

Northern soul

Culture, creativity and quality of place in Newcastle and Gateshead

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introduction

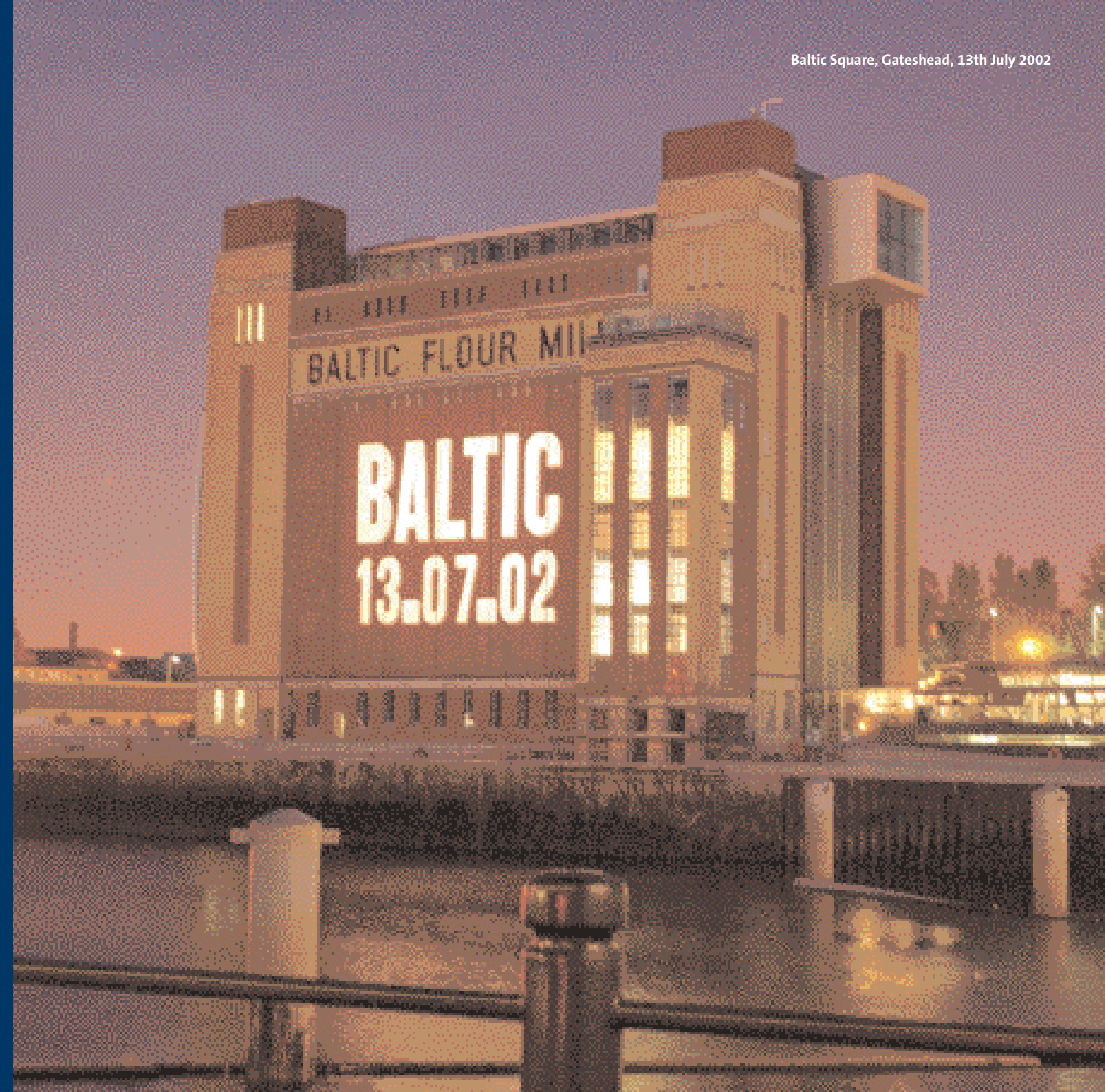
At one minute past midnight, the Baltic Flour Mill, on the banks of the river Tyne, stood illuminated against the skyline. An expectant crowd of thousands were packed into Baltic Square, the new public space linking the winking eye of the Millennium Bridge to the old mill. Friday night revellers, more accustomed to drinking in the bars of the 'party toon', mingled alongside families and older people who had come into town especially for the occasion.

As fireworks exploded across the river, the converted Baltic Mill opened its doors – transformed from a flour factory into an art factory. The symbolic significance of the occasion for the nascent partnership between Newcastle and Gateshead was undeniable. They were back on the map.

The following week, the US magazine Newsweek dubbed Newcastle/Gateshead one of the world's eight most creative cities. Shortly afterwards, their joint bid for European Capital

of Culture 2008 was tipped as the bookies' favourite.

The sense of excitement in Baltic Square was palpable, not just because of the opening of the gallery, important though that was. Nor was it simply the result of Gateshead's iconic regeneration projects, from the towering presence of Antony Gormley's Angel of the North to the award-winning Millennium Bridge and the soon-to-be-completed Sage Music Centre.



There have been many attempts to define what it was that brought Newcastle and Gateshead to this point and what maintains the sense of energy and excitement present in the city today. The Newcastle Gateshead Initiative simply describes it as ‘the buzz’.

This report attempts to explain what creates the buzz and how a city can retain it, without overheating or losing momentum. Our core argument is that the buzz comes from the spirit, or soul, of a place. It is soul – that indefinable X factor – which gives a city its character and makes it a special place to live in or to visit.

Soul is not something that can be easily captured by conventional indicators or economic datasets. To experience the soul of a city, you need to get out into the streets and talk to people. And so this is what we did – through focus groups, interviews with councillors and community representatives, and by spending time walking around the contrasting districts of Newcastle and Gateshead. This report presents the results of our journey, our experience of northern soul, and presents new evidence that it is this soul – or quality of place – that is helping to generate a new brain gain for Newcastle and Gateshead, as creative people are attracted to it.

Soul is a vital ingredient of urban success, but the key question confronting urban planners and policymakers is how to create cities which retain their soul. The report argues that the answer lies in a process of urban entrepreneurship, a proactive, risk-taking and innovative approach to city renewal. Urban

entrepreneurship is all about seeking out and nurturing new energy and ideas capable of generating and sustaining quality of place. It is this process of urban entrepreneurship that Newcastle and Gateshead – in particular Gateshead Council – has excelled at.

This notion of urban entrepreneurship also enables us to disentangle what can be a confusing debate about the relationship between successful cities and culture-led regeneration. We argue that culture-led regeneration is one approach to urban entrepreneurship, but it should not be mistaken for the whole story.

The value of culture-led regeneration has been demonstrated in many post-industrial cities, from Glasgow to Berlin and Bilbao to Liverpool. What all these cities have in common is the need to find a new economic base following the decline of manufacturing and heavy industry from the late 1970s onwards. The old industrial base has increasingly been replaced by the knowledge, service and leisure sectors of the new economy. Some cities more than others have adapted to this. With people and businesses more mobile and fickle in their choice of location, cities need to be competitive in the range of cultural assets and activities they can offer. Investments in culture and leisure facilities, such as galleries and theatres, are tangible investments in the quality of place and quality of life people can enjoy. Culture-led regeneration has also brought with it an emphasis on the cultural and creative industries. Silicon alleys of hi-tech creative businesses have

replaced the mass assembly line.

The value of culture-led regeneration when it is done well is not in doubt. It has the power to transform the physical fabric of a city and to alter people’s perceptions, as well as mobilising public and private sector resources around new shared goals. However, culture-led regeneration is only one dimension of what we mean by urban entrepreneurship.

This brings us back to soul. The key to successful transformation is not only what type of change – creative iconic, commercial retail, new residential loft development – is promoted, but how it is carried out. If it is delivered in a manner which is in tune with the soul of a place, it is likely to succeed. But if it goes against the grain of local distinctiveness and identity, it will struggle to take root and is more likely to falter, as a number of disappointing cultural projects in UK cities have shown.

We have selected Newcastle and Gateshead as a case study because they offer a clear example of successful transformation from coal city to culture city, underpinned by a dynamic form of urban entrepreneurship. They are also interesting because their experience helps us to map the contours of the next stage of the urban renewal agenda. Three issues stand out here. First, the need to invest in diversity as a way of breaking the ‘buzz to bland’ cycle, whereby successful regeneration is rapidly followed by homogenisation. Second, the importance of inclusion and everyday participation as a way of ensuring opportunities and benefits are spread across the entire community. Third, the need to

be serious about long-term sustainability, rather than quick fixes or short-term solutions.

Investing in diversity

One of the qualities that people prize most about a city is its diversity. In the interviews and focus groups we ran in Newcastle and Gateshead, the buzz of so many different things going on was frequently cited as a reason why people had chosen to live there. This diversity makes cities impossible to control and predict, but it is also a source of their creative and adaptive capacity. With such a rich mix of ethnic groups, household forms and lifestyles in many of Britain’s cities, it can sometimes seem as if we take the complex ecologies of cities for granted. However, the experience of Newcastle and Gateshead shows that cities need deliberate strategies to invest in diversity. Failure to do so risks one particular activity or household type becoming dominant, damaging the ecology of the city and its overall identity.

The ‘buzz to bland’ cycle is one way of describing this fallout, as high rents and land values squeeze out independent traders and lower-income residents. More worryingly, the US experience suggests a growing phenomenon of ‘place wars’, as different groups contest the right of others to live in a particular area. There is also a flip side to investing in diversity. If diverse spaces, places and activities are invested in, there is an equal need to support shared spaces, places and activities that bring different people and communities together. Otherwise, there is a danger that an atomised rather than a cohesive city will be created. Chapter 4 examines two



such threats in Newcastle and Gateshead around gentrification and the night-time drinking economy.

Inclusion and participation

The panel judging the eight bids for 2008 Capital of Culture made inclusiveness one of its key tests. Both Newcastle and Gateshead have a number of innovative schemes aimed at increasing the reach and accessibility of cultural activities and institutions, but Newcastle City Council got badly caught out when the inclusive language and aims of its cultural strategy jarred with the starkly non-participatory approach of its Going for Growth strategy, which announced the demolition of 6,000 homes in a local newspaper, before informing – let alone asking – the people who lived there.

One-off consultations are no longer enough for city planners to understand the needs of a city. This type of top-down approach cannot deal effectively with the complexity of city life. Instead, more opportunities for participation at the everyday level need to be developed. Participation in cultural activities is not an end in itself. It needs to be connected up with other forms of direct participation in the public realm, through involvement in community activities and the co-production of public services. And in turn, if cities are serious about the needs of everyone, participation needs to inform and influence how planning and governance systems are operated. Chapter 5 explores the limitations of conventional approaches to consultation, and highlights new models of cultural and civic participation.

Thinking long-term

The buzz created in Newcastle and Gateshead is being reinforced by an unexpected ‘brain gain’, as a new generation of creative professionals and knowledge workers is drawn to live in the two cities. Chapter 3 details initial evidence of this phenomenon, and explores the reasons that lie behind it. Our research shows that incomers are being attracted by a quality of place and sense of authenticity, magnified by the excitement of a place that is in the throes of change. Over time, we argue that this brain gain could reverse the long-term trend of population loss from the north to the south-east, which has hindered the progress of northern renaissance.

However, being the city of the moment is a precarious thing. As with clothes or music, cycles of fashion in cities can be rapid and shallow. To ensure a sustainable quality of place, urban planners need to generate longer, slower-paced cycles of change that can be continually refreshed and renewed. The Newcastle and Gateshead partnership offers an interesting model of how to approach this. Initially based around culture-led regeneration, this partnership was driven by an awareness that the two authorities needed to pool their assets in order to reach critical mass and create a long-term, sustainable urban unit. This example of far-sighted urban entrepreneurship has accelerated the pace of transformative change within the Newcastle /Gateshead and the wider region. The next chapter tells the story of that transformation.

from coal city to culture city

chapter one

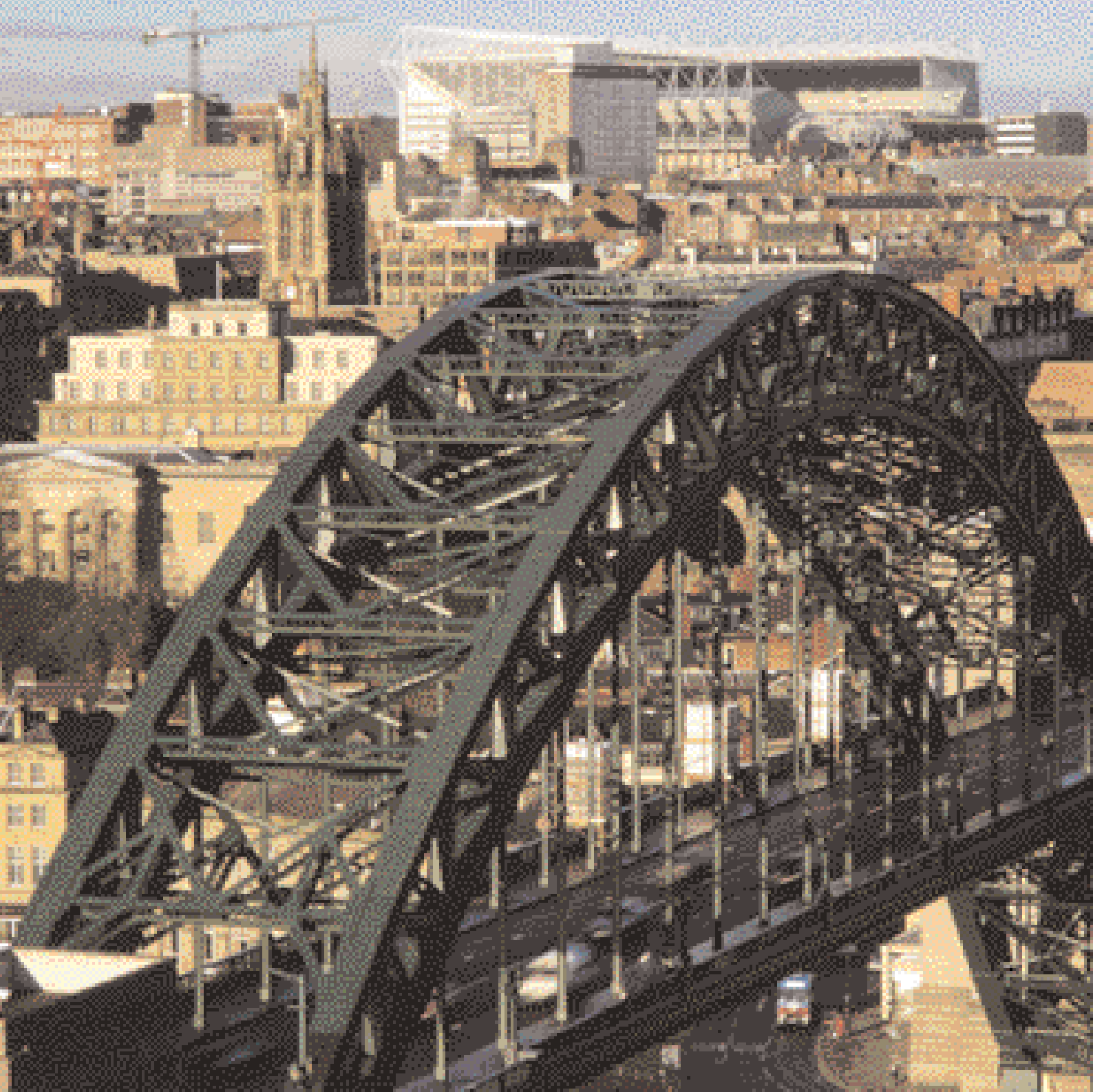
For the visitor arriving in Newcastle by train, the Victorian grandeur of Robert Stephenson's High Level Bridge acts as a timely reminder of the city's former industrial identity as the historic capital of the North East. Similarly the viaduct that towers over the approach to the Quayside inspires awe at the engineering prowess that gave the City its reputation as 'the workshop of the world'.

Newcastle was not only the regional capital but also the industrial powerhouse of the North East. The railway and the turbine engine were invented here. Today, in the heart of the city centre, the newly restored Georgian terraces of Grainger Town reflect the city's historic prosperity and confidence. Taking in the elegance of Grey Street, it is easy for the visitor to imagine the high living of the city's captains of industry and civic leaders.

The 1960s were another period of municipal confidence for the city, under the leadership of T. Dan Smith, the infamous council leader who ended up behind bars. Smith's grandiose vision for Newcastle, of which little was ever realised, was inspired by the concept of a 'Brasilia of the North'. The result is a mix of Victorian architectural excellence tempered by the reinforced concrete drabness and divisive arterial ring roads and roundabouts of the 1960s and 1970s. Yet despite its failure, T. Dan Smith's vision does illustrate an important truth about

Newcastle: the ongoing desire of the city to project itself as a regional powerhouse on the national and international stage.

By the early 1980s, as industrial Britain moved into terminal decline, no amount of historical and cultural identity could save the city from a crisis of confidence. In common with other formerly strong industrial centres, Newcastle and Gateshead underwent immense and traumatic change. Twenty years ago, 50 per cent of all men were employed in the four heavy industries of shipbuilding, mining, steel and engineering. Now the figure is just three per cent. As the jobs seeped away during the late 1980s and early 1990s, Newcastle and Gateshead became socially and economically depressed places to live, stripped of their former industrial identity but with little to put in its place. Rioting in 1991 in the West End of Newcastle and Meadowell in North Tyneside reflected this growing disaffection.



Yet today the picture, on the surface at least, has radically altered once again. ‘From coal capital to culture capital’ is a phrase increasingly heard in the region and appears to reflect the type of socio-economic changes experienced not only by Newcastle/Gateshead but by many post-industrial cities. This trend, often termed post-Fordism, reflects the decline of heavy industry – symbolised by the mass assembly lines of the car manufacturer – and the rise of the financial and service-based industries of the new economy, accompanied by the thriving cultural and leisure sector symbolised by the ‘culture city’ image.

Although the Capital of Culture title ultimately went to Liverpool, there is no doubt that Newcastle and Gateshead have been at the forefront of the culture and leisure revival. So far, it would seem that this attempt to find new sources of economic growth following the years of post-industrial collapse is reaping dividends. Alongside the *Newsweek* accolade crowning Newcastle/Gateshead as one of the world’s most creative cities, Condé Nast recently heralded it as the UK’s top holiday destination.

Any visitor can quickly see what prompted this type of coverage. The quayside has been transformed from a ‘rat-infested swamp’⁽¹⁾ to one of the most stunning riverfronts in the UK. And this is just one in a series of iconic image-transforming projects. The first to impact on the national consciousness was the erection of the Angel of the North in 1998. Next came the conversion of Gateshead’s Baltic Flour Mill into

an art factory and gallery, linked to the Newcastle side by the Stirling Architecture Prize-winning Millennium Footbridge. And due for completion next year is the Sage Music Centre, designed by Sir Norman Foster and recipient of the biggest lottery grant of any arts project outside London. A giant Hilton hotel is also under construction on the Gateshead side of the river. As one Newcastle cabbie confided, gone are the days when hotels would slip him a fiver to bring them customers from the station – now there are barely enough hotel rooms to go around.

It is no exaggeration to say that the changes that have taken place were inconceivable during the grey years of industrial decline when the image of Gateshead fixed in the national mind was the multi-storey car park featured in the film *Get Carter*. What prompted this transformation and how it can be maintained are the central questions of this report.

The dangers of a two-speed economy

Despite the shining symbols of change on the Quayside, the post-industrial transition has not been a seamless process. The reality is that Newcastle and Gateshead continue to have serious economic problems with far higher unemployment than the national average. According to figures from the Tyne and Wear Research and Information Unit, unemployment rates are currently running at 5.6 per cent for Newcastle and 5.3 per cent for the North East region as a whole, compared with a UK average of 3.1 per cent. In addition, both Newcastle and

Gateshead, in common with every core city north of London except Manchester, continue to lose population in net terms.

Set against these figures are some significant gains in the new economy, in particular the creative, cultural and leisure sectors. The share of people employed in the culture and leisure industries is running at 21 per cent compared to 19 per cent nationally.⁽²⁾ These figures are backed up by new evidence highlighting the start of a 'brain gain' for Newcastle and Gateshead, reversing the years of brain drain to London and the south-east, a trend which we will explore in depth in Chapter Three.

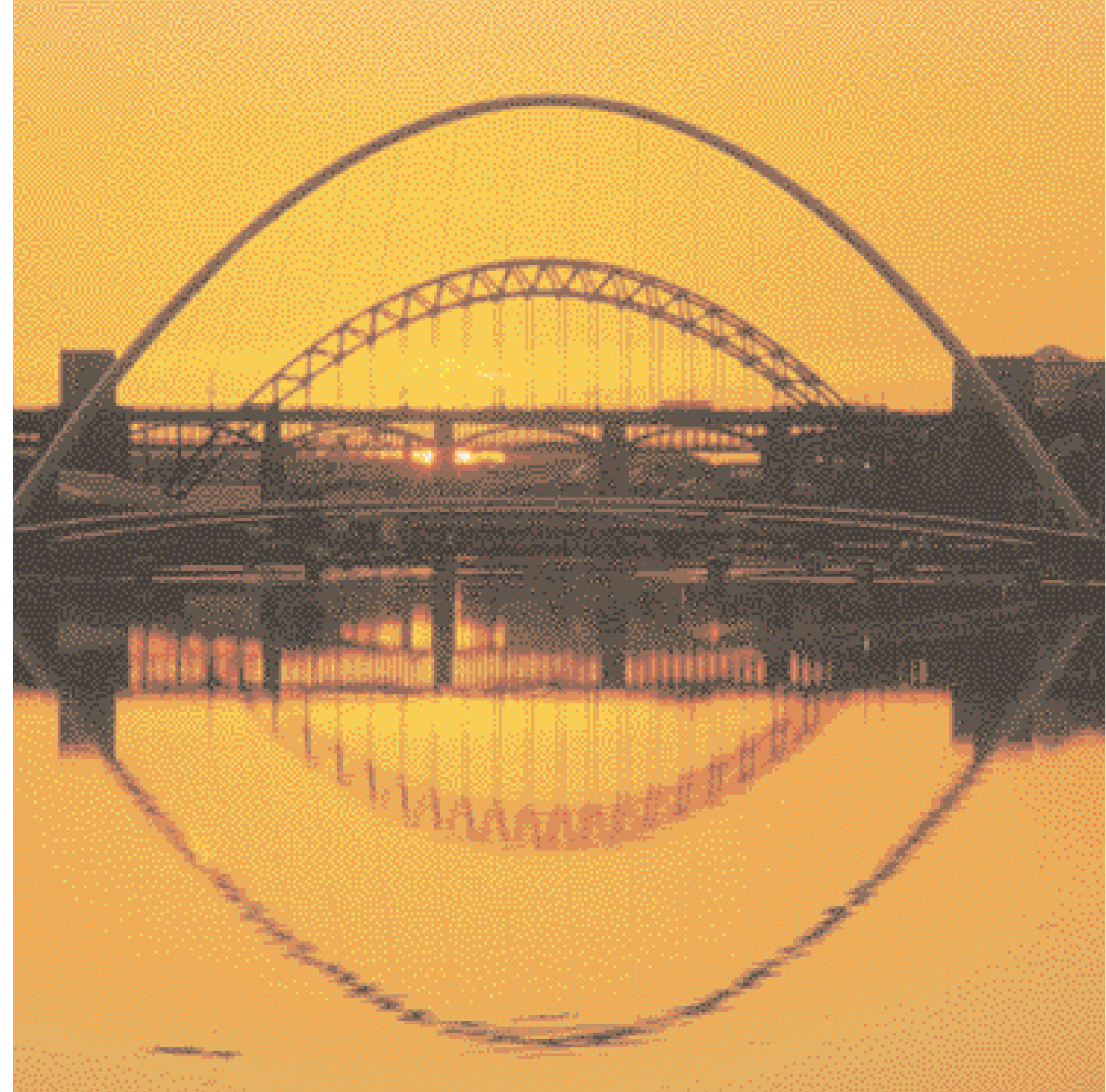
These apparently contradictory trends are indicative of the type of two-speed economy that is coming to characterise many post-industrial cities. In Newcastle and Gateshead, as in many other parts of the country, these trends are most clearly reflected in a polarised property market where the pattern of hot spots and cold spots is becoming pronounced.

For example, house prices in fashionable Gosforth are among the highest in the country, with a recent survey finding that the area was

home to the same number of millionaires as Notting Hill or Richmond upon Thames⁽³⁾. Equally a two-bed flat in Jesmond or Heaton would not leave you with much change from £200,000, and the marketing brochures for the Ouseburn and the Quayside are clearly pitching for middle to high earners or well-heeled retirees.

In sharp contrast, a couple of miles away in Newcastle's West End, it is possible to purchase a house in Scotswood or Benwell for under £10,000.⁽⁴⁾ Whether or not communities here are feeling the benefits of the city's cultural renaissance is a question frequently posed by critics of culture-led regeneration, who claim that little of substance lies beneath the froth.

Even so, despite the fact that Newcastle/Gateshead remains polarised, what has taken place in recent years cannot be so easily dismissed. The cities' cultural landmarks have reinvigorated an already strong sense of civic pride and confidence, and are now attracting increasing numbers of visitors and incomers, in search of the quality of place on offer. It is this intangible yet vital quality of place – the soul of the city – that the next chapter seeks to explain.



urban soul

chapter two

Soul may seem like a hazy term to land use planners and regeneration experts more accustomed to talking about section 106, zoning and development control. But as a concept, it goes straight to the heart of what creates living environments which really work and stand the test of time.

Not least, it serves as a way of reinvigorating what are sometimes unnecessarily dry debates about cities. In the discourse of policymakers, the sense of inspiration that should animate efforts to create exciting and vibrant places in which to live and work, is all too often submerged in jargon. Debates about the quality of our urban environment should be as important to the general public as discussions around education or health, yet somehow they fail to engage people on the same terms, not least because of the language in which they are often couched.

By contrast, soul offers a way to communicate quality of a place that resonates with most people. It captures an emotional response to a city that we all feel when we walk down a busy street or through a leafy park. While the specific factors behind the success of a place can be difficult to articulate, we know when a place works. Similarly, we can tell when places have lost their soul or never had it in the first place.

The soul of a place is both innate and changing, bringing together deeply rooted aspects of landscape, built environment and heritage, with the more transitory and adaptive characteristics of people, culture, and ideas. Quality of place is never stuck in aspic, instead it must be alive to growth and change.

Yet the path that this change follows is very important. The goal should be to evolve while retaining a sense of authenticity, which works with the grain of local identity and local culture. This quest for authenticity is more than a rose-tinted nostalgia for the way things used to be. David Boyle, author of a recent book on authenticity, acknowledges, 'The current demand for authenticity...does hark backwards, but it's more than that. It derives from the so-called "cultural creatives" in the USA and the so-called "inner-directeds" in Europe – those people identified by sociologists who put education, individuality and authenticity at the hearts of their ambitions for themselves.'⁽⁵⁾



Today, this idea seems to be gaining ground, partly as a reaction to a sense that many of our cities are developing in a similar fashion. Speaking at a conference soon after her appointment as Culture Minister, Estelle Morris made clear her frustration with what she called 'sameness' in the urban environment.⁽⁶⁾ More recently, the Campaign for the Protection of Rural England has been running a campaign protesting against the blandness of our chain-store saturated high streets.⁽⁷⁾

Dutch architect Berci Florian gets to the nub of the issue:

'Demand and supply seem to be sailing in opposite courses. While the public increasingly wants choice, diversity, distinguishing features and depth to enrich their own individuality and connect emotionally with their environment, what is on offer appears to be heading energetically towards monotony and predictability. This means that cities are in

danger of losing the power to differentiate themselves and to elicit emotions, bonds and involvement. They are becoming impersonal, anonymous and in the end uninhabitable.'⁽⁸⁾

Untrammelled commercial forces, left to work alone, will actively run counter to distinctive identities and towards uniformity, creating similar environments across the country. The clearest example of this is the creation of identikit high streets dominated by the same brands up and down the country. In policy terms, this means that a better balance must be struck between growth and the distinctive identity that keeps a place special; a balance that taps into the soul of a place and sustains a feeling of excitement and 'buzz'.

Soul reflects the culture of a city in its broadest sense. It is about recognising and valuing the unique assets and character of a city – its authenticity and rootedness. It reflects the relationships between people and the physical spaces of the city. It is dynamic and open to new ideas, new people and new ways of living. And it is the art of combining old and new in order to maintain a healthy balance.

This idea is gaining currency. For example, a recent English Heritage report on the regeneration of Borough in London details how the area needs 'a keeper of its soul'. It explains that while 'market forces have always shaped this part of the city... there has to be a balance which will allow the area to continue to change and respond as part of Central London and yet hang onto the evolving essence of what makes

the place unique and vibrant.' It goes on to say that there is a need to 'understand the elements which make the area special – the memories and associations, the people, the movement, the buildings and the spaces – and to explore how they might respond to change in a way which amplifies rather than mutes their intrinsic character.'⁽⁹⁾

Underlying all this is a hard economic reality. Cities with soul are today's successful cities. They are the cities that are proving increasingly attractive to mobile knowledge-based workers, whose willingness to move for greater quality of place is giving rise to the 'brain gain' phenomenon. Creative professionals are increasingly choosing to live in cities like Newcastle and Gateshead which provide the authenticity and sense of identity that more and more people are seeking.

The Newcastle-Gateshead story

Soul cannot be created from scratch according to a fixed policy prescription. It has to be there already. In Newcastle and Gateshead, the achievement of policy makers has been to work with the soul of the place, enhancing its distinctive identity, most notably through Gateshead Council's cultural regeneration strategy. The two cities offer a very tangible example of how a series of investments can have a transformative impact on a city's quality of place. This process we term 'urban entrepreneurship'. Within it, there are a number of key elements:

1. Civic leadership

The driving force behind the Angel, Baltic, Millennium Bridge and Sage Music Centre was Gateshead Council. Newcastle was at times strongly opposed, and only came to embrace the culture-led regeneration agenda in the mid-1990s. For a time, Newcastle City Council was even against the building of the Millennium Bridge. The contrasting behaviour of the two authorities illustrates an important point about urban entrepreneurship. Now that culture-led regeneration has become commonplace, it is sometimes easy to forget that projects like the one Gateshead embarked on often require the inherited apparatus of city governance and administration to take on new actions or goals. This is not a simple task for public bodies, which are often characterised by an aversion to failure and risk-taking and riven by inter-departmental turf wars. How Gateshead negotiated these potential obstacles is an essential part of the story.

Part of the reason for Gateshead's success, and Newcastle's past problems, is down to the political culture of the two authorities. Gateshead Council has been an unusually stable political authority, characterised by flexibility and delivery. As one key player in the region told us: 'Gateshead has been a very single-minded public authority with no problems or crisis of political leadership. George Gill was a very single-minded political leader and Les Elton is outstanding. They have developed a very clear vision and in many ways put Newcastle City Council to shame. Newcastle had to go along with it.'⁽¹⁰⁾

In terms of delivery, Gateshead is in the top 15 per cent of authorities in the UK who scored ‘excellent’ under the Audit Commission’s recent Comprehensive Performance Assessment. Council leaders emphasise that this delivery of basic services is what underpins the political acceptance and popularity of the city’s culture strategy. The council is particularly proud that it is top in the country for the emptying of wheelie bins, missing only two in every 100,000, a figure that reflects incredibly close attention to the essential details that contribute to quality of life for local residents.⁽¹¹⁾

By contrast, during our interviews with people in the North East, the picture of Newcastle that came through is of an authority that has, at least in the past, been dogged by vicious political infighting and personality politics. There has also been a history of grandiose visions and masterplans, from Brasilia of the North onwards, but without the necessary leadership skills to deliver them.

The longevity of key personnel is another useful indicator. In Gateshead, both Les Elton, the Chief Executive, and Bill McNaught, Head of Culture, have been at the council since 1984 while the current leader Mick Henry started as a councillor two years later in 1986. In Newcastle, although Tony Flynn has been leader since 1994, his tenure (and that of Sir Jeremy Beecham before him) has been characterised by factionalism and a high turnover of chief executives.

This infighting and the lack of stability within Newcastle City Council had a direct impact on

its ability to mobilise around new cultural goals. Several insiders told us that an unwritten agreement that the new music centre would be sited in Newcastle was undermined by Newcastle’s factionalism, with the result that it went to Gateshead.

2. Asset pooling

Historically, Newcastle and Gateshead were bitter rivals. Newcastle, the regional capital with a population of nearly 300,000, always looked down on its smaller cousin across the river. Tribal loyalties, not to say anecdotal enmities, are strong throughout the region. As a leading political figure in the area says: ‘Newcastle has been traditionally regarded with a mixture of fear and loathing in surrounding areas – they exploited the area and a degree of hostility survives to this day.’⁽¹²⁾

Yet today the picture could not be more different. The two authorities have achieved a degree of cooperation that would have been unimaginable a decade ago. Deputy Prime Minister John Prescott highlighted this transformation when he spoke at the 2003 Core Cities conference in Newcastle: ‘Ten years ago you would have been lynched for even mentioning Newcastle and Gateshead in the same breath. Now look at them,’ he told the audience.⁽¹³⁾

Paul Rubenstein, Head of Culture at Newcastle City Council, characterises the partnership as ‘refashioning a city with a critical mass of half a million with a river running through it.’⁽¹⁴⁾ Instead of a small city, divided from the town

opposite by a river, a decent-sized European city, with a river at its centre, is being created. If you talk to his opposite number in Gateshead, Bill McNaught, he’ll tell you about his not-entirely-tongue-in-cheek ambitions for re-naming the two cities ‘Newhead’.

The collaboration between the councils began with culture. Although Newcastle dragged its heels at first, informal working between the two authorities gradually increased, and was eventually placed on a more formal footing by ‘Building Bridges’, a joint cultural strategy published in 2002. The Newcastle Gateshead Initiative (NGI), which was behind the joint bid for Capital of Culture, operates alongside this. Despite not winning the Capital of Culture, both authorities are keen to emphasise that the joint strategy and NGI will continue.

This level of targeted urban entrepreneurship around culture-led regeneration was highly effective in mobilising two different authorities around a shared vision. What is equally important is how this has helped to generate trust by making the benefits of partnership visible. Collaboration in other areas, including housing, transport and cross-river planning have now developed and as Paul Rubenstein says, ‘There is a formal recognition that where it adds value it should happen.’⁽¹⁵⁾ What lies beneath this pragmatic approach is a recognition that Newcastle and Gateshead together comprise a viable urban unit and can generate valuable multiplier effects when they pool their resources.

For all its former difficulties as a Council, Newcastle has always had the name and the regional and national pull. It also has a number of other key assets that contribute towards quality of place: two universities and a teaching hospital, a Premier Division football team and a historic Georgian town centre. Today Gateshead complements this with the Angel, the Baltic and the soon-to-be-completed Sage Music Centre. Perhaps most importantly, it was Gateshead which built the award-winning Millennium Bridge linking the two cities across the Tyne. Together this critical mass of unique assets and new developments has created the momentum which has given Newcastle and Gateshead their current buzz and sense of excitement.

In other parts of the country too, there are signs that city-to-city collaborations are beginning to demonstrate their value. The joint city status shared between Brighton and Hove stands out as one example. There are lessons here for other cities, particularly in regions trying to combat the dominance and pull of London.

3. Building on local assets

If the soul of a city is both innate and evolving, it is clear that, in line with the views of the great American urbanist Jane Jacobs, development which enhances soul involves the art of combining the old with the new.

Every city has its own unique set of territorial assets, from its location and topography, to its buildings and its people. How these are developed and invested in is crucial in ensuring it remains distinctive and that new

developments resonate with what already exists. Newcastle and Gateshead not only pooled many of their territorial assets, they also recognised the value of investing in others which are unique. Two main examples stand out: the Quayside and Newcastle's historic city centre, Grainger Town.

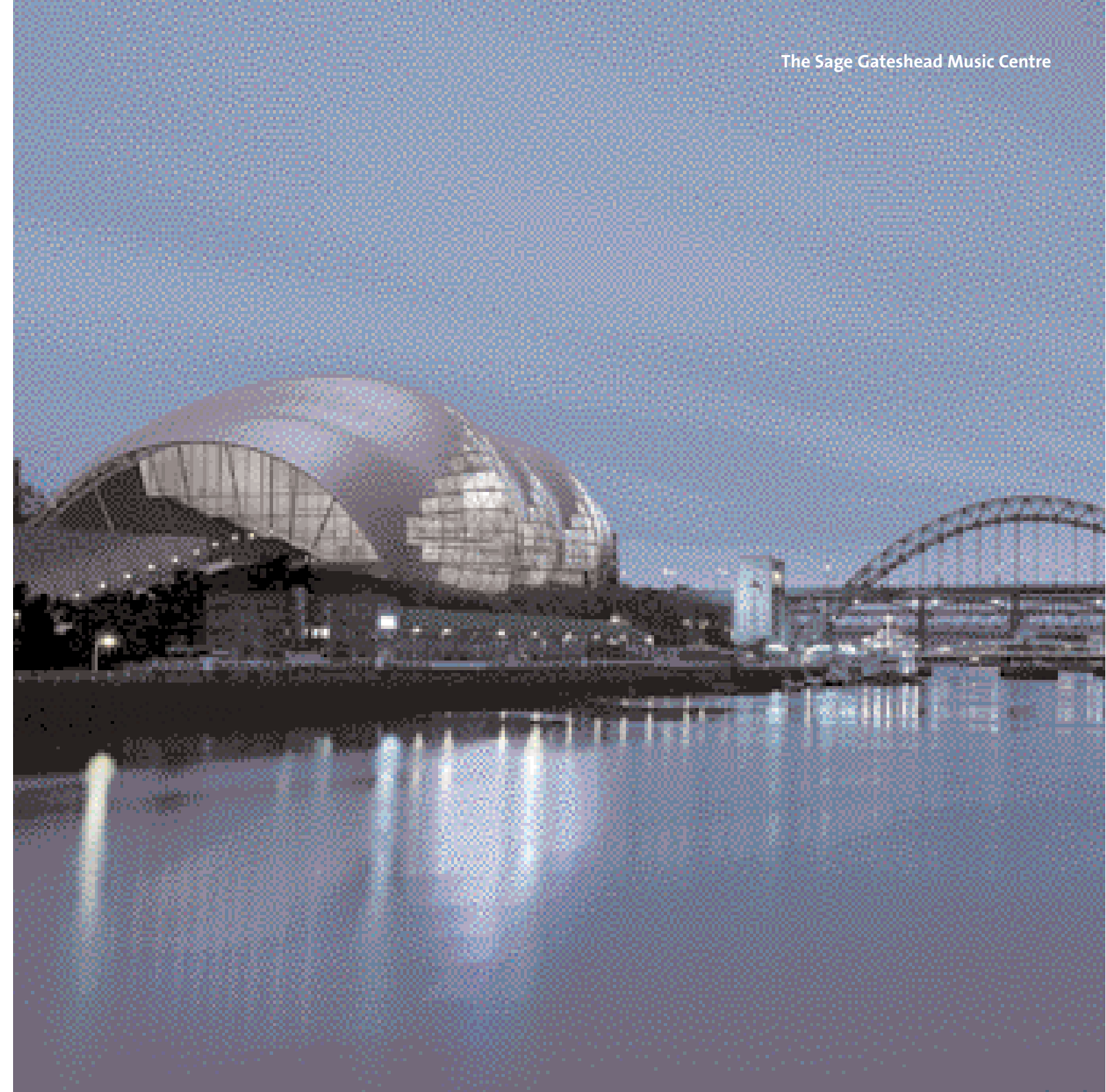
Grainger Town, named after Richard Grainger who developed the Tyneside Classical style in the 1830s and 1840s, is one of the region's finest assets. Many of the original Grainger buildings have survived and 40 per cent of the buildings in the 90 acres designated site are listed.⁽¹⁶⁾ Its main shopping street, Grey Street, won the title of Britain's best street in 2002.

Ten years ago, it was a very different story. Retailers began leaving in the 1970s and offices followed suit in the 1980s and 1990s. By the mid-1990s Grainger Town had a large amount of empty and unwanted floor space, many historic buildings were in a serious state of disrepair or dereliction, and the entire area was neglected and degraded. Craig Wilson, a conservation academic at Northumbria University recalls: 'The place was emptied of tenants. In conservation terms it was a major danger – the buildings were at risk.'⁽¹⁷⁾

The solution was a £40million project to revitalise the area funded largely by English Partnerships and the Single Regeneration Budget, with contributions from the City Council and English Heritage. Grainger Town has now been restored to a high quality living and working environment in a historic – yet not

'faux-heritage' – setting, where converted warehouses and restored Georgian frontages speak of every phase of the city's development. In terms of attracting the creative and knowledge workers of the 'brain gain', described in the next chapter, this regeneration of the historic heart has been crucial. As well as placing Newcastle at the centre of the 24-hour compact city lifestyle favoured by such workers, the sense of history and identity provided by the weathered buildings of the Georgian centre provide the authenticity that so many people look for when making their location decisions.

The Quayside has a more mixed story, but has served as an important catalyst for change in Newcastle and Gateshead. Alastair Balls, the former head of the Tyne and Wear Development Corporation (TWDC), says that the Newcastle side is now 'twenty times better than it was', transformed from a dilapidated swamp of broken down wharves and warehouses into an 'urban public park with an unbelievable level of public ownership',⁽¹⁸⁾ as evidenced by the scores of weekend strollers and evening revellers in the bars. Yet while there is a widespread acceptance that the TWDC's development has had a very positive impact on the city, the transformation is not without its detractors. One local regeneration expert says: 'It's fine but it's nothing earth-shattering. It's a predictable late-twentieth century model, it's become a "smart" environment as opposed to scruffy, but there's nothing stunning which would bring people from far and wide. The 'wow' factor is all on the Gateshead side.'⁽¹⁹⁾



Part of the problem can be explained in the genesis of the regeneration process. When the then Regeneration Minister Nicholas Ridley launched the TWDC in 1987 he told local leaders that the test of its success would be the extent to which land values increased.⁽²⁰⁾ The kind of qualities associated with Gateshead's projects – such as creativity and design excellence – were lacking, with development too narrowly focused on physical change and an uplift in property values. Alastair Balls is the first to admit this, saying that while the UDC provided the necessary 'boosterism', 'it lacked the spark'. But he adds, 'What Gateshead went on to do complemented it perfectly.'⁽²¹⁾

Gateshead for its part refused to allow the TWDC to develop any of its land, so when the time came for the Council to develop its ambitious plans, it had the land available on which to site them. The result was that the complementary activities of the TWDC and Gateshead Council created a critical mass of activity on the river. For all the criticisms of the TWDC, without a viable quayside on the Newcastle side it is hard to imagine the Millennium Bridge being built. On the other hand, it is impossible to deny that it is the Bridge, the Baltic and the Music Centre which are inspirational in a way that the developments on the Newcastle side are not.

Despite the well-documented successes on the Gateshead side, it is also necessary to sound a note of caution at this point. A growing number of critics claim that the residential and commercial developments currently under

construction on the Gateshead side behind Baltic Square are failing to live up to the standards set by the larger projects, and are threatening to undermine the integrity of the area. The fear is that these new buildings will be as short on imagination and quality as some of the developments on the Newcastle side. This illustrates once again the difficulties of carrying through an ongoing regeneration process which continues to inspire and enhance the soul of a place.

4. Culture-led regeneration

'Regeneration with the help of culture is not a new medicine'. For Sune Nord-Gren, the outgoing Swedish Director of the Baltic, you have to go back to post-war Germany and the launch in 1955 of Documenta in the bombed-out city of Kassell.

Hosted in a ruined shell of a building, Documenta aimed to rebuild the city's confidence and reconnect with the culture of the pre-war period, by showing artists such as Paul Klee, who had been labelled as degenerate by the Nazis. By the 1970s, this had become one of the biggest international biennials, and started to generate clear economic dividends. Research revealed that for every mark spent on the exhibition, the city received seven marks back through tourism and boosted local business. Today this figure is estimated at 10 euros back for every euro spent.⁽²²⁾ And biennials, from Venice to Liverpool, are now a tried and tested means of fostering regeneration.

So although he describes it as an 'old trick',

Nord-Gren warns that there are 'lots of traps on the road – some cities have succeeded very well while others have not'.⁽²³⁾ The Bilbao Guggenheim – the most famous contemporary icon of culture-led regeneration – is according to many regeneration experts an example of a project that has not made the most of its opportunities, particularly through its failure to connect with the rest of the city.

Inclusion in creative projects is critical to their success. If they are rooted in a city's culture and community, they will 'take', acting like the Angel or Baltic as a signal of change. If, however, they are intended as little more than a tourist magnet, they will come to be seen as white elephants, and will ultimately undermine creativity and change. The failed pop museum in Sheffield is a good example of this.

Nord-Gren believes that unlike Sheffield and Bilbao, Gateshead started this process of culture-led regeneration in a highly inclusive way. The Council and other public agencies worked with the soul of region, sensitive to the challenge of combining the new with old and innate assets. The Angel of the North – a 20-metre high bronze sculpture towering over the approach to Gateshead, was built in the Tyneside steel-yards, and acted as a tipping point in the process of cultural renewal.

The Angel was highly controversial when first proposed. The local media ran a vociferous campaign against spending taxpayers' money on an irrelevant monument, which could have gone towards better schools and hospitals. Yet today

it is hailed as an outstanding success and a positive symbol, not merely for Newcastle and Gateshead, but for the north of England as a whole. For sculptor Antony Gormley, the moment of genuine acceptance came when three Newcastle United fans draped a nine-times life size replica of Alan Shearer's football shirt over the Angel. This iconic image was captured on the front page of the *Daily Telegraph*, and catapulted Gateshead into the national consciousness, by linking the sculpture to the lifeblood and passion of the region – football.

Gormley described the adoption of the Angel project by Gateshead as a 'fluke'.⁽²⁴⁾ It was not his first attempt at a monumental piece of work for a local authority, but his earlier experience, with the Brick Man project in Leeds, had left him jaded. After five years of development work, the council abandoned the proposed 120 ft-high Brick Man in what was, according to Gormley, an example 'of how local authorities normally behave'. He puts the fact that Gateshead pursued the Angel down to 'a really extraordinary fluke of local chemistry', which saw Les Elton, Bill McNaught and Councillor Sid Henderson (then chair of libraries and arts) united in their commitment to the project, despite local opposition.

The secret of success

A central question for urban entrepreneurship is how to nurture the type of political and civic culture that enables such innovative 'flukes' to

thrive? Looking at the story of culture-led regeneration in Newcastle and Gateshead, it is possible to isolate a number of factors that helped make its particular brand of urban entrepreneurialism so successful.

Long-term commitment

The Angel was part of a wider strategy to transform the post-industrial environment of Gateshead through the use of public art, which had been pursued since the mid-1980s. The site, a former baths for the old pithead at Teams Colliery, was identified as suitable for a large-scale public art project as far back as 1989. This strategy involved an intense level of joint working between different council departments, led by the planning department in collaboration with arts officers.

This commitment was severely tested by the level of opposition to the project, but was offset by the staying power of key officers and elected members at Gateshead. The triumvirate of Les Elton, the Chief Executive, Bill McNaught, the Head of Culture and Jerry Barford, Director of Planning has been in place since the mid-1980s and has overseen all of Gateshead’s iconic projects. In 1992, before the subject was trendy, a council report, *Urban Regeneration through the Arts*, was produced jointly by McNaught, Barford and Elton and paved the way for Baltic and subsequent projects.⁽²⁵⁾

High standards

Another key factor that characterises this series of projects is an adherence to high standards.

From its inception, the Baltic drew on the very best international expertise, appointing experienced consultants as advisors and involving Sandy Nairne, now the right-hand man to Nicholas Serota as Assistant Director at the Tate. Graham Marchant, formerly a senior figure at the South Bank, carried out the feasibility study. High standards may seem an obvious part of any recipe for success, but this aspect of the story relates to wider arguments about elitism and inclusion in the arts. As one insider put it, ‘The view was that Baltic would be an elitist contemporary art facility which would compete with Newcastle’s facilities.’⁽²⁶⁾ Another said, ‘Newcastle wanted to spend the money on populist art projects, such as interactive exhibitions about football, which they thought would ensure high visitor numbers.’⁽²⁷⁾

But far from an elite art gallery, Baltic has been built as a contemporary art factory, housing studio spaces for working artists, five galleries and a rooftop restaurant. Visitors can see art being constructed in front of them. A stroll around it has little in common with a visit to the traditional cloistered world of the art gallery. Although it is only a year and a half since it opened, there is no doubt from the Baltic’s own research, that it is drawing in ‘ordinary’ local people delighted at this distinctive, high-calibre facility on their doorstep. Visitor numbers have been consistently high despite the fact that critical opinion of the content – in common with most contemporary art spaces – has been mixed.

Flexibility and an organic vision

Flexibility, an open-minded approach to innovation and an element of risk-taking has consistently characterised Gateshead’s approach to culture-led regeneration. Gateshead went for an art factory and international exhibition space, in spite of pressure for a traditional gallery housing a regional collection. It also chose Dominic Williams as the architect, at the time an unheard of 28-year-old, who won the opportunity to remodel the building through an open competition.

The Millennium Bridge offers another example of the organic, flexible type of development pursued by Gateshead. There had been no plans for another bridge across the Tyne and as Alastair Balls, former head of the TWDC, admits, it was something no one had ever thought of. The bridge arose out of what has been described as ‘creative serendipity’⁽²⁸⁾, namely the spotting of an opportunity by Gateshead to link their projects with the transformation of the Quayside on the Newcastle side. When the unexpected opportunity arose to bid for the Music Centre as well, Gateshead Council seized it. The result of this series of opportunistic leaps is a set of iconic projects which retrospectively make up a coherent whole but which in fact were never part of any overarching masterplan. Describing his strategy over the last decade Bill McNaught says: ‘If I’d written down ten years

ago what I thought Gateshead would be doing they’d have locked me up and thrown away the key. You need flexibility and you need to be opportunistic and we have been. We studiously avoided setting out grand visions.’⁽²⁹⁾

Confidence and local ownership

A prerequisite for flexibility and innovation is confidence. The design excellence of the Bridge, the Baltic and the Music Centre signal a return to the civic confidence of the past. This has resonated with local people, and helped to foster a broader sense of civic pride – a sense that Gateshead and Newcastle are back on the map. During one focus group a local resident summed this feeling up: ‘It’s really done us proud.’

This sense of local ownership is vital if culture projects are to be sustained and provide opportunities for participation in the civic life of the city. So far, the Baltic has been innovative in spotting opportunities for participation. One of its first major projects was Antony Gormley’s Domain Field, which opened in May 2003. Two hundred and fifty local people were picked from thousands who applied. On the second floor of the Baltic, they were each wrapped in gorse and plaster and had their cast taken. Their statues now stand as a crowd in the gallery with visitors free to walk among them, seeing if they can recognise any of their friends or family.

the beginning of a brain gain

chapter three

chapter three

Authentic places with soul are where the creative professionals of the knowledge economy want to live. Such places also appeal to visitors, as demonstrated by recent research for Britain's tourist authority, which found that what people are searching for in cities is 'passion', 'heart' and 'an element of anarchy'.⁽³⁰⁾

Places with soul are seen as 'real', with a live sense of their gritty past, combined with an ability to tell a confident story about the future. The sociologist Manuel Castells describes this search for an authentic, unique and distinctive identity as increasingly important to the individual in today's impermanent world.⁽³¹⁾ Newcastle and Gateshead, with their strong sense of place and identity, are in a strong position in this respect.

It is also possible that a sense of identity is enhanced – in part at least – by the process of trauma and transition a city experiences. It is no coincidence that some of the world's most successful cities today are places with a history of problems, a factor which appears to strengthen identity and act as a magnet for certain types of people, including the so-called 'creative class' – US academic Richard Florida's term for people working in knowledge-based professions.⁽³²⁾ Describing the regeneration of Barcelona, Mayor Juan Clos has pointed to the fact that the city only held its first free elections as late as 1979, during a period of profound economic crisis.⁽³³⁾ Similarly Berlin, another historically traumatised

city, is undergoing a tremendous renaissance in the wake of re-unification.

While political events in Newcastle and Gateshead were never quite so dramatic, the city was at the heart of the UK's post-industrial crisis. It is not alone in having come through this with a strong sense of purpose. Glasgow and Liverpool are similar examples. Belfast too, despite being the most fought over part of the UK, was among the initial contenders for European Capital of Culture, something that would have been unthinkable a decade ago.

The lesson appears to be that cities with a gritty past, twinned with a sense of excitement about the future, are those that succeed in drawing in visitors and new inhabitants. It is a combination of local identity and history that helps to create a sense of soul. Our research indicates that Newcastle and Gateshead have got this mix right, with the majority of local people interviewed claiming that there are now significantly more people moving into the area from London and the South East.

This runs counter to conventional accounts of a continued brain drain from the north-east to the south-east. Our research suggests that the headline statistics about population movement are obscuring a subtle yet significant trend. A growing number of creative, highly-skilled professionals are now being attracted by the quality of place in cities like Newcastle and Gateshead. Students and graduates, who previously would have come to university in the north-east and then moved back down south, are also choosing to stay.

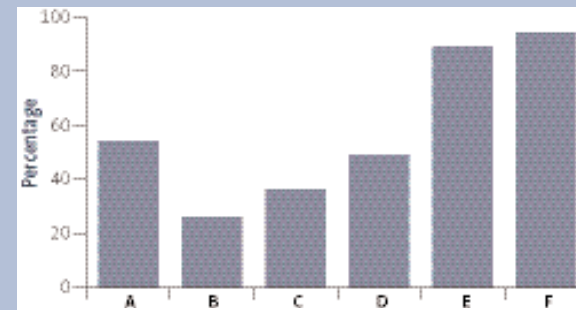
There is powerful anecdotal evidence to support this trend. Cathryn Harvey, Head of the Careers Service at Newcastle University, says that she is certain the numbers of incomers have soared. 'I would say definitely that the whole place is just buzzing with creative industry people and developments but we don't have the figures on it. What has changed over the last few years is that the employment opportunities have changed. There is much more support for start-ups and many more links between the universities and arts related organisations.'⁽³⁴⁾

The figures remain hard to pin down, and there is a definite need for more robust research to test this hypothesis. But in the absence of comprehensive data, we attempted to explore the extent to which greater numbers of creative people are being attracted by the quality of place on offer. Our research found that there is indeed compelling evidence of a brain gain among creative and knowledge professionals

Over the summer of 2003, we surveyed seventy companies in Newcastle and Gateshead in the

fields of architecture, PR, advertising, web design and TV/film production. Fifty-four per cent of these 70 firms said that they were increasingly employing people from outside the North-East region. Twenty-five per cent said they recruited 'a majority' of their employees from outside the region. Our survey found that the brain gain trend had become most pronounced over the last three years.

Survey of creative firms



- A** Percentage of firms that displayed evidence of brain gain
- B** Percentage of firms where the majority of their recruits over the past three years have come from outside the North-East
- C** Percentage of the total number of recruits who came from outside the region
- D** Percentage of firms who reported an increase in the proportion of their workforce coming from outside the region in the past three years
- E** Percentage of firms who said Newcastle and Gateshead were good places to do business
- F** Percentage of firms who said Newcastle and Gateshead had improved as places to live and work in the past three years.



These findings are backed up by statistics from the government's latest *Labour Force Survey* from the Office of National Statistics. It reports that 2002 was the first year for a decade when the balance of people coming into the region exceeded those leaving it. Of particular interest is the growing trend away from London and the south-east towards the north-east. In 1998, 8,000 people chose to leave London and the south-east for the north-east. This rose to 9,000 in 1999. By 2002, the number of incomers reached 10,000, finally overtaking the number relocating south, which stood at 9,000.⁽³⁵⁾

More than fashion

We ran focus groups with a number of incomers to find out why they had moved to the region. This revealed that improved quality of life was the main factor behind their decision to move. What came across most strongly in our focus groups and interviews was the desire not just for the 'buzz' of the cultural renaissance, but for easy access to different types of city life, revealing just how broad the definition of 'quality of place' can be. One recent incomer explained why Newcastle and Gateshead were good places to be: 'It's more relaxed, more fun, less money driven. The friendliest people I've come across. Beautiful countryside and coastline within 30 minutes of home, but a city with a real buzz and sense of excitement.'⁽³⁶⁾

The brain gain is also being boosted by one very practical factor: affordability. While parts of Newcastle have seen an exponential rise in property prices, property is still, on the whole, far cheaper than in the overheated South East.

A two-bedroom flat in Heaton, for example, costs around £90,000, while at the East Gateshead Staiths Development, designed by Wayne Hemmingsway, one-bedroom flats start at £65,000. Similarly, the cost of renting business premises is lower.

The degree of mobility amongst today's creative and knowledge workers, which was unknown a generation ago, is another crucial factor. They are increasingly prepared to up sticks and move in search of a better quality of life or quality of place. Compounding this mobility, the arrival of broadband communications has removed the traditional geographic disadvantage of the north-east. Creative professionals, many of whom only need a laptop and a connection, can now work from anywhere.

But above all it is the distinctive identity and soul of Newcastle and Gateshead which appears to bring these incomers to the region. In conversation, many give the impression that their location decisions are as much based on these softer factors as on professional considerations. In some ways, choosing where to live is becoming akin to choosing what to wear: an emotional decision, rather than one based purely on property prices or job prospects. Choosing where to live is a core statement of personal identity and of how someone wishes to be perceived by others.

If we accept that Newcastle and Gateshead are now succeeding in attracting and retaining a new wave of incomers, the question is how they can accelerate this trend, and maintain the

Project North East

Pink Lane used to be notorious as Newcastle's red-light district. Today it is known as Silicon Alley and has a cluster of almost 100 creative hi-tech businesses. Set up by Project North East 12 years ago with just £40,000, the project now receives thirty enquiries a month from aspiring businesses. The availability of affordable space has proved a critical factor in attracting businesses to Project North East, which is able to subsidise workspace and provide small business support.

The project's clients are mainly drawn from local talent or people who have returned to the region. It has helped to strengthen Newcastle's emerging reputation in film and television production, kick started thirty years ago by the Amber Film Collective and Live Theatre, whose writers include Alan Plater, Peter Flannery and Lee Hall, responsible for the box office smash *Billy Elliot*. Channel Four's seminal music show *The Tube*, seen as integral to shaking up television in the 1980s, had its founding roots in Newcastle and many of those involved have chosen to return to the region. Andrea Wonfor, formerly Director of Programmes at Granada TV, recently chose to launch her independent production company Liberty Bell in Newcastle. And the on-line retailer Eyestorm, which sells art multiples and photographs to collectors worldwide, has relocated to Newcastle, claiming that the city's international profile in the visual arts will enhance their reputation.

sense of freshness and excitement – the 'buzz' – that attracts so many people. Cities on the cusp of change often maintain this buzz for a while and then lose it, falling victim to the pressures of rapid growth which, if pursued without sensitivity, can destroy the soul of a place. How can cities avoid this 'buzz to bland' cycle?

The challenge is two-fold. First, success can often create negative feedback loops, with rapid growth leading to rising rents that price out diversity. Second, after the kind of disruptive innovation that happened in Gateshead and Newcastle, there is a need to broaden the social base of the renewal process. Quality of place needs to work for everyone, not just creative professionals, if it is going to be sustainable. Precisely how this can be achieved is the focus of the next chapter.



investing in diversity

chapter four

Our most successful cities are the ones that manage to combine a sense of soul with an innovative approach to change, which is enhanced by a diverse set of people, activities and places. It is this mix of innovation and organic development, driven forward by diversity, which gives rise to the sense of excitement and ‘buzz’ that Newcastle/Gateshead have nurtured so well.

However, there are strong trends, not only in Newcastle and Gateshead but across a growing number of UK towns and cities, that militate against diversity and can dilute the sense of buzz. This chapter focuses on two such trends and explores how they can be countered. The aim for urban entrepreneurs is to find ways of breaking this ‘buzz to bland’ cycle of development.

Gentrification and place wars

The trend for artists and creative businesses to seek out cheap industrial workspace, which then acts as a catalyst for regeneration and gentrification, is well-documented.

But it is not merely the cheap rents and large empty buildings that bring the artists flocking. A strong sense of history, embedded local culture and identity, are also appealing to creatives who crave authenticity and gritty reality.

There is, however, an inherent tension here. Once the artists move in, and a formerly run-

down area starts to take off, property developers wake up to an opportunity, rents start rising and before too long the area is overrun by theme pubs, expensive restaurants and mock loft apartments. The artists and locals are priced out and the distinctive quality of place that people found attractive in the first place is lost.

We must be careful not to condemn gentrification as entirely negative. Revitalising blighted areas and bringing people back into the inner city are an important part of urban renewal. It is clear, however, that these trends have to be handled with immense sensitivity if the soul of the area – and therefore its long-term appeal – is to survive such a rapid process of change. In *The Rise of the Creative Class*, Richard Florida explains this problem: ‘Gentrification in major urban centres continues to threaten the diversity and creativity that have driven these cities’ innovation and growth in the first place.’⁽³⁷⁾ In addition, there is growing evidence that a failure to balance development

with the needs of local people can lead to real conflict between communities.

In the US, the growing phenomenon of 'place wars' has been identified, as local people get pushed out of their communities by incomers. For example, in San Francisco, a recent campaign against gentrification has been described as 'a powerful portent of things to come'⁽³⁸⁾. In the summer of 2000, a coalition of artists, club owners and residents organised nearly forty marches and collected more than 30,000 signatures in a protest against the gentrification and high-tech development of various neighbourhoods.

These issues are just as relevant to Newcastle and Gateshead as to San Francisco. A telling example is the proposed private residential development on the Quayside, going towards Byker, which has provoked outrage among local residents and an opposition campaign spearheaded by the local vicar. Local people are furious that they will ultimately be pushed out of the area by such developments. Another flashpoint is the old industrial area of the Ouseburn, which is being earmarked for expensive development which will have little to do with the original community. There are also fears that some of the Ouseburn's best loved pubs, such as the Free Trade and The Cluny, may be under threat from corporate development. As one local resident said to us: 'They're building 2,000 one and two bed apartments. They're not catering to families so there won't be a community. We've lost the Ouseburn.'⁽³⁹⁾

Within any process of gentrification, there is a need to maintain some affordable areas, both for housing local people, who are unable to afford soaring prices, and for independent and creative businesses which initially lend an area its buzz and kickstart its fashionability. This is also in keeping with the government's aim of creating mixed and balanced communities. *Planning Policy Guidance Note 3* states: 'Local planning authorities should encourage the development of mixed and balanced communities: they should ensure that new housing developments help secure a better social mix by avoiding the creation of large areas of housing of similar characteristics.'⁽⁴⁰⁾

The night-time economy

'They should cater for older people too. Places on the quayside, they're not for everyone, I mean when I'm older I want to be able to play dominoes and darts. Can you do that in Newcastle anymore?'⁽⁴¹⁾

Newcastle's reputation as a 'party toon' extends throughout the UK and internationally, with thousands of young people descending onto the streets of the city centre every weekend. But this has been a double-edged sword for the city. While the 'party toon' is undoubtedly very popular, both with locals and tourists on weekend breaks, it is also an extreme example of the type of binge-drinking, night-time economy which characterises many city centres around the UK. A recent House of Commons Environment Select Committee report raised serious concerns about this phenomenon.⁽⁴²⁾



The danger is that Newcastle will fall prey to the same ‘buzz to bland’ cycle that has afflicted places such as Temple Bar in Dublin, where originality and diversity are undermined by a corporate bar culture and a drunken party zone. Europe’s biggest party city, Amsterdam, is also a worrying model for regeneration experts in Newcastle and Gateshead, especially as the region becomes a venue of choice for stag parties and hen weekends. There are concerns that the ‘party toon’ culture swamping the city centre is mono-cultural and excludes large sections of the community. Critics argue that there is little space for alternative entertainment such as jazz, comedy or live music. There are also fears that the largely white culture of the city centre is not welcoming to ethnic minorities. Families with children and older people, who may want to visit the centre for a meal in the evening, also tend to be marginalised.

However, despite these concerns, we need to remember that Newcastle’s party toon does offer a very popular night out which has become a central part of Geordie culture, and consequently is a core element of the identity and soul of the place today. While sections of the community may not enjoy what is essentially a white working class night out, it is an inclusive experience for a large percentage of people in the region. The issue, as with gentrification, is when one activity or type of development comes to dominate, such that it blocks out the possibility of other activities. For a city to retain the ability to adapt and renew itself, it needs to keep a diversity of development options open. A narrow dependence on one type

of activity reduces this flexibility. A saturation point can be reached, when the dominant activity becomes so intense that it begins to degrade itself.

There are now signs that the party toon is losing its local distinctiveness. National and regional chains dominate the nightlife and evening economy in Newcastle City Centre. Sixty-six per cent of city centre pubs are owned by national operators.⁽⁴³⁾ Regional operators such as 42nd Street Bars and Fitzgeralds own thirty per cent, and less than five per cent are independently owned. This is a very low figure compared with other cities – in Leeds for example a full 18 per cent are independent. Most planners accept that independent operators are more likely to provide the diversity and vitality so crucial to a thriving city centre. They also provide greater opportunities for innovative DJs, musicians, performing artists and spin-off industries in fashion, music and art. The concern is that if they continue to be squeezed out, the soul of the city centre will be damaged.



Quayside loft apartments



Byker Wall

Ways forward

The solutions to the dangers of over-gentrification or a mono-cultural night-time economy, are well known. A call for ‘mixed and balanced communities’ features in numerous government policy documents, from the *Urban White Paper* to the detail of *Planning Policy Guidance*. However, achieving this balance is harder in practice, as any local authority official negotiating a Section 106 agreement with its provisions for affordable housing in new developments will testify. The short-term needs of many developers to clear a profit, alongside the pressures on the local authority to achieve ‘best value’, often seem to contradict the longer-

term needs of ensuring a place has a sustainable quality of place. Investing in diversity involves a complex juggling act between the needs of a broad coalition of interests: government, business, developers and the local community. More thinking needs to go into how to coordinate outcomes across these groups, but the experience of Newcastle and Gateshead offer some clues as to the way forward.

A need for affordable property

Newcastle has recognised the need to invest in diversity by finding new ways to support its arts and culture sector. Importantly, this has meant the council taking on a new, cross-departmental role linking up the Culture Directorate with the Property Services Department.

Liz Archer is the Cultural Estates Manager for Newcastle City Council. As far as she is aware, she is the only local authority Cultural Estates Manager in the UK. She describes her role as being ‘a one stop shop’ for artists seeking advice on property. Until Liz came along there was a huge gap with artists ‘finding it difficult to sort out these things and property professionals finding it difficult to cater to artists.’

A typical example of her work was the acquisition of the Wards Building in Grainger Town, a former print works that now houses the Waygood art space. With additional funding from One North East, the rest of the building is now due to be converted into an arts complex, with a commercial element in the basement that will be used to subsidise the non-commercial gallery and studios. Another



example is the Council's acquisition of SWS House in the Ouseburn. This will be marketed as a cultural venue, but the user clause will be restricted to keep rents low.

Property services is a commercial arm of the council and is required to conform to 'best value' requirements when renting out properties. Liz is acutely aware that artists can't afford to compete in this context. Instead she has the power to take individual cases to the Council's Cabinet and, if they are deemed a non-commercial or charitable organisation, they can escape some of the restrictions of the 'best value' framework. This is a deliberate effort to give greater recognition to quality of place considerations. As Liz said: 'It's a balancing act between commercial interests and benefits for artists, which have spin-off benefits for the area.'⁽⁴⁴⁾

Other cities are also beginning to recognise the value of investing in diversity through support for artists and the cultural industries sector. The London Development Agency (LDA), following its Commission on the Creative Industries has proposed setting up ten to fifteen local Property Trusts across the capital. These trusts will purchase properties and provide an asset base for creative industries, and will also provide advice on property-related issues, including quantity surveying and finance for feasibility studies. The LDA is also proposing that all new developments above a certain size require some affordable space for creative industries; a significant extension of what are understood as 'key workers' for today's cities.⁽⁴⁵⁾

The move to invest in diversity should not end with better support for artists and the creative industries. The portfolio approach to property advocated here, which rests on the need for an element of affordable space, should retain a degree of flexibility and be open to support other forms of diversity that help make up the ecology of a city. This might mean supporting cheap shops in areas suddenly swamped with high-end coffee houses and retail outlets. Or it might mean supporting the local pub against the large chains.

Perhaps most important of all to the creation of balanced communities is the policy of ensuring a percentage of affordable housing is built in new developments. This is already enshrined in the planning system as the notoriously complex and opaque Section 106, otherwise known as 'planning gain'. If this system worked, it would be a powerful force for positive change. But local authorities still struggle to enforce Section 106 in the face of short-term financial pressure from developers, so more needs to be done to enable the spirit of the legislation to operate in practice.

Time and space

The need to diversify the city centre has been recognised elsewhere. Leeds began transforming its nightlife ten years ago under its 24-hour city initiative and has made good progress. There is now a greater mix of venues and activities, from jazz clubs to comedy clubs and restaurants. Alongside these changes a new public square now exists for events that deliberately aim to attract families and older people into the city centre. These events have been very successful and have included parades

that saw children welcomed in the city centre as late as 10pm and 11pm.

Newcastle city centre, in common with many UK towns and cities, experiences a dead time after the shops shut and before the pubs and bars get going. Shoppers, older people and families with children leave the centre when the shops close. A few hours later, the young people return for a night out. This form of segregation undermines diversity and quality of place. If soul is also about the art of successfully combining the old with the new, too great a level of segregated activities can prevent different types of people meeting, let alone mixing. Zoning reinforces this problem, especially when bars and night clubs are concentrated in certain streets or areas. The result is that these become no-go zones for a large number of residents. Newcastle's Bigg Market is a classic example of a dense drinking strip where every other building is a bar or club.

The solutions are increasingly being recognised by a number of cities across the UK. They include investing in the 5pm-8pm 'bridging economy', by extending library, gallery and shopping times and making greater use of public spaces for a diverse range of activities. There may also be a case for trying a more dispersed pattern for the night-time economy. For example in New York it is not possible to obtain a licence to open a bar within 500 feet of another, while in Paris it is 250 feet with a cap on the number of premises in any arrondissement. The forthcoming review of Planning Policy Guidance 6 on zoning and the government's Licensing Reform Bill offer a chance to experiment with alternative models.

social inclusion and quality of place

chapter five

How inclusive a development is and how widely the benefits of a project are distributed has been a central question in debates about regeneration over the past 20 years. For example, all six cities on the shortlist for the 2008 Capital of Culture title had to demonstrate the inclusiveness of their bids.

A vociferous campaign against Oxford's bid by residents of the Blackbird Leys estate denounced the Council for spending a small fortune on 'a plaything for the middle classes, [that was] nothing to do with life on council estates or what survives of working class culture.'⁽⁴⁶⁾ Similarly, Glasgow's year as European City of Culture in 1990 was derided at the time as having little to do with life on the city's most deprived housing estates.

Statements are often made about the inclusiveness of particular culture-led regeneration projects, but there is a lack of hard evidence to back up such claims. And the terms 'inclusion' and 'exclusion' are freely deployed despite being highly contested and opaque. Demos research has identified three broad dimensions of inclusion: access to social goods, empowerment, and institutional trust.⁽⁴⁷⁾ Each of these is highly relevant to cultural regeneration projects because without them the projects will eventually fail.

Access to social goods: inclusion involves ensuring that all individuals and groups, including those in the most marginalised communities, have equal access to the collective goods that are any citizen's basic social entitlement. Alongside more traditional social goods such as education, housing, legal advice, and public transport, access to cultural experiences and assets is a core social good. Indeed, Article 27 of the UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights states, 'Everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, (and) to enjoy the arts'.

Empowerment: to have meaning, the right to culture as a social good must translate into active engagement not passive provision. Participation in cultural or art activities can be a transformative experience for individuals and communities, as people discover their own capabilities and capacity for creative thinking and action.

Institutional trust: culture-led activities engage individuals and communities in a different kind of relationship with the city and the institutions and organisations that usually represent it. They can help to articulate a new narrative about a place that can mobilise people around shared goals and generate trust between people and local institutions.

Newcastle and Gateshead contributed to each of these dimensions of inclusion with their programme of culture-led regeneration. In the focus groups we ran, long-term residents explained how projects like the Baltic made them feel proud about their city. One said, 'I have pride in where I live. It's taken about 15 years for this place to get going, but it's doing well.'⁽⁴⁸⁾ Antony Gormley's *Domain Field* with its 250 local volunteers is a fine example of the transformative potential of culture, with local people co-producing the art. And despite appearances, with its lavish Norman Foster-designed building, the Sage-Gateshead Music

Centre will be a community-based inclusive enterprise, aimed at spreading active engagement in local music and culture.

The Sage Music Centre

The Music Centre represents the coming together of two very different organisations and traditions: the Northern Sinfonia and Folkworks, a community-focused folk music organisation. Education and community programmes are integrated into the Centre's artistic programme at every level. The Director of Community Music, Katherine Zesserson, describes the planned activities, which will span the region and range from DJ-ing projects in Scotswood and Byker to community choirs in Seaham and Durham. The Centre is also working with every secondary school in the region, offering training for teachers, and has a programme training community musicians – 16 have already graduated and are working in the north-east region.

Boarded up homes earmarked for demolition in Scotswood



Everyday inclusion

Cultural inclusion is important in itself, but also helps to illuminate the wider need for inclusion and participation across the whole range of city life. Indeed, Newcastle Council got badly caught out when the inclusive language and aims of its cultural strategy jarred with the starkly non-participatory approach to its Going for Growth strategy, which announced the demolition of over 6000 homes in a local newspaper without first informing – let alone asking – the people who lived there.

Going for Growth

Going for Growth is Newcastle Council's twenty-year strategy document to reverse population loss by remodelling rundown parts of the city's East and West End into 'urban villages'. According to the Going for Growth Green Paper⁽⁴⁹⁾, Newcastle is losing its population at a rate of 1,500 people a year which on current trends could result in the loss of 17,000 people by 2020. This sizable figure does not take account of any of the brain gain effects discussed in this report.

The aim of the strategy is to attract the middle income people who are leaving the city for the suburbs and green belt, while at the same time turning around areas of multiple deprivation where the housing market has collapsed. The cost of decline in Scotswood and other parts of the West End is a huge drain on Council resources, of up to £10million a year⁽⁵⁰⁾.

The story of Going for Growth is told through the eyes of local resident and chair of the

Scotswood Area Strategy, 68-year-old Rose McCourt.⁽⁵¹⁾

'We first heard about Going for Growth with a phonecall from the Newcastle Journal when the reporter told us street by street which homes were earmarked for demolition. The Council knows Scotswood and they knew that when this came out all hell would break loose and it did.'

According to the plans most of the 6,600 homes to be demolished were in Scotswood and Walker, a riverside area in the East End. In the Going for Growth document both are coloured red, meaning they are 'unviable'. Rose says she was told that in Scotswood only 30 homes were to be preserved, as a 'gateway' to the proposed urban village. The result was a wave of local outrage and 'Save Our Scotswood', an unprecedented community campaign that took the city and the Council by surprise.

'Seven hundred people turned up to the first meeting. We couldn't fit everyone into the church and we had to have another meeting the following night. After that we had to hold meetings at the Scotswood social club, it was the only place big enough. People were literally emptying their purses into the bucket – on a Thursday.'

Rose is keen to point out that the community was not opposed to change, simply to the way it was being implemented. 'We knew there would have to be changes. There were a lot of empty homes. People here are not thick, they know what they need.'

As a result of the campaign the initial plans have changed considerably, with the Council claiming to have taken account of community views. However, an enormous chasm of distrust between community and council remains.

‘The Council asked us to come in and tell them what we thought. Our main group went away for a weekend and came up with a plan which we presented to the Council. We gave them, if you like, lower Scotswood – we knew we couldn’t sustain everything. We picked out certain areas for demolition on the understanding that people who wanted to be rehoused in Scotswood could move to the top end.’

The Council responded positively to the plan and set up a joint working group with the community to take it forward. Rose, however, has little faith in it and has since left the working group.

‘I stopped going. The Council would say they are working to our brief but they are not. In reality they are moving people out of houses earmarked for demolition but they aren’t filling up the houses which are meant to be staying. There’s a show home next to me but it’s not been shown to one person.... In terms of decisions the working group can’t make any because everything has to be referred back to the cabinet. It felt like we were going round in circles and going nowhere.’

As to what the outcome will be she is far from positive: ‘I think they’re running Scotswood down. They don’t want it. It’s a very family-

orientated place with many extended families but this is breaking them up and scattering people in different places.’

What happened in Scotswood goes to the heart of the debate about inclusion. It is clear that this type of top-down approach is no longer adequate for the complexities of modern city life. Nor can it effectively engage people. As Paul Brickell wrote in a Demos pamphlet, ‘Across the country, a growing number of people have grown weary of the traditional methods of community consultation and community governance, which have consistently failed to engage the interest and commitment of local people or to effect real change in their lives.’⁽⁵²⁾

The architect Richard Rogers made a similar point when talking about Scotswood to the Guardian in 2000, just after he resigned from the project, ‘In this kind of situation it’s a matter of life or death. In the 1950s and 1960s, we took the wrong road. We were centralised. The best you had was consultation. There is a big difference between consultation and participation. With consultation the authority arrives at a plan and asks people: ‘Do you like it?’ With participation, you get round the table with community leaders to work on solutions together.”⁽⁵³⁾

It is no coincidence that the themes and language used here – the need for physical regeneration projects to be locally rooted if they are to succeed – are the same as for cultural

regeneration projects. In both situations, greater opportunities for participation at the everyday level need to be created and joined up. Direct participation in cultural activities is not just an end in itself; it needs to be integrated with other forms of direct participation, such as voting, community activity and choices about the delivery of public services. In turn, if cities are serious about the needs of everyone, direct participation needs to inform and adjust how planning and governance systems are operated. Through everyday participation, the process of shaping a city’s life can become a collective and distributed endeavour. The adaptive capacity of the city is enhanced because more people are involved in helping to generate ideas and solutions.

Gateshead has already begun thinking about how to extend the debate around culture-led inclusion, by exploring how creativity can be distributed more widely than through clusters and art factories. This is crucial if cities are to develop a broader, more sustainable economic base rather than being reliant on a growing but relatively small and largely imported ‘creative class’. Creativity Challenge is the brainchild of Bill McNaught, the Head of Culture at Gateshead Council. The aim of this cross-cutting initiative is to pull together what he sees as the four crucial strands of urban entrepreneurship: business, education, neighbourhood renewal and the creative industries.

The initiative kicked off earlier this year with a two-day brainstorm led by management consultants Cap Gemini. Forty people working in

each of the four strands attended, including Gateshead’s Director of Community-Based Services, the Head of Neighbourhood Renewal and representatives from the Department for Education & Skills and organisations such as the North East Museums Libraries and Archives Council.

The main benefit of the brainstorm, according to McNaught, was not so much the clarity of the resulting programme but the deeper understanding of the agenda shared among the participants. ‘We’re trying to recognise that the skills set around creative thinking and creativity is the one most important to the 21st century. In terms of social inclusion, for example, we want to bring creative thinking into our discussions on neighbourhood renewal, to allow local people to articulate what kind of neighbourhood they wish to become. Creative thinking skills can empower them to do that,’ he explains.

Gateshead has now appointed an officer to look at how the Challenge can be incorporated into the roles of Council employees across the four strands. One aspiration is to develop a major programme for creative skills development in schools and at a neighbourhood level. As McNaught says, ‘Why not teach creative thinking as an essential skills set? We’re looking at having a creativity education advisor and we’d like to encourage Creativity Champions within schools who can talk up the role of creativity within each school plan. The problem with our economy is that anyone who is not a straight line thinker is regarded as weird but this type of thinking is vital to the knowledge economy.’⁽⁵⁴⁾

the next city

chapter six

On their journey from coal cities to culture cities, Newcastle and Gateshead have excelled at a particular brand of urban entrepreneurship which has worked in tune with the essence, spirit and distinctive identity of the place – in other words, its soul. The lessons for other cities lie not in how to build their own Angel or Millennium Bridge.

There have already been too many copycat cultural initiatives across cities. Instead, the lessons lie in understanding how it is that Newcastle and Gateshead came to have an Angel and a Millennium Bridge. The mix of leadership, skills and capacities in these two cities represents a shining example of what we mean by urban entrepreneurship: the ability to seek out and nurture new sources of energy and ideas, and combine them with an existing stock of resources in order to fuel renewal and ensure the long-term quality of a place.

The most interesting part of the Newcastle-Gateshead story is what gave rise to this culture of collaboration and success. But their experience also tells us something about the next set of challenges, risks and opportunities for cities and regions seeking deeper and more sustainable forms of renewal. Three core themes can be identified which have relevance not just to Newcastle and Gateshead, but across the UK and beyond.

First, there is a need for citywide strategies to invest in diversity. The complexity of urban ecologies is often taken for granted. However, a common if not inevitable side effect of development and culture-led regeneration is the undermining of urban diversity. Two such threats in Newcastle and Gateshead are gentrification and a mono-cultural night-time drinking economy, both of which could accelerate the ‘buzz to bland’ cycle which would undermine the soul and long-term viability of these areas.

To sustain this diversity, a broad coalition of interests needs to be mobilised, ranging from developers and local authorities, to independent entrepreneurs and local community groups. While this is a difficult task, the need to give long-term support to the cultural and creative industries is now recognised, as the work of Newcastle’s Cultural Estate Manager and the London Development Agency’s proposed Property Trusts show. Both approaches have

much to recommend them and could be adopted by other cities.

But investing in diversity requires more than supporting the creative industries. Similar approaches also need to be found to support other diverse spaces, places and activities that make up the rich ecology of a city that has soul. This includes the neighbourhood pub or cheap shops to serve local people in areas that have become gentrified. The need for affordable property in successful areas with rising land values underpins these innovative approaches.

Second, cities need to take seriously the needs of everyone. The debate about the inclusiveness of culture-led regeneration – often frustrating for its lack of supporting evidence – is important because it highlights the need for cities to increase their capacity for direct, everyday participation. Newcastle's experience with its Going for Growth strategy highlights both the limits of the conventional top-down consultation approach and the dangers of pursuing contradictory approaches to participation. At the same time as Newcastle was mobilising city residents for its Capital of Culture bid, it was making seemingly unilateral decisions about the future of a large swathe of the city.

The benefits of cultural inclusion are clear, including access to social goods, empowerment and increased institutional trust. Newcastle and Gateshead's culture-led regeneration strategy has generated value in each of these areas. The next challenge is to join up and boost

opportunities for everyday participation in other areas of the city, including its public services, public spaces and neighbourhood strategies. Currently, there is no one organisation with responsibility for thinking about how to join up these different spheres of everyday participation, but as Gateshead's 'Creativity Challenge' shows there is an opportunity for local authorities to play a leadership role.

Finally, Newcastle and Gateshead have demonstrated an unusual level of long-range thinking by overcoming their historical differences and collaborating. Culture-led regeneration has often been characterised by competition, as 'boosterism' takes hold and cities vie for the best galleries, tourist attractions and so on. The collaboration between Newcastle and Gateshead shows that a long history of bitter rivalry can be overcome. The pooling of assets can create a more robust and viable urban unit. This has important lessons for other cities, particularly in the context of continuing regional disparities.

The principle of collaboration is also relevant to new forms of genuinely joined-up working within local authorities. In developing their vision for culture-led regeneration, first Gateshead and then Newcastle were effective in mobilising the resources and apparatus of different departments around a new set of goals. To maintain such adaptive capacity over the long-term, cities need to invest in their ability to connect different fields of activity. Gateshead's joining up of different departments in formulating its culture strategy is one

example of this. Newcastle's Cultural Estates Manager is another. This ability to shift categories and expectations in this way is an essential part of urban entrepreneurship. Such fleet-footedness, which simultaneously broadens the range of interested parties, has also proved effective in mobilising public support.

It seems that the limits of the first phase of culture-led regeneration have now been reached

in Newcastle and Gateshead. Today – and tomorrow – the challenge for both cities is to retain an adaptive and flexible mindset. If they manage to retain their sense of identity, openness to diversity and quality of place – above all, their sense of soul – then there is every chance that the next phase in their transformation will be even more exciting than the last.



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About the author

Anna Minton is an author and journalist, whose recent pamphlet, *Building Balanced Communities*, was published by RICS last year. A former staffer on the *Financial Times* she has worked for all the major broadsheets and is currently a contributor to *The Guardian*.

A note on methodology

A mix of investigative journalism techniques were combined with focus groups and qualitative research. The author spent two months in Newcastle and Gateshead, talking to individuals and community leaders from Scotswood in the West End to the 'party toon' of the City Centre.

The qualitative research took three main forms:

- Depth interviews
- Focus groups
- Desk research.

Depth interviews were carried out with forty key players across Newcastle and Gateshead. These included politicians, academics, regeneration experts, property developers, architects, chief executives in the region's major institutions, community leaders and community activists. Most of these people spoke to us off the record and have not been identified, although their comments are referenced.