

Examining the concept of identity in peripheral cities and the contribution of universities

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OECD and other studies show that all successful regional economies have significant university and college sectors. Virtually any study on what really drives regional or national growth will come down to the observation that national growth in GDP is driven by regions, instead of the country as a whole. Almost all studies also conclude that there are always universities or higher education institutions at the heart of successful regions. Greater Manchester has five higher education institutions and some 200,000 students in further and higher education. Universities, or “knowledge machines”, are therefore at the heart of successful regional growth and, therefore, successful urban regeneration.



NeT-TOPIC

New Tools and
approaches for
managing urban
Transformation
Processes in
Intermediate
Cities

BUILDING NEW URBAN IDENTITIES

From mono-functional to multi-functional cities

Salford, 21-22nd October, 2009



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PREFACE

NeT-TOPIC & THE URBACT II PROGRAMME

NeT-TOPIC is a Thematic Network within URBACT II, an European exchange and learning programme that enables cities to work together to build solutions to major urban challenges.

NeT-TOPIC is composed of European peripheral cities in transformation, with shared problems including industrial decline, territorial fragmentation and social polarisation. Located near to major cities, they are transforming to more attractive urban areas: focusing on developing their own urban identity, offering a greater quality of life, improving citizen integration and social cohesion to fulfil a new role within their metropolitan areas.

One of the biggest challenges faced by these cities is the use and promotion of new tools and approaches relating to territorial governance and urban planning processes at local, regional and national level to improve urban transformation processes. The network provides these cities with a platform to reflect on changes in the city model to increase the strategic value of its territory.

NeT-TOPIC's network aims to foster the exchange of knowledge, experiences and best practices among its partners. The project seeks to enhance the role of peripheral cities in territorial governance and urban planning processes to achieve their desired new city model.

The URBACT II Programme enables cities to work together to develop solutions to major urban challenges, reaffirming the key role they play in facing increasingly complex societal changes. URBACT helps cities to develop pragmatic solutions that are new and sustainable, and that integrate economic, social and environmental dimensions. It enables cities to share good practices and lessons learned with all professionals involved in urban policy throughout Europe. URBACT is 181 cities, 29 countries, and 5.000 active participants. URBACT is jointly financed by ERDF and the Member States.

This publication intends to gather the interventions and conclusions of the Second Thematic Seminar organised by NeT-TOPIC Thematic Network under the title: *BUILDING NEW URBAN IDENTITIES – From mono-functional to multi-functional cities*.



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— INTRODUCTION

Urban identity is a very broad concept. It deals with social, economic, cultural and environmental dimensions. Cities belonging to NeT-TOPIC are peripheral cities within a metropolitan area. This location has determined their evolution as urban spaces. They have suffered industrial decline, territorial fragmentation and social exclusion as a consequence of this "metropolitan membership".

These peripheral cities are now reconsidering their city model, trying to increase the strategic value of their territory in order to transform into more attractive and cohesive cities that offer greater quality of life and better citizen coexistence. Thereby, a change in their traditional identity is taking place or, at least, "building a new urban identity" has become a main goal of local government's policies and aims.

From an initial situation of "suburbs" morphologically characterised by big blocks of flats or factories, functionally characterised as being dormitory or industrial cities, these towns are changing into a space which tries to balance residential and economic functions, where shopping centres, facilities and green areas are being established, and where new infrastructures are being developed.

The combination of all these elements aims to provide the metropolitan peripheral territory with a centrality and an individual urban balance, transforming them from satellite dormitory cities into real cities. Indeed, they are building their new "identity".

Once the transformation process of the city model has been realised and disseminated, and once the evidence of radical changes has become greater than the inertia of the city's negative image (peripheral, dormitory, marginal, unsafe, etc.), a progressive change is triggered in the perception of the city by its own inhabitants, as well as in the perception of the city by the country.

We must also bear in mind that in the construction of the self, human beings build up their identity on the basis of a matrix of relationships (family, group, religion) among which the "link to the territory" must be highlighted due to its particular strength. Belonging to a place and feeling that you come from a place are derivations of the territorial character of the human being.

The identity of a territory extends to the past and is projected to the future. Cities need to build active identities: communities that do things, make decisions and achieve results together. However, cities also need to be seen as a particular geographical space that is a reference for its citizens. Identity provides a sense of belonging, on the basis of shared characteristics that serve to distinguish territoriality from other forms of personal identity.

01

_ CONCEPTUAL
FRAMEWORK ON
THE SEMINAR THEMEEXAMINING THE
CONCEPT OF IDENTITY
IN PERIPHERAL CITIES
AND THE
CONTRIBUTION
OF UNIVERSITIES

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The presentation will try to analyse the contribution universities make to the concept of identity in peripheral cities. In the context of the seminar's theme, the presentation will be focused on four main points:

- Appropriate governance structures
- Countering fragmentation with integration
- Re-using industrial sites
- Promoting multi-functionality.

We will try to analyse how these concepts relate to universities, in order to see how they can contribute to the urban agenda. In this undertaking, universities will be considered as "knowledge machines", i.e., vast and complex machines that generate and transmit knowledge.

SO WHAT DO UNIVERSITIES DO FOR THEIR CITIES?

OECD and other studies show that all successful regional economies have significant university and college sectors. Virtually any study on what really drives regional or national growth will come down to the observation that national growth in GDP is driven by regions, instead of the country as a whole. Almost all studies also conclude that there are always universities or higher education institutions at the heart of successful regions. Greater Manchester has five higher education institutions and some 200,000 students in further and higher education. Thereby, Universities, or "knowledge machines", are at the heart of successful regional growth and therefore, at the heart of successful urban regeneration.

- **Universities offer education and training: developing and re-skilling a high performance workforce.** Today, people do not spend their lifetime working for the same company. People are constantly reinventing themselves. It is a very rapidly moving economy. It is the so-called knowledge economy, where constant re-skilling and workforce development are essential.
- **Universities offer research and innovation: developing new knowledge.** All universities do this in one way or another. However, there is an unresolved matter: we are not yet very good at translating the information into knowledge that is useful for the private sector. Therefore, effective instruments must be developed which allow the transfer of this knowledge into private and public sectors so that it can be translated into drivers of urban growth.
- **Universities combine the local with the global: bringing the world to the city and the city to the world.** Universities are intensively local: we are located in a city — Salford in our case — but we are also intensively global. Here in Manchester we have students of more than 100 different nationalities enrolled, who act as ambassadors to their own countries. This is translated into connections and trade links. As the word itself suggests, universities are “universal”.
- **Universities serve as significant employers: education is an industry in its own right.** Universities are also big industries: students represent an important source of income for the city. Greater Manchester has one of the highest concentrations of students in Europe. It is a higher education hub whether it is identified as such or not.

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Now that we have analysed what universities can do for cities, let's turn some of these questions back to the issue of urban identity.

The place where we are sitting today, the Lowry at Salford Quays, is a mayor asset in terms of urban identity. Heritage and urban identity are particularly important because if we look at successful cities from a multi-functional and integrated point of view, all of them have heritage in one way or another. Paris and London are some examples. From my point of view, the great success in the centre of Manchester is the way they have preserved that wonderful 19th century urban heritage, and reinvented it along with new contemporary architecture.

All good cities that have achieved integration have a strong sense of identity and a lot of that is about “place making”. Successful cities have strong identities and unique qualities. In this sense, some key aspects of identity are founded on heritage and on contemporary cultural activities. This does not mean that cities must be constantly analysing their heritage. People walk past these assets and are aware of their richness, but quite often are unaware of which century they date from. It is that sense of architectural variety that gives us the sense of place. People do not have to come to Manchester to do their shopping at the weekend; they could go to nearby shopping centres instead, with the same shops, free parking, and where they have security and convenience. However, people do go to the centre of Manchester, because they like the vibe and what is going on in the centre of Manchester. And this is how the identity issue works.

Salford has an extraordinary heritage asset resulting from the Industrial Revolution, one that perhaps has not yet been fully exploited. Salford was the city where Engels was sent to learn his father's trade; it was the first place with public gas lighting; with the first public park and the first public library. However, this entire heritage has been fragmented and lost to an extent and I think it needs to be revived.

Recently there has been an exhibition about the “lost streets of Salford”. Over the last 50 years, more than 1,500 streets have been destroyed in the city. In these events you can feel the energy of ordinary people coming and tracing on a map where their houses used to be. It is not because they are nostalgic for poor housing conditions, but because heritage and identity matter in urban “place making”.

Salford is also one of those cities without a clear city centre. After moving the heart of the city to Swinton, it is not clear where the city's civic centre is. Reversing the effects of the destruction of the city's civic centre and the loss of a distinctive urban fabric are thus two core challenges for Salford.

And again universities play a role in that, not only in terms of promoting heritage but also serving as a site of public intellectual life. A university should be an active entity that organises seminars, exhibitions, conferences, etc. We do not do enough of all that anymore. Universities should rediscover this mission and take up this space at the heart of the city.

EFFECTIVE GOVERNANCE

Effective governance structures are also key in the consolidation of urban identities. Public participation is a vital player in urban issues. From my point of view, much public participation is being taken for granted at the present time. I think we should go back to a governance that is driven by effective public participation.

And here universities can also play a key role in terms of promoting and developing appropriate and focused public policy. In this context, Salford University is developing a 3D model of Salford city. This complex system will help with public participation in governance and decision-making because it will allow us to deal with quite complicated issues and to visualise and familiarise ourselves with all the kinds of breakthroughs that will be needed if we want to return effective governance back to cities.

COUNTERING FRAGMENTATION WITH INTEGRATION

Overcoming fragmentation in order to make cities integrated is another key factor in the consolidation of urban identities. Effective integration depends on appropriate infrastructures: utilities, transport, urban planning systems — and digital infrastructure. At the same time, an appropriate infrastructure also requires a three-helix model which involves the effective participation of the public sector, the private sector and universities. Universities should serve cities as centres of innovation.

Infrastructure must enable entrepreneurship at all levels. Public transport and appropriate digital infrastructure should be provided in order to ensure accessibility to Media City, but more importantly, to the Media City spin-offs. Chapel Street, one of the areas with the country's fastest growing rate of cultural industries, will not go anywhere without an effective broadband and digital infrastructure.

REUSING INDUSTRIAL SITES

Effective cities are in constant regeneration. They have this very attractive, challenging, constant organic quality that makes their constant regeneration possible. Houses are coming down, and new houses are going up. Taking into account that cities are

constantly changing, I think that the issue of "Reusing industrial sites" needs to be changed to the question of "How do we constantly regenerate?" The most important thing is that cities do not stagnate or become static. Constant change and development is needed.

Britain is a country with a very rich industrial heritage. These industrial sites make a major contribution to heritage and identity when they are reused rather than replaced. Universities also play a key role in these constant opportunities for reusing and reinventing urban infrastructure: they should promote innovation and spin-off activities, adding economic value to re-used industrial sites.

The most important thing is that cities do not stagnate or become static. Constant change and development is needed.

Destructive brownfield land banking is a crucial challenge that should be overcome in order to ensure that identity and regeneration issues do not slow down and collapse.

PROMOTING MULTI-FUNCTIONALITY

Multi-functionality follows from the effective combination of an appropriate infrastructure base, strong identity through heritage and culture, and appropriate public policy development. If these conditions are right, the city would look after itself in multi-functionality terms because you cannot legislate for things like multi-functionality. That is what the city of Manchester has done so successfully in terms of their continuing regeneration.

And if these conditions are met, then universities function as effective knowledge machines, driving a multi-functional ecosystem that will be self-sustaining.

Having the university at the heart of the city is a key opportunity for Salford. The university, with roots stretching back to the Industrial Revolution when it provided new knowledge for industrial development, is still there and has a key stake in future developments.