *et al.*, 2015a; 2015b: 1). How then does civic crowdfunding fit into this narrative of localism and post-political regeneration? Since civic crowdfunding is a relatively new concept there is limited literature discussing its impact to date (Davies, 2014). Additionally, the existing literature mainly focuses on the practicalities of executing civic crowdfunding or analysing government savings (Warbis, 2016).

A common theme found in the existing literature, links civic crowdfunding with the declining role of the state and austerity (Tallon, 2013; Gullino *et al*., 2019). Davies (2014) goes further to argue that since civic crowdfunding deals with the private or collective production of public goods, it can be viewed as taking on the functions of the state. It is also suggested that civic crowdfunding's positive impact depends on the relation government agencies choose to develop with crowdfunded projects, with the state playing an important role in managing inclusiveness (Davies, 2015: 352). These arguments are in line with some of the post-political regeneration debates discussed earlier, suggesting that while civic crowdfunding exists in a domain outside the state, the state does not disappear. Therefore, several

academics have expressed the need to develop a deeper understanding of the relationship civic crowdfunding campaign groups have with Local Authorities and other institutional actors (Davies, 2014; ECN, 2018; Gullino *et al.*, 2019). Furthermore, the partnership of Spacehive with the GLA and several local councils within London, calls into question the autonomy of the crowdfunding process. This can also suggest that civic crowdfunding has been co-opted by both state and non-state actors, and represents another form of partnership based on consensus rather than a challenge to existing democratic streams.

Stiver *et al.* (2015a; 2015b) have indicated that civic crowdfunding has emerged as a response to the dual reality of reduced available government funding and an increased demand for effective civic participation. However, Davies (2015) warns against magnifying the degree to which civic crowdfunding achieves genuine participation, tackles social inequality and aids public institutions. This argument is also corroborated by other academics like Gullino *et al.* (2019: 256) who have raised concerns about the civic benefits of the platform and equated the tensions within civic crowdfunding debates to those around the localism narrative.

Due to the nature of the crowdfunding process in general, it can be argued that civic crowdfunding is a grassroots activity as crowdfunding campaigns gather their finances and thus their political agency from the crowd (Baeck and Westlake, 2012). However, Davies (2015: 345) has discussed how an individual's capacity to participate in civic crowdfunding is highly dependent on their access to technology, skills, as well as their financial resources. It can thus be deduced that while civic crowdfunding is a bottom up process, it can support a sense of populism, whereby wealthy communities, groups with significant grassroots clout, or demographics with technological skills can disproportionately take advantage of it.

Additionally, Brent (2004) suggests that within the urban sphere, multiple publics exist and thus cautions against the utopian idea of a public consensus in planning and regeneration. Warbis (2016: 14) therefore warns against the creation of an "echo chamber" through the crowdfunding process, where one group with significant leverage may be in a position to decide on the future of civic space. Furthermore, DiSalvo (2010) has highlighted that most civic crowdfunding platforms that exist today, do not offer spaces for the dissent and disagreement that is essential for genuinely democratic participatory planning.

Davies (2015) has also pointed to the fact that to have real agency, donors might expect a certain level of ownership or control over a crowdfunded project. However, this is rare in practice and it is therefore important to empirically analyse civic crowdfunding's participatory claims across several case studies, as this research aims to do.

The existing literature discussed above has touched upon themes of citizen participation, bottom up placemaking and citizen activism. However, there is no literature analysing crowdfunding from a post-political lens. There is also literature missing on the very process of crowdfunding and how the platform moulds civic and state actor relations. This is important because even though the nature of projects may vary, the crowdfunding process remains constant across all and can serve to illustrate how crowdfunding itself politicises or depoliticises the urban sphere.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Framework

The research uses Latour's (2007) framework on the 'what' and 'how' aspects of planning issues. The former looks at what elements of a planning issue are promoted in discourse and policy, while the latter explores the methods in which it is executed in practice. Whilst an examination of discourse and policy can uncover valuable information on how planning issues are politically framed and the role of ideology in shaping systems, it lacks empirical exploration of how these are mobilised in practice (Fairclough, 2013; Sayer, 2005; Lipton & Tunstall, 2008). For Latour (2007), sites of politicisation or depoliticization are not limited to formal institutional structures and such a methodological framework can help dispel assumptions about depoliticization being a top down phenomenon.

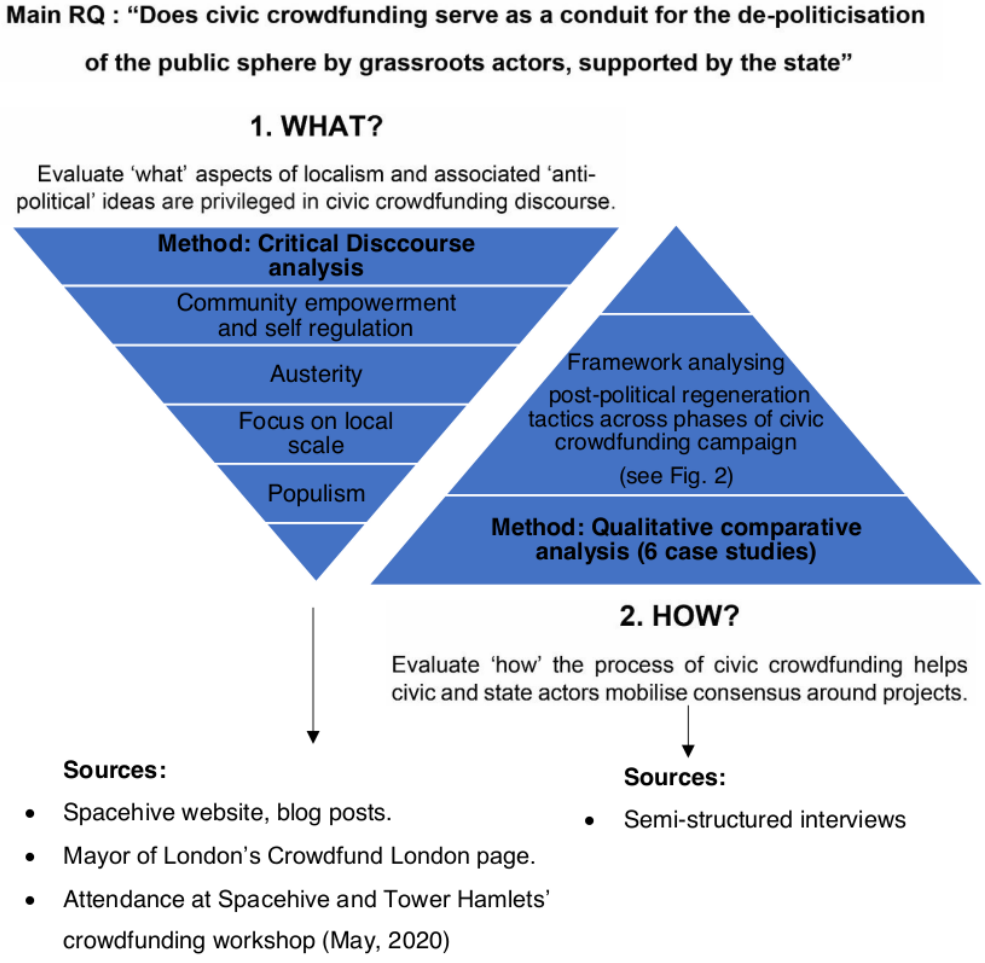

Fig 1. Research framework, methods and sources (Source: Author)

	Phase 1: Defining project idea before launching campaign	**Phase 2:** Crowdfunding through personal social network, crowd	**Phase 3:** Crowdfunding through local businesses, institutions, crowd	**Phase 4:** Match-funding by state and completion of campaign
Tactic 1: Regeneration-beyond-the-State				
Tactic 2: Building consensus while moralising regeneration				
Tactic 3: Populism				
Tactic 4: Outcome oriented politics				

X: State actors, Y: Civic actors

Fig 2. Framework for analysing post-political regeneration tactics, across phases of civic crowdfunding campaign

Source: Author, adapted from image below

Fig 3. Phases in a civic crowdfunding campaign

Source: Spacehive

3.2 Methods and sources

Discourse Analysis method:

In response to the research objective 1 ('what' in fig 1), this dissertation follows Fairclough's framework on Critical Discourse Analysis, which views policy and discourse as a pursuit of articulating broader social and institutional configurations and shapes a certain "social world" (Grigs & Howarth, 2016; Fairclough, 2013). The relevant texts documents were closely read and tabulated on Excel under various themes (fig 1), with attention paid to understanding the dominant political ideologies governing civic crowdfunding (Fairclough, 2003).

Interview sampling:

To assess research objective 2 ('how' in fig 1), a total of eleven interviews were conducted, comprising one hour face-to-face virtual interviews where possible. The final sample (fig 4) consists of interviews with 6 project founders who have successfully crowdfunded projects on Spacehive. Furthermore, the research incorporates interviews with a spectrum of state actors (fig 5) participating in civic crowdfunding, which shapes an informed view of how depoliticization plays out. While the small sample size limits the extent to which findings can be generalised across projects, ultimately, this was constrained by the difficulty in gaining access to project founders within the short time frame of the study, as well as the limitations posed by the Covid-19 pandemic. Another drawback is a lack of perspective from project donors— due to confidentiality— and representatives from Spacehive. These limitations are overcome by incorporating a wide range of project types in the interviews conducted, and by thoroughly understanding the project founders' perspective, including their interactions with donors and Spacehive.

Interview design and analysis method

The first-hand interviews conducted were all semi-structured, each guided by the interviewee's experiences with civic crowdfunding (Appendix a/b). This follows Verloo's (2017) advice that semi structured interviews provide a means to access social conceptions, experiences, tactics and beliefs. The interviews were recorded, transcribed and categorised into broad themes based on the objectives, namely: 'role of the state', 'austerity', 'building consensus', and 'populism and then categorised again into more detailed themes like 'tokenistic participation', 'moralising regeneration', 'skills required'. Mapping the tactics revealed in the comparative analysis of interviews, using the framework in Fig 2, helps locate individual cases within a larger picture and prevents any oversimplification of the changing roles of state and non-state actors in moulding cities.

3.3 Case studies

The six case studies have successfully raised funds on Spacehive. To understand experiences across socio-economic contexts and avoid any over-generalisation, they span project types, geography (fig 6), funding amount and varying degrees of state support.

Figure 4: Case studies and interview sampling for projects (cross reference with fig 6)

Project Name	Project Founder (#F)	Project type	Location borough	Funds raised	Donors	State support
Camden Highline	#F1 Camden Town Unlimited (Business improvement district)	Park/public space Development	Camden	£62,652	302	Mayor's Crowdfund
Ladywell Self-Build Community Space	#F2 Rural Urban Synthesis Society (Community Land trust)	Community education centre	Lewisham	£52,598	320	Mayor's Crowdfund
Ealing Wildlife Group Nature Reserve	#F3 Ealing Wildlife Group (Charitable trust)	Park/public space development	Ealing	£20,307	98	Ealing Council's fund
Transform the Common Room	#F4 Roman Road Trust (Charitable trust)	Community centre	Tower Hamlets	£81,711	252	Mayor's Crowdfund & Tower Hamlet Council's fund
St Ann's Redevelopment Community Bid	#F5 St Ann's Redevelopment Trust (Community led trust)	Bid for community led housing development	Haringey	£24,215	477	No support
Build Up Hackney	#F6 Build up foundation (Charitable company)	Youth Community centre	Hackney	£49,512	241	Mayor's Crowdfund

Fig 5 lists the state actors who were interviewed to understand governance perspectives both at the borough level and at the city scale.

Figure 5: State authorities interview sampling (cross reference with fig 6)

Organisation	Role (#C)
Hammersmith and Fulham Council	#C1 Community Partnerships Lead
Tower Hamlets Council	#C2 Programme Assessment & Monitoring Officer
Southwark Council	#C3 Programme Manager, Regeneration Division
GLA	#GLA1 Programme Manager for Crowdfund London
GLA	#GLA2 Programme Manager for Crowdfund London

Figure 6: Geographical mapping of case studies and interviews

Source: Author

Spacehive:

Spacehive is the main platform dedicated to civic crowdfunding within the UK. Since 2012, it has supported over 1300 projects to raise £18 million in funds, with a high success rate of 55% (Spacehive, 2020). The platform supports a variety of project types and sizes with project founders ranging from charities, local communities, grassroots organisations and local businesses. Platforms like Spacehive run on an 'all or nothing' model, where founders can collect pledge amounts only if the funding target is reached. A key feature of Spacehive is its partnerships with local statutory authorities. Local councils can create their own 'hives' and co-finance local projects that are backed by the 'crowd'. The London context and Spacehive serve as a good opportunity to analyse civic crowdfunding since the GLA and local councils have supported over one hundred projects through the platform.

The Mayoral Programme in London

Since, 2014, the Mayor of London has supported civic crowdfunding campaigns on Spacehive, through Crowdfund London. The programme was started by the regeneration team of the Greater London Authority (GLA) and primarily supports community led projects through matched funding. Crowdfund London is a part of a much larger funding portfolio to support 'growth' and 'community development' in London, and includes the Good Growth Fund, with a £70 million regeneration programme (GLA, 2018). Community projects that show adequate community support (backers who have pledged donations to the campaign), can receive up to £50,000 in support however this cannot be more than 75% of the total project cost.

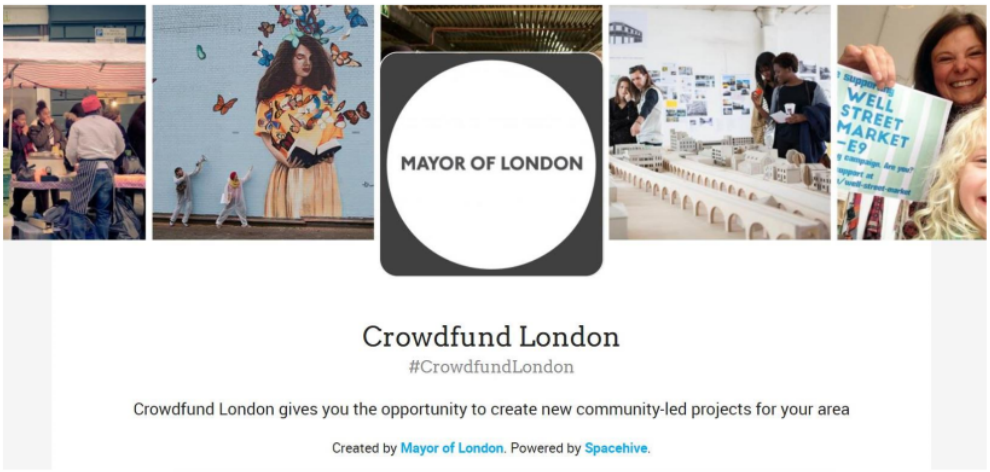

Figure 7: The Mayor of London's Crowdfund London webpage

3.4 Safety and Ethics

Given the research involved interviewing human participants and the limitations around the Covid-19 crisis, all interviews were conducted on Microsoft teams. Verbal consent was always sought before recording interviews with an emphasis on confidentiality. To avoid the safety and ethical risks of conducting lone interviews and disclosing sensitive information, the UCL risk assessment form (Appendix c) was filled out beforehand.

4. ANALYSIS

4.1 Civic crowdfunding policy and discourse: localising universal demands

It is become evident from the discourse analysis that there is a promotion of localism and associated ideas of community empowerment with respect to civic crowdfunding. The Mayor's Crowdfund London page states the following:

> *"We want communities across London to come together to create, fund and launch projects that make a positive change in their local area. We know that our diverse communities are well placed to propose creative, distinctive and inclusive solutions to local challenges and opportunities." (Crowdfund London, 2020)*

> *"Spacehive is a new form of grassroots regeneration that's empowering communities to shape their local area." (Prime Minister Theresa May, April 12, 2017)*

This indicates that within the UK and particularly in London, civic crowdfunding has found space to grow in the political and social context of the localism agenda. This pushed the idea that citizens should have a greater involvement in their communities and should function as a part of wider community networks within their living environment (Kisby, 2010). For several researchers, while the localism agenda was publicly presented as empowering communities, in essence it was evidence of the long-term shift from the concept of local councils as service providers (Leigh, 2015; Skelcher,2000; Fyfe, 2012; Lyons, 2007). This rhetoric is evident in the statements made by representatives of Spacehive.

> *"Local authorities are expected to announce further cuts to parks budgets…now is the time for local people to get together and demonstrate their love for their local park and find new ways to keep our green spaces vibrant." (Spacehive Blog, January 16, 2017)*

In a study on the political approaches to creating active citizenship, Verhoeven and Tonken (2013) have highlighted that the English approach to persuading citizens to take on more responsibility, revolves around building an enthusiastic tone to "empowerment talks". This emphasis on the positive emotions associated with being an active citizen, is evident in the discourse:

> *"The impact of our experiment has been inspiring…It's about reaching out to the wider community, getting more people actively involved in their area, and building skills and knowledge through volunteering." (Crowdfund London, 2019)*

The discourse also reflects a language that addresses citizens not as individuals, but as a part of communities that are active locally:

"You and your community need to come together to create something new and exciting to benefit the whole neighbourhood." (GLA, 2019)

In doing so Clarke and Cochrane (2013) have suggested that localism can be "anti-political" in a couple of ways. It tends to ignore politics by envisioning "homogenous populations where plurality exists", and evoking self-regulation in place of "collective" solution building. This has also been argued by others (see for example, Bauman, 2001; Young, 1990; Harvey, 1997) who suggest that "community" refers to a sense of social uniformity as opposed to diversity and inclusiveness. By imposing self-regulating "rational" systems (eg: "will of the market" or "will of the crowd") and replacing debate and differences with homogeneity (eg: "the people" of populism), politics can lean towards populism (Clarke and Cochrane, 2013). There is a sense of this populist rhetoric in the some of the statements made by representatives of Spacehive:

"Crowdfunding enables everyone to get what everyone wants, Spacehive's founder and CEO, Chris Gourlay, told Information Week. He said Spacehive's early experience shows unpopular ideas, or projects not led with enough energy, will fail, while popular projects that hit their funding targets are guaranteed to succeed." (Information Week, March 22, 2013)

Additionally, it is evident that there is a policy focus on local scale and distinctive projects:

"We want to pledge to projects that: celebrate and strengthen the special character of your area, respond to a local challenge in a creative way" (Crowdfund London, 2020)

According to Baeten (2009), by focussing regeneration policies on the "local community", post-political regeneration tends to depoliticise the urban sphere since community wish-lists are by definition local and specific (eg: safe streets, a park). In doing so, post-political regeneration tries to prevent community demands developing into a wider universal ask (eg: the call for universal state provision of public services) that could make them enter the realm of the political.

The findings outlined above indicate that there is a clear focus on localism and associated "anti-political" ideas in the discourses around civic crowdfunding in London. However, these rationalities remain largely abstract, revealing little about the politics and practice of the civic crowdfunding process itself. This confirms the importance of an empirically focussed discussion on depoliticization and civic crowdfunding in the next section.

4.2 Civic crowdfunding and depoliticization tactics

This section relates to the second research objective, which looks at how civic crowdfunding depoliticizes the public sphere in practice. Specifically, it focuses on the four tactics discussed in Chapter 2 and analyses if and how they are employed by civic and state actors across the various phases of a crowdfunding campaign.

a) Tactic 1: Regeneration-beyond-the-state

Governance-beyond-the-state or in this case Regeneration-beyond-the-state refers to allegedly innovative participatory systems of governing that invoke a greater involvement/ self-management by both private economic actors and civil society, towards providing services that were originally supplied by the national or local state (Swyngedouw, 2005, 2010; Moulaert *et al*., 2005). From this perspective, the funding of public realm projects through crowdfunding raises questions, since it provides civic resources but gathers its funds from the private sphere. Indeed, Tallon (2013) has argued that civic crowdfunding is an innovative tool that has transformed the process of urban regeneration within the UK from "government to governance".

At the same time, a recurring debate around civic crowdfunding is that it represents a withdrawal of the state, diminishing power of local government and public spending cuts (Hudik and Chovanculiak, 2016). All interviewees consistently referred to the restrictions around government funds, with some project founders alluding to the state evading its responsibilities while others adopted more pragmatic views.

> *#F5: "I think more and more the state not funding things is a problem. Now organisations have to go out and self-fund because they've lost state funding, because there's local authority cuts, and this takes up huge amounts of volunteer group time".*

> *#F3: "We have to face up to the fact that our council tax is a limited fund and there's a lot of priorities. Unfortunately, the parks budget has been slashed and we have had to be a bit more inventive in how we fund public parks"*

On the other hand, local councillors viewed it as an opportunity to produce systems of 'good' governance (Swyngedouw, 2005).

> *#C1: "I certainly think if you do things like crowdfunding, you build stronger communities. If you get more people involved in these activities where people support each other, then you're possibly taking some of the emphasis away from the state needing to provide and the state being there to pick up the pieces"*

These statements corroborate Swyngedouw's (2010: 6) argument that the practice of regeneration-beyond-the-state, "is dependent upon a consensual agreement of the existing conditions", which in this case is represented by a reduction in public funding, and "the main objective to be achieved" which is the wellness of community through urban regeneration. With this understanding, active citizens are deemed a crucial part of the new, "democratic and efficient" governance model through which they are encouraged to enter into partnerships with the state (Swyngedouw, 2010: 6; Pierre, 2000b).

In this context, various researchers (Davies, 2014; Miglietta *et al.*, 2013) have linked the emergence of civic crowdfunding to a more neoliberal approach of urban development and view it as a public-private partnership. Others have suggested that civic crowdfunding programmes are not just affiliates of the state, but rather a new mode of citizenship which presents a challenge to existing formal systems (Dawson, 2014). This narrative is complicated by the fact that many projects on Spacehive receive a considerable proportion of their funds from local authorities, implying that civic crowdfunding encourages collaboration or co-option with government, and the process of trying to engage in such a partnership can tend to foreclose meaningful disagreement and dissent that forms the basis of politics (Žižek, 1999).

Most project founders attested to the fact that the main reason for using Spacehive to crowdfund was the possibility of attracting the state's attention towards their project and garner substantial funding.

> *#F2: "The Mayor said, the projects he particularly liked he would top up with an extra thirty grand, that was quite an incentive for us. If you're just rattling a begging bowl under somebody's nose, there's a limit to what they'll give you, but if you start busking, you will likely be capable of money. This showed that we were trying to help ourselves."*

This statement highlights Baeten's (2009: 252) views on the dynamics of regeneration-beyond-the-State. Only when the community displays "courage and will to unite and fight" for its rights as citizens, will they be (partially) met by the government through granting a specific amount of funding.

It is pertinent to note that most local authorities have their own 'hives' on the Spacehive platform and the GLA has the Crowdfund London page, where they list criteria for being eligible for their funds. For example, the Tower Hamlets Innovation Fund lists green spaces and art and cultural projects as some of its priorities. Amongst other things, state authorities mentioned that funded projects usually aligned with their strategic priorities and referred to this in the discussions:

#C1: "We do quite a lot of publicity around the sorts of things that we'd be looking to encourage. Also, Spacehive run workshops for us and they are quite good at explaining to organisations what sort of things we'd be looking to fund. There are certain things that aren't eligible, projects that are overtly, religious or political"

#GLA1: "Before launching the call for applications, we do a warm up with local authorities and groups, where we talk about the programme, what it's trying to achieve and what kinds of projects we're interested in supporting through it."

In another instance, authorities also discussed how their presence and role was crucial to the civic crowdfunding process.

#GLA2: "The platforms were not particularly interested or well-resourced to understand the urbanism context here, in terms of local democracy. They predominantly saw themselves as kind of facilitators of fundraising. For us, the interesting part was whether or not we could steer this whole civic crowdfunding in a slightly different direction and suggest where it falls short or where it's successful"

#C2: "You need quite a lot of buy in from the local authority for this to be successful"

These findings reveal several important points. Civic crowdfunding, while supposedly organised outside the state, the state often plays a critical and often dominating role (Swyngedouw, 2010). For Warbis (2016), the state's role in crowdfunding is not simply indicative of a "further roll-back of the state", but is instead to ensure best-practice in a new and participatory financing model. However, it is evident that before the crowdfunding process begins, the scope and nature of projects is "defined in advance" by the government, which for Wilson & Swyngedouw (2015: 6) is indicative of a post-political process. What is achieved is a "horizontally networked association", in this case including individuals, "that share a high degree of consensus and trust, with selectively inclusive participatory institutions or organisational settings" (Swyngedouw, 2010) leading to a depoliticization of the crowdfunding process.

Based on these findings, it can be deduced that the Regeneration-beyond-the-state tactic is mainly employed by the state. The state appears in the early stages (Phase 1) of the crowdfunding process—before the campaign begins—and it plays a crucial role in "steering" (#GLA2) the practices of the platform and conducting workshops to guide civic actors. The state's funding priorities are defined in advance and those who are able to fit within its scope are incentivised to work towards securing a partnership, limiting the extent to which it can be critiqued or challenged.

	Phase 1: Defining project idea before launching campaign	**Phase 2:** Crowdfunding through personal social network, crowd	**Phase 3:** Crowdfunding through local businesses, institutions, crowd	**Phase 4:** Match-funding by state and completion of campaign
Tactic 1: Regeneration-beyond-the-State	**X**			

X: State actors, Y: Civic actors

Fig 8. Framework analysing Tactic 1

b) Tactic 2: Crowdfunding and public participation: building consensus while moralising regeneration

As seen in the last section, post-political regeneration seeks to create a consensus-based form of politics that binds all actors into partnerships, effectively locking out disagreement and debate (Raco and Lin, 2011) and limiting the discourse to the management of consensus (Mouffe, 2005; Swyngedouw, 2007).

It has been suggested that the emergence of platforms like Spacehive offers novel ways for citizens to undertake civic improvement and thus presents a new kind of democratic participation, that enhances the community's agency in urban development (Davies, 2015). From this perspective, civic crowdfunding is seen to move beyond the dominant participatory mechanisms prevalent within urban planning, which reduce participation to forms of co-optation and control, leaving little scope for agency on the part of individuals and communities (Macleod, 2011, Hillbrandt 2016, Gunder 2010). It is therefore critical to investigate these claims within civic crowdfunding.

All the six project founders who were interviewed, stated that a significant amount of community engagement was conducted throughout the crowdfunding campaign. However, there were differences in the way this participation was enacted.

#F1: "We had quite a lot of crowdfunding events where we did some engagement. People would talk about what they expected of the project, we had a big model of the project on display. We also conducted many walks around the site and focused on going out and giving presentations."

#F5: "We had meetings where people could come along and have their say, but I think the crowdfunding was quite passive because people were giving their money, and unless they wanted to get involved, that's where their involvement in it ended. There wasn't an ongoing discussion with people just because they gave money."

#F4: "I think, you just have to go out and say, this project is happening, it'd be great to have you involved. For businesses, we quite sneakily did a scale of pledges. Depending on the amount they pledged, £100 was a bronze, £250 was a silver and then £500 was a gold. These would be put up on the wall. And it's funny how, it is almost like a fear of missing out thing. Once people see other businesses pledging, then they also want their name on the wall"

These statements reveal that extent of community involvement in a project is highly dependent on the energy and commitment of the local community as well the way project founders enact participation. The civic crowdfunding process did not necessarily enhance

participation, in fact for most cases crowdfunding tended to reduce engagement processes to become tokenistic. This point is corroborated by Davies (2015: 347), who observes how the wider community's participation in civic crowdfunding tends to be limited to individuals either endorsing or rejecting a project, making it a "binary choice", rather than co-creating or debating a variety of alternatives. Furthermore, in Arnstein's (1969) framework the highest aim of participation is "Citizen Control", in which the community has complete authority over the funding and management of a project and agency over the outcomes. However, in the case of most projects on Spacehive, the crowd does not receive anything in return for their donation apart from tokenistic recognition.

Moreover, the urban authorities interviewed in this research consistently referred to civic crowdfunding as a means of achieving consensus, which was crucial to prove the validity of the project.

#GLA1: "Civic crowdfunding, by the nature of its design, is about consensus building. It is about showing consensus and building relationships through the campaigning process, getting local businesses on board, getting local authorities on board and forming a relationship with your local government."

#C1: "The way that we look at it is that if people are pledging to a project, then it's clearly something that the community support."

Project founders also highlighted the procedural stresses of crowdfunding, the time constraints within an all-or-nothing model and how the technicalities of raising funds fast enough, may not always incentivise founders to widen their engagement beyond 'easily achievable' consensus.

#F1: "You need to leave no stone unturned. Don't get too hooked on the people that said they would donate and didn't, because some people just lie. You have to concentrate on keeping that net wide enough that it doesn't matter."

#F4: "I think we could have done better with corporate organisations, that could have been just easy chunks of money if you identify closely with their ethos. I do think that is much nicer to get little chunks of money from the community and local businesses, but perhaps, to fill out those gaps more quickly, big corporate organisations might be an easy way to get to targets faster"

These statements allude to a certain degree of depoliticization. By identifying "collective" agendas that go beyond class interests, politics is reconfigured as a "technical, project-focused activity" (Raco and Lin, 2011: 191). In the case of civic crowdfunding this can be seen as using the very orchestrated process of crowdfunding to show 'consensus' to urban

authorities, on the basis of which they decide which projects to fund, relying on an assumption that interventions can be made that "benefit all" (Raco and Lin, 2011: 191). However, it is important to consider that since the local authorities and the GLA are using public money to support local projects, there is a pressure to create a structured and formal funding process in an attempt to make it transparent (Gullino *et al.*, 2019: 256). This was pointed out in interviews with local councillors and members of the GLA, who stated that there was an increasing need to make sure crowdfunded projects supported by the government were deliverable and representative of the wider community's needs.

In another instance, a project founder discussed how he rallied consensus around his project:

> *#F3: "I just knew that if we put forward a good reasoning for securing this land for nature, that it would be an easy sell for the community. We got most of the money through match funding from the council. Then we also got one big corporate donation from a local developer because we pitched it to them as, this is good PR for you"*

This illustrates how post-politics privileges non-contentious objectives around which disparate interests can be integrated to work towards a shared agenda. It has also been noted that most civic crowdfunding platforms do not support "dissent and disagreement" (DiSalvo, 2010), and this foreclosure of "politics proper" is the essence of post-politics (Žižek, 1999). When asked about resistance and conflicts around their projects, all project founders said that there was no significant dissent apart from few isolated concerns. This can lead to a couple of assumptions, either the platform does not have spaces for conflicts to come to the surface, or the nature of projects tend to be non-contentious. Moreover, this absence of dissent alludes to Rancière's (1998: 102) argument that a post-political configuration is a model that has removed the "appearance, miscount, and dispute of the people" and in doing so discarded politics and those who do not already have a part.

Moreover, project founders also spoke about their tactics for handling opposition and building consensus.

> *#F3: "People who are highly critical and sit there and do nothing except for complain on social media about budgets. I say do something, show us your support, give us two pounds, and actually show that you will do something. Or if you don't want to give us money, come on down and volunteer."*

> *#F4: "It's about stroking people's egos and telling people that they are amazing, and they're great for putting in five pounds and then the idea is that other people see this and want to be a part of it".*

These statements are significant because they indicate that the effective removal of politically conflicting encounters between opposing sides does not simply lead to the disappearance of antagonism. Baeten (2009: 249) argues that following the attempt to remove antagonism between a political "right" and "wrong", antagonism is "reborn along moral divides". Mouffe (2005) also points out the disciplinary power inherent in non-ideological' politics which has become "moralised". In this way, conflict between "us" and the mindless "them" who do not understand how regeneration "works today", can be safely ignored – the end of politics, death by partnership.

Based on the findings in this section, it can be deduced that the consensus tactic is mainly employed by civic actors in the Phases 2 and 3. However, the state does use the tactic indirectly, by requiring civic actors to demonstrate consensus (through number of backers) in Phase 4, in order to unlock funding from the state. It is evident that the nature of public participation across projects, while varied, was largely tokenistic and involved informing audiences about a project and "getting them on board" (#GLA1), usually through moralising their participation. Furthermore, the sole requirement of demonstrating substantial number of backers within a limited period of time, often deterred project founders from widening their engagement beyond 'easily achievable' consensus.

	Phase 1: Defining project idea before launching campaign	**Phase 2:** Crowdfunding through personal social network, crowd	**Phase 3:** Crowdfunding through local businesses, institutions, crowd	**Phase 4:** Match-funding by state and completion of campaign
Tactic 1: Regeneration-beyond-the-State		**Y**	**Y**	**XY**

X: State actors, Y: Civic actors

Fig 9. Framework analysing Tactic 2

c) Tactic 3: Populism

According to Baeten (2009), post-politics aims to replace adversarial politics with consensus and in doing so, "depoliticised urban populism" emerges as a vital feature of post-democratic consensus. In the following section, we will trace the key characteristics of populism as discussed by Canovan (1999), Laclau (2005), Mouffe (2005), Žižek (2005b) and Swyngedouw (2007b) amongst others, and explore if and how these come into play during the civic crowdfunding process.

When asked if social differences weighed in on a community's capacity to benefit from civic crowdfunding, interviewees had the following responses:

#F1: "I'm sure that we've had more donations from Kentish Town (more affluent), than we have from Elm Village or Maiden Lane estate, the four densely populated housing estates our project goes directly through. And I'm sure that there's an effect that financial contributions have"

#F2: "It's very hard to carry out civic crowdfunding in an area that's deprived. Half the population of Lewisham is black or ethnic minority, the level of education is pretty low and it's a tough part of London. So, if you're trying to get money out of something that hasn't got much money in the first place, using a set of quite sophisticated skills that are hard to source in your locality, then it becomes a lot more challenging"

#GLA2: "If we're saying that there's wisdom in the crowd, then that crowd has to be representative. There is definitely a problem and its really difficult to get a sense of who's benefiting from some of this stuff and who supports it. It's an area where there needs to be some innovation around the platforms and the processes around collecting data. We've really struggled especially at the scale of a city like London, we're quite broad brushed here."

According to Swyngedouw (2007b: 66), a populist discourse is identifiable by the fact that "all the citizens are affected by the same urban problem" and it calls on the city or neighbourhood communities as one homogenous whole. Indeed, Davies (2015: 348) has pointed out that the very nature of civic crowdfunding can lead to varying capacities for communities separated by geography, class and ethnicities. The lack of acknowledgement of this variance was indicated by the founders who asserted that both at the neighbourhood scale and the city scale, there was a tendency for certain groups to disproportionately take advantage of the platform. Additionally, members of the GLA confirmed that while the presence of the Mayor's fund might help level up inequalities at the city scale, there was a lack of recognition of differences at the neighbourhood scale.

All project founders and councillors also attested to the fact that the crowdfunding process was labour intensive and required specific skills.

#F6: "We were required to make a film and I had made films before. Likewise, we also had skills in graphic design, which I've developed through studying architecture. Also, you do have to become a specialist in using social media."

#C3: "We do a number of training sessions with the local community, to educate them as to how it works, because if you're not careful, it might be something that is only picked up by digitally savvy people, younger people"

#F5: "Crowdfunding is quite labour intensive. For a good two months, it was taking up all of my time which is taxing within an all-or-nothing model"

#GLA2: "The demographic that are bringing forward projects to us tend to be middle-aged white women. We get the sense that they've got the time, capacity, skill set and networks to be in such a leadership role. But it's also a bit of an unfair kind of generalisation because I know for a fact that they often represent quite diverse groups."

Researchers have also discovered that personal social networks strongly impact the success rates of civic crowdfunded projects (Mollick, 2014, Cordova, Dolci, and Gianfrate, 2015). This was confirmed by project founders as well as local councillors.

#F6: "We were a small team, but we had people in different Hackney networks. We also had connections to parts of the architecture community which brought in links to businesses. Also, there's a project in Brixton we've been working with and they put in money out of solidarity. So, although, we would talk about how 300 local people backed the project in reality, there was a good chunk of people that weren't local and came through our organisational and personal network."

#C2: "There are some affluent organizations. I'll give you an example, this one project when they were crowdfunding, managed to unlock support from a directorate in the council, and the lead of that program emailed me and said, "are we supporting this project? This is a fantastic project". This would not happen for another organisation that didn't have those connections, it's not always as equal as it looks"

These insights reveal Swyngedouw's (2007b: 67) second argument that regeneration populism is based on a politics of "the community knows best", underpinned by a "neutral scientific technocracy" (which in the case of civic crowdfunding refers to a focus on absolute numbers of local backers). Here, the people who know best are usually the 'active citizens',

or people who have the social and economic means to commit their time to crowdfunding. Zuckerman (2012) cautions that civic crowdfunding might have the potential to produce a "social wedge" as it is more likely to be used by wealthier communities that have more free time and relevant skills needed for funding. However, Warbis (2016) argues that this highlights the crucial role the state plays in capacity building, supporting disadvantaged groups and 'levelling the playing field' as opposed to simply allowing the market to determine the outcomes. With this is mind, the extent to which civic crowdfunding can challenge the state is limited.

Which brings us to another one of Swyngedouw's (2007b: 68) arguments which states that regeneration populism does not aim to "overthrow the elites but, contrarily, bestow them with responsibility".

> *#GLA1: "For people that are thinking of applying, but feel like they need support, honing and refining their idea. We do a series of workshops with them. Usually we secure a bit of specialist expertise on key topics that people are commonly finding to be difficult, whether it's working with design teams or running a campaign."*

Boyer and Hill (2013) have suggested that civic crowdfunding can serve as a gradual route to changing society from one that is managed by elites to one that is more peer driven, changing things from the inside. However, Inch (2012) has argued that by trying to minimise antagonism, the planning system tends to push for the interests of powerful urban elites. The fact that civic crowdfunding relies on state support to overcome existing inequalities, shows that it requires co-option and bestows responsibility with experts and the state.

Lastly, as in most populist discourses where "no proper name is given to the field of action" (Swyngedouw, 2007b: 68), state authorities use vague terms to explain what kind of projects they are trying to support:

> *#C1: "We look for projects that are obviously around bringing people together, we're very keen on projects that have a green element, projects that get people active, cultural projects. The vast majority of projects that come through are ones that we would want to give something to anyway, because they fit our categories"*

According to Badiou (2005b) and Swyngedouw (2007b), populist politics focuses on vague concepts like 'creative city', 'inclusive city' and 'sustainable city' to displace the proper names that form a genuine democracy (Rancière, 1995). By privileging such ambivalent objectives, disparate interests can be integrated to work towards a shared agenda (Brand and Thomas, 2005; Whitehead, 2007). With respect to civic crowdfunding, Davies (2014) has analysed data to show that the most popular crowdfunded projects are gardens and

parks since these are the ‘least controversial’. Furthermore, he highlights that the number of contentious projects within civic crowdfunding are low overall with only a few raising radical questions.

In conclusion, the populist tactic is used by both civic and state actors in different ways throughout the civic crowdfunding process. The state employs populism by calling upon civic actors to propose public projects that benefit the neighbourhood "as a whole’ in Phase 1, whilst keeping fields of actions broad enough that many groups can rally around them. Moreover, the state relies on the (absolute) number of local backers as the criteria for match-funding in Phase 4 and in doing so it ignores the socio-economic differences within neighbourhoods. On the other hand, civic actors benefit from populism in Phase 1, 2 and 3, as only those with the ‘right’ social networks, skills and capacity are able to take advantage of the platform.

	Phase 1: Defining project idea before launching campaign	**Phase 2:** Crowdfunding through personal social network, crowd	**Phase 3:** Crowdfunding through local businesses, institutions, crowd	**Phase 4:** Match-funding by state and completion of campaign
Tactic 1: Regeneration-beyond-the-State	**XY**	**Y**	**Y**	**X**

X: State actors, Y: Civic actors

Fig 10. Framework analysing Tactic 3

d) Tactic 4: Outcome oriented politics: a consensus around 'growth' 'entrepreneurialism' and 'pride'.

According to Raco and Lin (2011), a central characteristic of consensus-based governance, is the transition towards an "output centred government", and a pragmatic "what matters is what works" outlook towards urban policy. Swyngedouw (2007b; 2009) argues that the impact of this is that "politics proper" is increasingly replaced by "expert administration' and 'instrumental rationality" takes the place of conflictual debates.

In this context, a project founder indicated how he used rationalities of economic growth to build consensus around his project:

#F1: "I was getting grief in a residence meeting once from someone and I was able to point out the increase in house prices around the highline in New York and suddenly they became a lot more amenable. I think the benefits of our project are fairly self-evident. There's a big development going to happen in Academy Street. The connectivity with that to both King's Cross and Camden Town, that's going to be enhanced as a result of our highline."

In this way, post-politics is represented by "the reduction of the political to the economic" and the ideological "end of utopia" (Vento, 2016; Wilson & Swyngedouw, 2015: 8). The aspirations around growth, create consensus among a broad range of elite groups, regardless of how divided they may be on other challenges (Logan and Molotch, 1987: 50-51).

Moreover, when asked about the benefits crowdfunded projects bring to the local area, most answers revolved around notions of pride and symbolic ownership.

#F4: "Our project is going to improve the look of the high street. It's going to draw people's attention to an area that is usually overlooked. And I also think it's going to bring a sense of pride."

#C1: "I think civic crowdfunding contributes to regeneration through bringing about community spirit and pride. We definitely see the difference it makes in terms of how it changes people's attitudes to the area they live in."

#GLA1: "Everyone is proud to be part of a project that's backed by the mayor. I think it builds a lot of pride of place in a kind of more symbolic way than anything else"

Additionally, in the workshops conducted by Spacehive as well as in the guidance listed on their website there was a focus on projects being "distinctive, clear cut, appealing broadly and being novel". This focus on place branding and marketing highlights the importance

given to the “seduction and symbolism” associated with architecture towards generating popular consensus (Vento, 2016). In doing so, feelings of “local pride and identity”, serve to move attention away from social antagonism and “mentally block out” the idea of any alternative solution (Vento, 2016). This focus on ‘uniqueness’ was also highlighted by a member of the GLA.

#GLA2: “We would be appraising the idea against our criteria, which was, evaluating, how interesting is it? how innovative is it? deliverability?”

These points illustrate that civic crowdfunding is characterised by a post-political tendency to build consensus around popular topics of growth, creativity and sustainability which seem to make the need for political dialogue – the essence of democracy – obsolete (Allmendinger & Haughton, 2012; Swyngedouw, 2009, 2011).

Furthermore, through the Spacehive platform the state encourages successfully crowdfunded projects to create impact reports, where the focus is on showcasing statistics as proof of success. Amongst other things, it encourages listing things like media mentions, number of project backers and volunteer jobs created, amount of extra funding secured and the number of trees planted (Spacehive, 2018). All indicators are based on quantitative representations of socioenvironmental and economic sustainability. There is a gap in any measurement of social equity and diversity of demographics involved. Such technocratic framings allow the clutter of the political process to be simplified and transformed into indisputable answers or what Ranciere (2005) refers to as a “politics of the possible”.

Based on the insights in this section, it can thus be concluded that in Phase 2 and 3 project founders focussed on narratives of outcome-oriented politics to rally consensus. The state used the tactic in Phase 4 to demonstrate ‘success’ through indicators that failed to evaluate social or equity concerns (Legacy, 2016b).

	Phase 1: Defining project idea before launching campaign	**Phase 2:** Crowdfunding through personal social network, crowd	**Phase 3:** Crowdfunding through local businesses, institutions, crowd	**Phase 4:** Match-funding by state and completion of campaign
Tactic 1: Regeneration-beyond-the-State		**Y**	**Y**	**X**

X: State actors, Y: Civic actors

Fig 11. Framework analysing Tactic 4

5. CONCLUSION

5.1 Summarisation of research and conclusions

Mobilising the power of the crowd to carry out civic improvement is nothing new, but civic crowdfunding platforms like Spacehive do provide a more comprehensive alternative to traditional sources of funding, broadening the possibilities for citizen-initiated projects.

The discourse analysis reveals ideas associated with localism and community empowerment. However an emphasis on 'community' as a socially uniform entity, the call for 'active citizenship' to promote self-regulation and a focus on the 'local' scale that prevents the metaphoric universalisation of particular demands, confirms the arguments made by academics linking localism to anti-politics (Clarke and Cochrane, 2013; Baeten, 2009). Nonetheless, these debates remain largely abstract and reveal little about the actual politics and practices of civic crowdfunding. This research therefore provides an original contribution to the empirically focussed discussions on post-political regeneration and civic crowdfunding.

Through a qualitative comparative analysis of six case studies on Spacehive, this research argues that civic crowdfunding appears to be a time bound, "delivery focussed system" (Raco *et al.*, 2016) that resembles the procedural characteristics of private sector organisations. The research illustrates (Fig 12) that there are four principal phases in the process, and in each of these phases there are certain goals to be achieved in order to demonstrate crowd consensus at the final stage and unlock funding from the state. This system produces a type of politics which prioritises pragmatism and delivery, urging civic actors (supported by the state), to use consensus building tactics that depoliticise the process.

It is evident that the state plays a dominant role in the Phases 1 and 4 of the crowdfunding cycle. Civic actors are called on to fill the space left by the withdrawal of the state (Tactic 1), however there are contradictions which lead to empowerment and disempowerment (Fyfe, 2012). The state is able to broadly define its strategic priorities at the start of the process and those who fit within these categories are invited to demonstrate public consensus (Tactic 2) and compete to receive funding at a later stage. In this way, civic crowdfunding allows the selective channelling of participatory claims and gains consensus of the 'active citizens'—the 'crowd' of populism (Tactic 3). Lastly, the success of this process is illustrated through quantitative indicators that leave out social or equity concerns (Tactic 4).

The civic actors (project founders), have most agency in the middle phases 2-3 of the crowdfunding process. Although projects are initiated by the community, they must align with the state criteria, to be eligible for match funding. In an effort to receive substantial funding

from the state in phase 4, project founders mobilise consensus around their projects (Tactic 2), using narratives that often revolve around moralising regeneration (Tactic 2), invoking pride or rationalising economic growth (Tactic 4). This can be viewed as a co-optation of civic crowdfunding by civic actors and public institutions, which limits the extent to which voices can be raised. Furthermore, it seems that civic crowdfunding tends to benefit citizens with skills and capacity (Tactic 3) and through these everyday practices of building consensus around bottom up regeneration, civic actors become key participants in the depoliticization of the urban sphere.

	Phase 1: Defining project idea before launching campaign	**Phase 2:** Crowdfunding through personal social network, crowd	**Phase 3:** Crowdfunding through local businesses, institutions, crowd	**Phase 4:** Match-funding by state and completion of campaign
Tactic 1: Regeneration-beyond-the-State	**X**			
Tactic 2: Building consensus while moralising regeneration		**Y**	**Y**	**XY**
Tactic 3: Populism	**XY**	**Y**	**Y**	**X**
Tactic 4: Outcome oriented politics		**Y**	**Y**	**X**

STATE CIVIC STATE

X: State actors, Y: Civic actors

Fig 12. Framework highlighting research findings

This research uses a novel framework (Fig 12) to evaluate the complex and evolving dynamics between civic and state actors during bottom up regeneration processes like civic crowdfunding. The framework is 'synchronic' and not 'sequential', highlighting that multiple types of depoliticization can come into play at a particular stage or around a specific issue (Raco & Keston, 2018: 897). Furthermore, by focussing on the capacities of both grassroots and state actors, the research corroborates Beveridge and Koch's (2017: 40) argument that depoliticization is not limited to top-down governance agents.

While civic crowdfunding does expand the opportunities for local agency, expecting citizens to act in domains of the state is not always equitable, highlighting that civic crowdfunding relies on state support to be successful while also limiting the extent to which it can challenge the same state. This confirms Wills (2016: 14) argument that the success of community participation is reliant on "institutional inheritance" and "civic capacity".

From this perspective, authorities need to continue evaluating ways in which they can offer light touch support without detracting from the autonomy of a project. Moreover, we must be vigilant that such platforms do not lead to an overreliance on these types of funding, paving the way for the state to step back from its responsibilities. Future policy should focus on ways in which the current model can be expanded to make engagement deeper and less transactional. Lastly the state—in partnership with platforms—must gather and publish more granular data on the beneficiaries of civic crowdfunding. Not acknowledging societal differences signals the disappearance of politics and with that "the disappearance of those who do not already have a part, and of those questions that are not already perceptible and objectifiable." (Rancière, 1998: 102; Bianchi, 2018). Lastly, this research does not seek to diminish the valuable role grassroots actors play in moulding cities. Demonstrating the depoliticised meaning of regeneration practices is not enough. It continues to be necessary to struggle for politicisation, both to enhance genuine citizenship and to prevent depoliticization from being normalised.

5.2 Future research:

These research conclusions are based on the analysis of one platform and future study could focus on comparing other civic crowdfunding platforms, to draw more informed conclusions. While this research is centred on the role of state actors and project founders in the crowdfunding process, future research could incorporate a wider range of actors, including project donors and local residents. This could illustrate how crowdfunded projects have impacts beyond the platforms and their users, while also revealing the nature of debate and disagreement that happens outside the realms of the platform.

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7. APPENDIX

APPENDIX A:

Interview with founders of successful crowdfunding campaigns on Spacehive:

Introduction: Keeping confidentiality in mind, all interviews will be kept anonymous. I would also like to ask for your consent to start recording this interview.

Project Intro: The aim of this project is to study projects that have successfully raised funds through online civic crowdfunding platform Spacehive to explore the nature of bottom up regeneration in the UK context. Using interviews with founders of crowdfunding campaigns, local council members and members from the Crowdfund London team at the GLA, the research explores the experiences of undertaking a civic crowdfunding campaign. The grassroots nature of civic crowdfunding is considered alongside its relationship with public institutions to explore the role of the state in fostering crowdfunding.

Introductory questions:

1. Could you start by telling me a little bit about your organisation?
2. Could you tell me a little bit about how the idea for this project came about and what was the main motivation behind this project?
3. Why did you decide to use crowdfunding on Spacehive as a way to support this project?
4. Could you elaborate a bit on, what the funds were going to go towards?

Crowdfunding and community participation:

1. Thinking about your own experience of crowdfunding for a civic project, did you feel you needed any particular skills and resources to undertake a civic crowdfunding?
2. Would you say there was a target audience for the campaign to crowdfund this project?
3. How did you go about approaching them?
4. In your experience, what is the main motivation of the people who contributed to the crowdfunding campaign?
5. In what ways did the community participate in this project? (Was it only through contributing funds or was there some engagement beyond that?)
6. Was there a process to involve people who didn't contribute funds to the project?
7. Has community opinion influenced visions and objectives of the project?

8. What kind of information did the donors seek about the project?
9. Did the donors receive anything in return for their contribution?
10. Was there any resistance from parts of the community towards the project? How was this tackled?
11. What benefits do you think this project brings/will bring to the community?
12. In what ways do you think this project will support local regeneration?
13. Do you view the campaign for this project as a grassroots campaign?
14. In your experience, to what extent did personal social networks influence the success of your crowdfunding campaign?

Crowdfunding and the state

1. Did you seek any support from the local authorities or the GLA during the project, in what capacity?
2. How important was it?
3. Do you view crowdfunding as a withdrawal of the state from its responsibilities?
4. Do you view this project running in conjunction with the local government, or outside it?

General concluding questions:

1. Could you elaborate on some of the hurdles you faced in the campaign?
2. What do you think are the benefits of crowdfunding?
3. Do you think civic crowdfunding increases democracy?
4. According to your experience, does crowdfunding empower communities?
5. In your opinion, can crowdfunding civic projects lead to socially and spatially uneven redistribution of resources, allowing only some citizens and neighbourhoods to improve their conditions of their lives compared to some others?

APPENDIX B:

Interview with member of the GLA's Crowdfund London team:

Note: Keeping confidentiality in mind, all interviews will be kept anonymous. I would also like to ask for your consent to record this interview. Please sign the consent form attached.

Project Intro: The aim of this project is to study projects that have successfully raised funds through online civic crowdfunding platform Spacehive to explore the nature of bottom up regeneration in the UK context. Using interviews with founders of crowdfunding campaigns, local council members and members from the Crowdfund London team at the GLA, the research explores the experiences of undertaking a civic crowdfunding campaign. The grassroots nature of civic crowdfunding is considered alongside its relationship with public institutions to explore the role of the state in fostering crowdfunding.

Introductory questions:

1) Could you start by telling me a little bit about your position at the GLA.
2) Could you tell me about the crowdfunding arm of the GLA.
3) What would you say is the main motivation behind the GLA's regeneration team supporting civic crowdfunding?

Civic crowdfunding process:

1) What criteria does the GLA look at while deciding which projects it is going to match-fund?
2) Have you seen people from diverse social backgrounds, ages or educational backgrounds presenting collaborative proposals? Does this representation factor into the GLA supporting a project?
3) Apart from the online crowdfunding procedure, does the GLA participate in any engagement that happens offline?
4) In your experience what is the main motivation of citizens using crowdfunding to fund civic projects?
5) Do you think crowdfunding strengthens public participation? If so in what ways?
6) Do you think it is an issue that only the people with funds/knowhow/social connections end up participating in a project?

7) In your experience have you seen people from disadvantaged backgrounds use crowdfunding?
8) In your experience what benefits does crowdfunding bring to urban regeneration efforts?

Crowdfunding and the state

1) In your opinion, what are the benefits of the Mayor endorsing civic crowdfunding and the Crowdfund London programme?
2) Does civic crowdfunding help build partnerships between citizens and the state? If so, what is the GLA's role in this partnership?
3) Do you think crowdfunding is a useful/effective tool at disposal to local authorities to address key societal problems, for the people that most need them?
4) What kind of issues and topics does Civic Crowdfunding help address?
5) Would you prefer to use other tools to address key issues like education, housing and employment?
6) Do you as a public authority see crowdfunding as a way to tackle a decline in funds available for public spending?

General concluding questions:

1) In your view what are the main benefits of crowdfunding? How can it be improved?
2) In your opinion, can crowdfunding civic projects lead to socially and spatially uneven redistribution of resources, allowing only some citizens and neighbourhoods to improve their conditions of their lives compared to some others?
3) There has been an increasing emphasis on community empowerment and community engagement in planning? Do you think civic crowdfunding is a way to achieve this?

APPENDIX C:

RISK ASSESSMENT FORM

FIELD / LOCATION WORK

The Approved Code of Practice - Management of Fieldwork should be referred to when completing this form

http://www.ucl.ac.uk/estates/safetynet/guidance/fieldwork/acop.pdf

DEPARTMENT/SECTION BARTLETT SCHOOL OF PLANNING

LOCATION(S) LONDON, UK

PERSONS COVERED BY THE RISK ASSESSMENT Tanushree Agarwal

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF FIELDWORK

1. Questinnaires (Online)
2. Personal interviews (online)
3. Obervations (desktop research)

Consider, in turn, each hazard (white on black). If **NO** hazard exists select **NO** and move to next hazard section.
If a hazard does exist select **YES** and assess the risks that could arise from that hazard in the risk assessment box.
Where risks are identified that are not adequately controlled they must be brought to the attention of your Departmental Management who should put temporary control measures in place or stop the work. Detail such risks in the final section.

ENVIRONMENT	**The environment always represents a safety hazard. Use space below to identify and assess any risks associated with this hazard**
e.g. location, climate, terrain, neighbourhood, in outside organizations, pollution, animals.	Examples of risk: adverse weather, illness, hypothermia, assault, getting lost. Is the risk high / medium / low ? Low

CONTROL MEASURES	**Indicate which procedures are in place to control the identified risk**
	work abroad incorporates Foreign Office advice
	participants have been trained and given all necessary information
	only accredited centres are used for rural field work
	participants will wear appropriate clothing and footwear for the specified environment

trained leaders accompany the trip

	special equipment is only issued to persons trained in its use by a competent person
	OTHER CONTROL MEASURES: please specify any other control measures you have implemented:

LONE WORKING	**Is lone working a possibility?**	**NO**	**If 'No' move to next hazard** **If 'Yes' use space below to identify and assess any risks**
e.g. alone or in isolation *lone interviews.*	Examples of risk: difficult to summon help. Is the risk high / medium / low?		

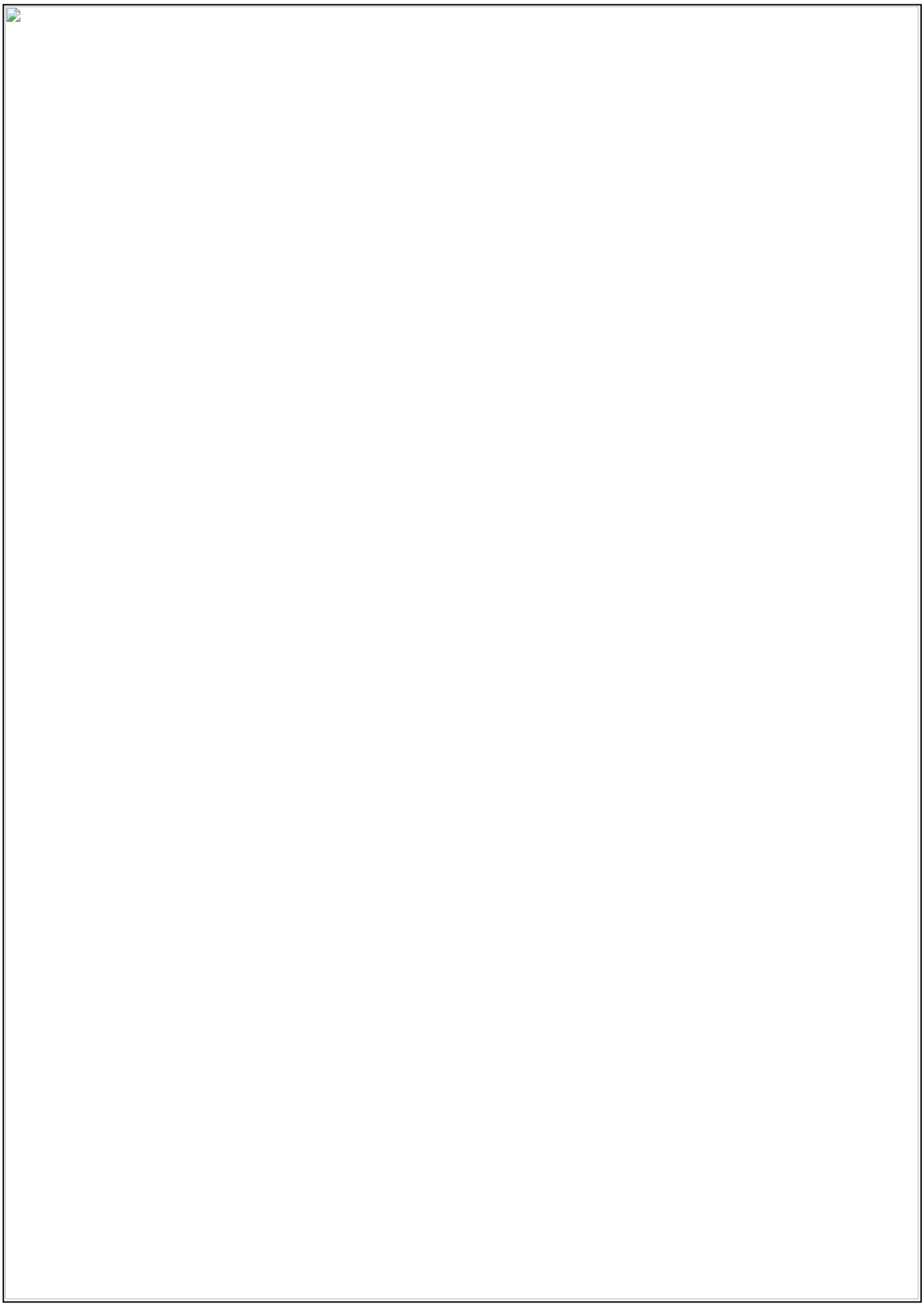
CONTROL MEASURES	**Indicate which procedures are in place to control the identified risk**
	the departmental written Arrangement for lone/out of hours working for field work is followed
	lone or isolated working is not allowed
	location, route and expected time of return of lone workers is logged daily before work commences
	all workers have the means of raising an alarm in the event of an emergency, e.g. phone, flare, whistle
	all workers are fully familiar with emergency procedures
	OTHER CONTROL MEASURES: please specify any other control measures you have implemented:

ILL HEALTH	The possibility of ill health always represents a safety hazard. Use space below to identify and assess any risks associated with this Hazard.
e.g. accident, illness, personal attack, special personal considerations or vulnerabilities.	Examples of risk: injury, asthma, allergies. Is the risk high / medium / low? Low

CONTROL MEASURES	Indicate which procedures are in place to control the identified risk
	an appropriate number of trained first-aiders and first aid kits are present on the field trip
	all participants have had the necessary inoculations/ carry appropriate prophylactics
	participants have been advised of the physical demands of the trip and are deemed to be physically suited
	participants have been adequate advice on harmful plants, animals and substances they may encounter
	participants who require medication have advised the leader of this and carry sufficient medication for their needs
	OTHER CONTROL MEASURES: please specify any other control measures you have implemented:

TRANSPORT	Will transport be	NO	✓	Move to next hazard
	required	YES		Use space below to identify and assess any risks
e.g. hired vehicles	Examples of risk: accidents arising from lack of maintenance, suitability or training Is the risk high / medium / low?			

CONTROL MEASURES	Indicate which procedures are in place to control the identified risk
	only public transport will be used
	the vehicle will be hired from a reputable supplier
	transport must be properly maintained in compliance with relevant national regulations
	drivers comply with UCL Policy on Drivers http://www.ucl.ac.uk/hr/docs/college_drivers.php
	drivers have been trained and hold the appropriate licence
	there will be more than one driver to prevent driver/operator fatigue, and there will be adequate rest periods
	sufficient spare parts carried to meet foreseeable emergencies
	OTHER CONTROL MEASURES: please specify any other control measures you have implemented:



	coastguard information is understood; all work takes place outside those times when tides could prove a threat
	all participants are competent swimmers
	participants always wear adequate protective equipment, e.g. buoyancy aids, wellingtons
	boat is operated by a competent person
	all boats are equipped with an alternative means of propulsion e.g. oars
	participants have received any appropriate inoculations
	OTHER CONTROL MEASURES: please specify any other control measures you have implemented:

MANUAL HANDLING (MH)	**Do MH activities take place?**	**NO**	**If 'No' move to next hazard** **If 'Yes' use space below to identify and assess any risks**
e.g. lifting, carrying, moving large or heavy equipment, physical unsuitability for the task.	Examples of risk: strain, cuts, broken bones. Is the risk high / medium / low?		

CONTROL MEASURES	**Indicate which procedures are in place to control the identified risk**
	the departmental written Arrangement for MH is followed
	the supervisor has attended a MH risk assessment course
	all tasks are within reasonable limits, persons physically unsuited to the MH task are prohibited from such activities
	all persons performing MH tasks are adequately trained
	equipment components will be assembled on site
	any MH task outside the competence of staff will be done by contractors
	OTHER CONTROL MEASURES: please specify any other control measures you have implemented:

SUBSTANCES	**Will participants work with substances**	**NO**	**If 'No' move to next hazard If 'Yes' use space below to identify and assess any risks**

Is this project subject to the UCL requirements on the ethics of Non-NHS Human Research?	NO
If yes, please state your Project ID Number	

For more information, please refer to: http://ethics.grad.ucl.ac.uk/

DECLARATION The work will be reassessed whenever there is a significant change and at least annually. Those participating in the work have read the assessment.

Select the appropriate statement:

x	I the undersigned have assessed the activity and associated risks and declare that there is no significant residual risk
	I the undersigned have assessed the activity and associated risks and declare that the risk will be controlled by the method(s) listed above

NAME OF SUPERVISOR Dr Sonia Arbaci (signed by email) Date: 01 June 2020

FIELDWORK 5 May 2010

APPENDIX D:

Your response

Respondent: **Tanushree Agarwal** Submitted on: Monday, 1 June 2020, 4:14 PM

Ethical Clearance Pro Forma

It is important for you to include all relevant information about your research in this form, so that your supervisor can give you the best advice on how to proceed with your research.

You are advised to read though the relevant sections of UCL's Research Integrity guidance to learn more about your ethical obligations.

Dissertation Details

Question #1

1

Response is required

*

Please select your programme of study.

International Planning : International Planning

Question #2

2

Response is required

*

Please provide your current working dissertation title.

People powered urban regeneration: Exploring civic crowdfunding in London

Question #3

3

Response is required

*

Please select your supervisor from the drop-down list.

Arbaci, Sonia : Arbaci, Sonia

Research Details

Question #4

4

Response is required

*

Please indicate here which data collection methods you expect to use. Tick all that apply.

- [x] Interviews
- [ ] Focus Groups
- [x] Questionnaires (including oral questions)
- [ ] Action research
- [ ] Observation / participant observation
- [x] Documentary analysis (including use of personal records)
- [x] Audio-visual recordings (including photographs)
- [x] Collection/use of sensor or locational data
- [ ] Controlled trial
- [ ] Intervention study (including changing environments)
- [ ] Systematic review
- [x] Secondary data analysis
- [ ] Advisory/consultation groups

Question #5

5

Response is required

*

Please indicate where your research will take place.

UK only : UK only

Question #6

6

Response is required

*

Does your project involve the recruitment of participants?

'Participants' means human participants and their data (including sensor/locational data and observational notes/images.)

(•) Yes ( ) No

Appropriate Safeguard, Data Storage and Security

Question #7

7

Response is required

*

Will your research involve the collection and/or use of personal data?

Personal data is data which relates to a living individual who can be identified from that data or from the data and other information that is either currently held, or will be held by the data controller (you, as the researcher).

This includes:

- Any expression of opinion about the individual and any intentions of the data controller or any other person toward the individual.
- Sensor, location or visual data which may reveal information that enables the identification of a face, address etc. (some postcodes cover only one property).
- Combinations of data which may reveal identifiable data, such as names, email/postal addresses, date of birth, ethnicity, descriptions of health diagnosis or conditions, computer IP address (of relating to a device with a single user).

(•) Yes ( ) No

Question #8

8

Response is required

*

Is your research using or collecting:

- special category data as defined by the General Data Protection Regulation*, and/or
- data which might be considered sensitive in some countries, cultures or contexts?

*Examples of special category data are data:

- which reveals racial or ethnic origin, political opinions, religious or philosophical beliefs, trade union membership;
- concerning health (the physical or mental health of a person, including the provision of health care services);
- concerning sex life or sexual orientation;
- genetic or biometric data processed to uniquely identify a natural person.

( ) Yes (•) No

Question #9

9

Response is required

Do you confirm that all personal data will be stored and processed in compliance with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR 2018)?

- (•) Yes
- ( ) No
- ( ) I will not be working with any personal data

Question #10

10

Response is required

I confirm that:

- [x] The information in this form is accurate to the best of my knowledge.
- [x] I will continue to reflect on, and update these ethical considerations in consultation with my dissertation supervisor.

Supervisor sign-off for Ethical Clearance Forms and Risk Assessment Forms

(For supervisor completion only)

Are you satisfied with the **ethical clearance form** (*yes/no*)?

Please provide any additional comments about the form that may help the student. *(If **unsatisfactory**, also provide a suitable resubmission date.)* *yes*

Are you satisfied with the **risk assessment form** (*yes/no*)?

Please provide any additional comments about the form that may help the student. *(If **unsatisfactory**, also provide a suitable resubmission date.)* *yes*

MSc Dissertation

GRADEMARK REPORT

FINAL GRADE

/100

GENERAL COMMENTS

Instructor

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