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REDEVELOPMENT IN THE CITY OF NEWCASTLE UPON TYNE, UK

For Britain generally and for Newcastle in particular there is a real question as to the modern function of the city. In the western industrialised countries, and especially in the UK and the USA, there has been a wider consideration of the modern role of the city in both social and economic life. Underlying this consideration is the recognition of quite a radical change in the structure of western economies. In particular there has been a general decline in traditional industries such as large-scale manufacturing and a growth in the service sector and specialised manufacturing.

In this context the historical development of the city of Newcastle upon Tyne and the wider city/region was based on the existence of key raw materials, (especially coal), shipbuilding, armaments and general manufacturing.

It appears that Britain, the first country to industrialise, will become the first truly post-industrial society, i.e. one without a significant manufacturing industry. Such a transformation has implications for employment, international trade and of course for urban planning.

If the city development is not based on production then what can it be based on? The broad answer in the UK is that the old industrial cities are to become centres of consumption. They are to become the places that people will increasingly visit to spend the income they have earned either elsewhere or at least not in manufacturing. The key growth industries for the city have become leisure pursuits, restaurants, hotels and shopping. This is of course in addition to the growing service sector employment throughout the economy, especially in such areas as finance and business services. One particular aspect of the consumption city, which Newcastle especially wishes to exploit, is culture. This term can mean many different things, and for urban development this looseness of definition is quite useful, for it permits a wide range of activities to be brought within one over-arching theme. At the heart of the initiative has been the intention to change the image of the city/region both to those who live there and most importantly to outsiders in the belief that it is the image of a place that influences the real decisions of business investors, tourists etc rather than the actual reality. Of course the image needs to have some substance and the city/region has been actively developing its cultural assets and creating "cultural events".

Some examples may illustrate the policy. One cultural asset is the historic buildings in the region. Perhaps the most well known are Durham Cathedral and Hadrian's Wall, both world heritage sites. There are many others however and part of the cultural policy is to make these more well-known and to encourage tourist visits. Some have actually been developed with the support of public money. For example at Alnwick Castle the gardens have been extensively revitalised and extended. Over £20million of public and private money has been spent on the project and the intention is to spend more so that it can become a major visitor attraction.

Another approach to culture is the use of public works of art to not only to create interest but also to change the image of the city/region. One of the most striking examples of public art in Newcastle area is the Angel of the North. While an interesting piece of art in its own right, one of the principle reasons for using public money to fund the work was to create a "visible monument" for those entering the urban area from the South. The Angel received huge coverage in the national and international press and has certainly helped to change the image of the city/region.

A further, and very significant action, was the decision by the local authorities to bid to become the European City of Culture in 2008. The bidding process raised the profile of the city and while Newcastle/Gateshead eventually lost out to Liverpool the process enabled the city to arrange a series of cultural events which will still go ahead. Since the decision on the bid the city has revised its cultural events programme, extended it to 2010, and there are cultural events in every month throughout the year as you can see from the web site of the city.

Public sector planners have become actively involved in bidding for government money to support projects. Public funding is only available via competitive bidding with other local authority areas. Furthermore in many cases some funding from "other sources" has to be available. Planners have to be involved in this process not least because many of the proposed projects involve real physical

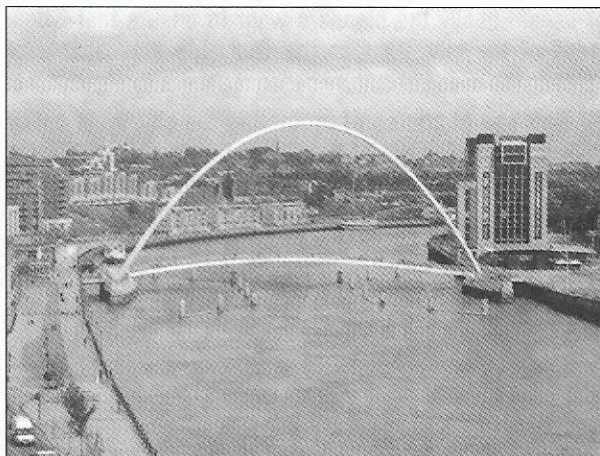
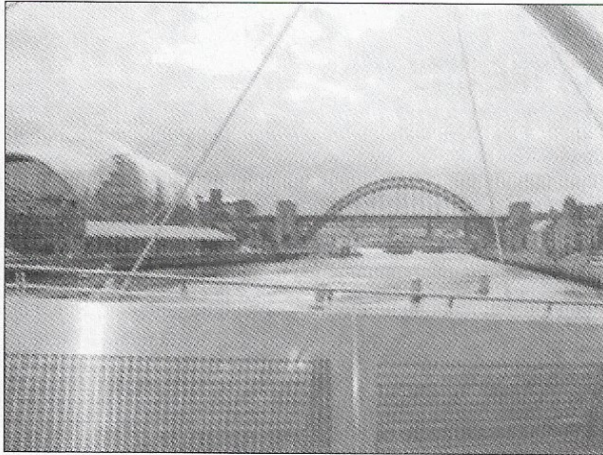


Fig. 1: Gateshead Millenium Bridge and Baltic Flour Mill



*Fig.2: SAGE Music Centre by Norman Foster
A view from the Gateshead Millenium Bridge.*

developments and these have to be approved by the local planning authority. In practice the planners are more fully involved, actually trying to devise and/or upgrade bids, and more generally working in a pro-active way to foster the development of the city. The planners also recognise the need to develop new partnerships with different types of investors and "actors". They are often members of a team trying to develop some culture based activity which may have land-use implications. One example may illustrate the point. Funding has been obtained for the new SAGE music centre. This building houses two auditoriums for musical performances and is the new home for the regions principle orchestras. In addition it cooperates with the University's School of Music in the teaching of the next generation of musicians. The bid for the funds required the local authority (and of course this included the planners), to show that it had the active support of a whole range or artistic groups as well as the University.

The planners in Newcastle upon Tyne are also well aware that the image of the city is important. This has impacts of the design of buildings that they are willing to permit and the uses to which land can be put. No one wants to damage the image by approving inappropriate buildings or uses. Equally the planners want to ensure that whole areas of the city such as the Quayside are capable of meeting the needs of culture based regeneration.

One way of course of promoting the city is via policy makers in other parts of the UK and abroad. In 2006 the city/region was the first European location for the World Summit on Arts and Culture, an accolade which could bring huge social and economic benefits to the region. The inaugural summit, organised by the International Federation of Arts Councils and Cultural Agencies (IFACCA), was held in Ottawa, Canada, in 2000 when 60 countries were represented. The second summit was held in Singapore last year. The Newcastle Summit could be attended by as many as 500 cultural leaders, policy makers and regeneration managers from up to 200 countries.

In addition Newcastle city/region will host WOMEX, the World Music Expo, which could bring over 2,000 delegates and musicians to the region, while the conference of the International Society for the Performing Arts (ISPA) will also see the world's top producers and venue managers on Tyneside.

One way of understanding these policies is to think of it as a form of urban marketing, a re-branding of the city as a place of culture in its widest sense. The world and tourists/visitors in particular, are intended to see the city/region as "rich in interesting cultural activity". For potential inward investors the intention is to transform the city from an old industrial (unpleasant) city to one that is attractive (pleasant), forward looking and therefore a good place to live, and to work.

It means a change in land use of the urban area. The city planners will not allocate any more land in the local plan for industrial uses and indeed have become quite relaxed about the idea of converting current industrial land to other uses. This is in start contrast to the policy in the 60s and 70s of protecting existing industrial land and using the availability of industrial sites as a promotional tool. A part of the issue is the need to provide additional space for new tertiary activities. In practice this implies the need for additional office space but this brings with it a requirement to consider transport policies such as car-parking and the availability of public transport. More generally the issue is about ensuring that new developments are compatible with their neighbours and perhaps supportive of one-another so that a whole part of the city is transformed.

One of the complications in the use of culture as a means of supporting regeneration is the role of housing. An important aspect of modern regeneration is the encouragement of new high quality housing in the city centre. Part of the reason for this is that it is recognised by the development agencies that it would be impossible to have a small successful city centre surrounded by a decaying housing area. Another reason for new high quality housing is that people living in the area will make use of the cultural facilities on a more regular basis in comparison to

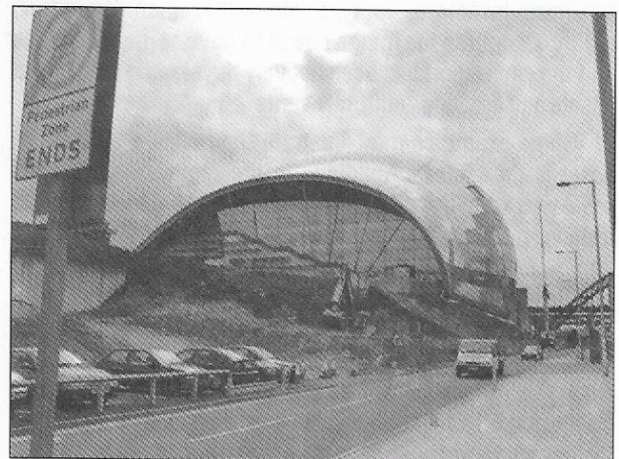


Fig.3: SAGE Music Centre by Norman Foster



those who live further away. Finally, but perhaps most importantly, high value housing is very profitable and this profitability can be used to part-fund other elements of the development such as theatres and public open spaces. This is particularly possible in Newcastle where the city owns much of the land and can therefore sell it to the house-builders at a high price and use the revenue to support other physical developments.

There are of course some concerns about this cultural development approach to the re-development of the city/region. At a general level there is debate about whether the concentration on the image of the city masks the real economic and development needs that exist. After all the urban area includes some of the poorest urban districts in Britain. These localised areas of poverty have high unemployment, drug abuse and other social problems. No amount of re-imaging will solve these and culture based activities are unlikely to have much impact on these areas or on the people who live in them.

Another concern is for the labour market. The employment that is created may be short-term, at low wages and requiring lowly skilled employees. This is in comparison to the norm in Newcastle where major industrial employers have historically created secure, permanent, well-paid jobs. The evidence suggests that wage levels have not been affected but employment is more short-term than it used to be. This change is consistent with wider changes in employment in Britain. It is now normal not to expect "a job for life", rather people are expected to be flexible, move from job to job over their lifetime and are prepared to re-train where necessary.

A further concern is often expressed about the lack of entrepreneurship in the city/region. There is little doubt that real employment creation is dominated by smaller firms in the service sector and culture based activities are no exception. In Newcastle the traditional form of employment

has been either in a large company or in the public sector. It is difficult 'to change the mind-set', so that people see the creation of their own small business as a real possibility.

Newcastle and the wider region of Northumbria have made a specific decision to change the image of itself and through this approach change the direction of urban development. Use of the cultural image is consistent with the wider changes in the British economy, especially its move to a post-manufacturing society, though the actual relevance to some sections of the poorest sections of the population (who have often suffered the most from the decline in manufacturing), is at best marginal.

Clearly other cities could follow this approach and indeed there are other examples of culture-based regeneration across Europe. Newcastle is unique in Britain, and perhaps more generally, in the extent to which the city/region is using culture as the primary focus for its regeneration. In part this is a choice but it is also important to recognise that as an old industrial city in a part of the country far away from the capital, Newcastle does not have a lot of alternative choices.



Gateshead Millenium Bridge.