

AG2016 Conference Report 3: universities and place making

The Town and Gown sessions organised by Jennifer Mapes (Kent State University), examined the relationship between universities, townscape and the 21st century city. Universities are increasingly inculcated in place marketing and branding, connecting campus development to broader practices of civic boosterism, urban regeneration and place making. Indeed, larger institutions might well be considered as significant property developers in their own right. The sessions, therefore, included international case studies examining the relationship between universities and towns and settlements where they are located.

Euan Hague (DePaul University) asked ethical questions concerning whether universities should become involved in commercial property development. Euan discussed a 10,000 seat basketball stadium that is being constructed for de Paul University in partnership with the private sector and the City of Chicago, with a planned opening in 2017. The development is actually off-campus, located south of downtown Chicago in a diverse neighbourhood that the City aims to regenerate. The university's new stadium will anchor an events and entertainment complex, The McCormick Place Event Center, that will accommodate ancillary commercial development, including retail and two new hotels. The stadium could be used for graduation, concerts and other events. Potentially the project will create both temporary construction jobs, permanent employment opportunities within a relatively poor area. The City and the University also stand to benefit from long term revenues arising from use of the stadium complex. From the perspective of local government, the increased hotel capacity and entertainment complex is seen as essential for Chicago to maintain its reputation as an important destination within the convention market. The project is supported by Tax Increment Financing, an idea once entertained by the Core Cities Group in the UK (<http://www.corecities.com/news-events/rough-guide-tax-increment-financing-core-cities-and-british-property-federation>). In Chicago, state support for what is essentially a private commercial development has provoked significant public reaction, including both online protests and demonstrations on campus and at the site. 70% of local residents oppose the development, questioning this use of public money when the City has recently cut the schools budget. But universities have form in Chicago, as this film reveals *Now we live on Clifton* reveals (<https://www.kartemquin.com/films/now-we-live-on-clifton>).

Given that the core business of universities is teaching and research, the development of a sports-entertainment complex appears somewhat tangential to the University's purpose. But as universities across the world compete for resources and students, the development of new facilities are seen as essential by university management in terms of recruitment. Having such facilities in place is now seen as necessary as individual universities fear losing a competitive edge to other institutions. For Euan, this example from Chicago reveals a number of challenges regarding the role of universities in taking the lead role in urban planning. Is public financial support for a project that is clearly a private commercial development appropriate in an age of austerity? In Chicago for example, a reduction of budget for state schools is equitable to the level of public investment in this particular project. This case study also raises the spectre of creeping corporatisation of the higher education sector, exposing institutions to the vagaries of international property speculation and

commercial property interests. Universities are perhaps targeted by city authorities as key anchors of commercial property development, given their fixity in place. Unlike commercial firms, universities are unlikely to relocate to other cities, and are therefore ideally positioned as sitting tenants, that also bring students as potential consumers.

For more information about Euan's work:

<http://las.depaul.edu/academics/geography/faculty/Pages/euan-hague.aspx>

Jean-Paul Addie (University College London), is currently working on a European Commission funded project, *Situating the New Urban University* and asks us to consider what does it mean to be a university in the contemporary city? Jean-Paul also considers how urban universities are becoming significant places in their own right, connected to multiscale networks, effecting change at the global, regional and neighbourhood levels. In global cities such as London, institutions occupy a leading position in reproducing the notion of the capital as a global centre of knowledge production and exchange. Through management strategies to encourage internationalisation and network building, there is now an alignment between the universities and the broader economic development objectives city-regional and national government.

By attracting both international students and researchers, London's universities are also having a profound impact on the built environment and the character of urban communities, contributing to the cosmopolitan diversity of the capital. Through estates management and development, therefore, universities are playing a significant role in place making and identity formation, in ways which define the nature of urban living in a global city.

For universities located close to the centre of large growing cities such as London, expansion or the provision of new functional buildings poses a particular problem. In London, most of capital's Higher Education Institutions are concentrated in the urban core leaving them with few options in terms of affordable estates development. Jean-Paul discussed, for example, plans for UCL East, a new £141million campus development at the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park in Stratford, East London. Even on this regenerated site, initial proposals involved the displacement of public sector housing to make way for new university buildings, a highly unpopular move in a city where affordable accommodation is already strictly limited. Revised proposals now locate the new campus on a cleared 11acre site within the Park, with a planned opening 2019-20.

But universities are messy institutions, replete with internal contradictions and competing agendas. UCL, for example, is home to critical mass of urban scholarship, such as the Bartlett School, but it appears this constituency has become disengaged in planning university estates. Drawing on this expertise, however, might encourage universities to consider more socially progressive models of development, to become more inclusive institutions and through estates development that produces more positive outcomes for the neighbourhoods affected by campus development and expansion. We might think of the university, therefore, as both a place in itself, but also a process driving place change.

For more information about Jean-Paul Addie and UCL East:

<http://www.geog.ucl.ac.uk/about-the-department/people/research-staff/research-staff/jean-paul-addie/>

<https://www.ucl.ac.uk/ucl-east/>

Jennifer Mapes (Kent State University) discussed the relationship between her university and Kent, a small former industrial town in Ohio. Reviewing the recent history of the university revealed a social and physical divide between the expanding student body and residents who had mainly worked in industry. During the 1960s, for example, the downtown became a space for student protest and occupation, marking the beginning of a social divide between the university and community. In 1975, the construction of a new highway disconnected the downtown area and surrounding districts, effectively walling-off the campus from the centre. A further consequence of this construction was the creation of awkward urban spaces, residential cul-de-sacs on the university side of the highway, which became subject to studentification, resulting in the concentration of a none-integrated student body in a particular neighbourhood. Over the years this area effectively became an unregulated party-zone, a space for anti-social behaviour that leads to conflict with both the police and local community. The context is important here, as Kent has a residential population of just 32,345, whereas the KSU Campus is home to some 29,000 Undergraduate and Postgraduate students on an 866-acre site.

The Downtown Kent Redevelopment plan, involves reconnecting the university and the urban core. At the heart of the project is the construction of a new esplanade linking the campus and downtown, a pedestrian walkway and greenspace, which cuts across the highway, and provides a space for mixing of both the university and residential community. This has also opened up vacant lots for

development, where new university buildings have been constructed. The university is also supporting the downtown redevelopment by building a new hotel and conference centre. What does this mean for the local community? Reconnecting the downtown and campus is changing the character of central Kent in terms of improved walkability, safety and social connection. The Esplanade is promoting new outdoor uses and café spaces, and the increased pedestrian footfall appears to be generating activity for retail and restaurant businesses located in the centre. The project illustrates, therefore, how a university might positively contribute to the revitalisation of place, acting as both an investor in places and a provider of student/consumers

<http://www.street-works.com/portfolio-CDev-BK.asp>

Jacob Robert Wolff (University of New Mexico) discussed the tensions produced by university driven gentrification. In a context where urban growth is connected to the rise of the creative class (Florida, 2002), universities can play a key role in the production of economic and social capital, the skilled labour said to be essential for driving the growth of the contemporary city. The repositioning of universities as sites for the production of labour against their traditional role as places of enlightened education, however, brings into question their role in offering critical reflection and even resistance to the strategies pursued by institutions today. Wolff suggests that students themselves are complicit, tied into narratives of employability and career progression, whereas once they might have provided a voice for resisting such logics. Wolff drew our attention to an example at Columbia (Harlem), in Morningside Park, where in 1968 students helped to resist a university project that would have displaced African-American residents. In the contemporary climate, however, particularly within US student consumer culture, student priorities seem to reflect an embedded economic rationality, where return-on-degree and value-for-money dominate. Consequently, US universities have become embroiled in place marking campaigns, that position cities as safe and reward recreational spaces for students. Students themselves are the new gentrifiers, or at least “apprentice gentrifiers”, occupying exclusive purpose-built and gated residential facilities, gated, which offer a range of targeted consumer and leisure services

For more on Morningside Park:

<https://exhibitions.cul.columbia.edu/exhibits/show/1968/causes/gym>

Clare Melhuish (University College London) in another session, discussed the role of universities in re-imagining urban life through their capital investment programmes. Historically universities are elite institutions, disconnected from local neighbourhoods, places where encounters with local ethnic (and I would add class) difference are limited. Furthermore, there are many examples where universities estate projects have led to displacement of local communities, as institutions expand to colonise sites and buildings across the city. That said, universities themselves, have been and continue to be microcosms of cosmopolitan communities, places where staff and students from across the world might mix and engage with each other. Today, universities are major landowners, many located in major cities where surrounding communities have been transformed into ethnically diverse and multicultural neighbourhoods. They have capital resources, perhaps, to develop new spaces of architecture that might encourage cosmopolitan encounters with nearby communities. Clare, therefore, refers to Postcolonial urban practice, referring to the potential for universities to reinvent themselves as outward looking institutions to connect with both global and local communities through the creation of places encourage spaces of interaction with local communities. Despite the competitive environment that universities now operate within, universities might become places that drive socially progressive models of urban life, through research that critically engages with processes driving urban social problems, together with their role to reach out to communities through widening participation and public engagement strategies. That said, Clare calls for greater community engagement over time to inform masterplan development.

For more information about Clare's research: <http://iris.ucl.ac.uk/iris/browse/profile?upi=CMELH53>

Steve Millington (Manchester Metropolitan University) presented his evaluation of place making on Manchester's Oxford Road. The full text of this paper is below:

Manchester's (UK) Oxford Road runs directly south of the city centre connecting two of the UK's largest universities (University of Manchester , Manchester Metropolitan University formerly Manchester Polytechnic) and The Royal Northern College of Music, together with significant cultural venues (The Whitworth Art Gallery and Contact Theatre), plus the city's main hospitals. There is a total student population of over 75,000. The road is associated with major scientific discoveries and figures of the 20th century, such as Rutherford's splitting of the atom, Alan Turing and the team behind world's first programmable computer, as well as recent discoveries such as the 'wonder' material graphene.

Since 1945, Oxford Road has been accommodated into the wider spatial planning context of the city. Manchester's Postwar Reconstruction Plan envisaged a mono-functional Educational, Cultural and

Medical Precinct integrated into a regional system of highways, combined with open recreational areas, and links to surrounding residential neighbourhoods. The areas flanking Oxford Road, for instance, were to be remodelled into an international cosmopolitan educational zone to match London's Bloomsbury or New York's Greenwich Village, reproducing a notion of place as a site for cultural or knowledge through spontaneous interactions, where:

“Manchester's artists, writers, dons, students, Continentals, journalists, engineers, and others ... should find a dwelling designed to cater for their personal and professional needs ... in such an environment cultural societies would flourish as never before, the arts of conversation, and of civilised living would be restored to their proper status” (Manchester Postwar Reconstruction Plan, 1945).

This plan presents Modernist utopian vision for Higher Education, positioning the university as a key driver of a post-industrial city, where science and technology would lead to social progress. In practice, the plan entailed the mass clearances of working class housing to allow for the construction of new university buildings, together with a literal Death of the Street, as the diverse urban fabric of the Victorian city was almost completely eradicated.

Under the influence of The Buchanan Report, the 1960s witnessed a refinement of this Modernist vision, to incorporate the new Polytechnic, a campus in the sky, where each building would be linked at first floor level by a system of raised pedways, to separate people from traffic. Although this plan was largely abandoned in the 1970, the physical legacies remain visible along Oxford Road. Importantly, so are the absences. Oxford Road is bereft of a diverse street culture. Whereas independent second-hand book and record stores, cheap clothing shops, and cafes, often proliferate in student towns, on Oxford Road they are absent. Instead traffic dominates, principally through the constant presence of 100s of privatised and highly polluting buses that ferry students along the corridor into studentified neighbourhoods to the south.

During the early 1990s Oxford Road became subject to a new spatial vision, invariably named The Knowledge Capital, The Knowledge Corridor, The Oxford Road Corridor, and now simply The Corridor. Estates redevelopment under the auspices of The Corridor Partnership, has aligned the universities with the wider rebranding of Manchester as a globally competitive city, and has more clearly defined their role in contributing to urban regeneration. The post 1992 architecture, exemplifies this repositioning of higher education within a market driven culture to produce a landscape in which the buildings are perhaps more important than the science. Icons of the Modernist high-tech future are being gradually erased, antiquities, perhaps, symbolising a pre-Thatcherite era. Instead, aluminium-clad and glazed steel structures are now the premier spatial manifestations of this vision, structures that reveal little about the science or education that takes place within. The attempt to produce a corporatized landscape almost seems to be deliberate intention of university management, in alignment with their plans to produce highly ranked globally

competitive institutions. The connection between new buildings and their respective institutions is only revealed by an over layering of branded university logos. Instead of integrating into local neighbourhoods, this new campus almost turns its back on local residents, who are confronted by walls of glass or confounded by hidden entrances. Many new buildings even fail to provide access from Oxford Road, with public entrances facing inwards, subject to swipecard access and the protection of 24hr security. Furthermore, the deployment of interdictory and legal measures serves only to discourage itinerant users.

Over recent years, Oxford Road has also lost iconic landmark buildings that have a long association with the area, such as the Cornerhouse Arts Cinema (now temporarily occupied by MMU until anticipated demolition), the BBC television and radio studios, The Maths Tower, and the relocation of MMU's Student Union. Opportunities for social gathering, loitering, and sitting are restricted. Pedestrians, instead, encounter a fractured linear journey disrupted by awkward crossing points, impact barriers and a plethora of street clutter. Movement along Oxford Road entails long walks along narrow pavements around super-blocks of closed and featureless university buildings described by Pevsner's Architectural Guide as lacking "architectural interest ... There is too much that is just run of the mill ... deplorably weak and unimaginative" (2001, 107-08).

Opportunities to restore street life and generate a sense of place are hardly priorities within this new landscape, but this is perhaps not surprising considering the weakened relationship between place and the university. The achievements of academics are no longer defined by eureka moments, or the product of teams working and lively closely together. Instead, research processes are embedded within global networks connecting vast teams of experts. The importance of place specifics to technological innovation or the spread and diffusion of innovations is much less important. Academia, in particular, is marked by itinerant professional groups, where career progression is dependent on national and international mobility. Students, themselves, through the affordances of their education, will gravitate towards major graduate employment centres, and largely drift away from the towns and cities where they were educated. Put simply, the main constituency of the university comprises a group that is unlikely to develop a strong affinity with the place of the university. In this sense, the revisioning of Manchester's Oxford as a Corridor is an apt spatial metaphor, a functional space designed for speed that you travel along to get to somewhere else.

Latterly, Oxford Road is subject to renewed development through a transport infrastructure project, The Cross City Bus Prioritisation scheme, which will lead to the construction of Dutch Style cycle lanes and the daytime closure of the street to private traffic. Reflected in this plan, however, is an anxiety about the quality of public realm, and Oxford Road's lack of spatial focus or place identity. In 2012, The Corridor Partnership launched a public realm design competition inviting the city's leading architectural firms to revision problematical public space along the Corridor. Prior to this scheme the Oxford Road Cultural Consortium proposed The Avenue of Giants, a series of art installations to commemorate historical figures associated with Oxford Road, which would lead to the ambitious claim that "We can help to make Oxford Road as famous as the Ramblas in Barcelona" (Professor

John Hyatt, 2007). Despite these imaginations of Oxford Road as a space generative of sociality and vibrancy, subsequent developments, including the transport project, only further undermines the potential restoration of Oxford Road as a vibrant public street.

Jarzombek (2010) alerts us to Corridor Futures and the positioning of corridor metaphors in urban planning discourse. Utilising the notion of the corridor presents an opportunity to revisit historical understandings of this space, perhaps as a liminal zone enabling the mixing of social class, of town and gown, and a mutually beneficial cross-fertilisation of ideas. However, in the contemporary city it seems that governing elites have captured the corridor for the purposes of civic boosterism. From Modernist utopia to flawed attempts to reimagine Oxford Road as global corporate knowledge hub, the fragmented nature of Manchester's contemporary higher educational campus reflects the discontinuities produced by the failure to fully realise any of the various planning visions that have informed its postwar development, and perhaps also the failure of a fragmented market driven university sector to produce cohesive estates strategies informed by critical research on place making, ignoring even the research undertaken by world-leading academics in their employment. Alarming, confounded by its failure in place making, the Oxford Road Corridor Partnership has turned to an external place-branding consultancy.

Dr Steve Millington