

INTERNAL AND LOCAL TOURISM TO BUILD REGIONAL IDENTITY: THE NEW UK CITY REGIONS

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Abstract

Ahead of the UK referendum on EU membership both government and opposition parties were developing industry policies directed at the lagging regions of the country. In the face of increasingly unbalanced development smart specialisation and inward investment directed by elected city-region mayors were to re-energise the regions at the heart of the first and second industrial revolutions. However, these newly promoted city regions exemplify the tensions created by a divisive national vote.

The Liverpool and Manchester conurbations elected city-region mayors in May 2017. These regions contain a core city which voted for continued membership of the EU, surrounded by metropolitan boroughs which voted predominantly to leave. The nativist and isolationist aspects of the successful but divisive leave campaign compromised these internal city brands and contaminated their external brands.

Tourism based on contemporary and heritage aspects of these cities has a role both in repairing this damage and in developing a robust understanding of the history and future of these conurbations and of shared place for inhabitants and incomers grounded in localised 'internal tourism'.

This presentation examines the role of heritage and tourism in the construction of robust and inclusive narratives to support capacity building for European city regions.

Key words: Internal tourism; city regions; place branding

Introduction

Proposals for the systematic introduction of devolution to English regional governments had been made at various points during the twentieth century. However, after a proposal for devolution to an elected North East Assembly was rejected in a referendum in North East England in 2004 the process was abandoned, to be replaced by adhoc bilateral negotiations with separate prospective city regions

Summer 2017 saw the tenth anniversary of the onset of a global recession which created continuing economic and social pressures on governments at national and local level. Currently regional and urban governments in England are under pressure from two directions. Following the 2010 general election the incoming coalition national government rejected the regional development mechanisms established by its predecessor - Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) - and replaced them with ad hoc Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) against a background of growing bottom up dissatisfaction and unrest resulting from the consequences of severe austerity measures.

In the early 1980, several cities controlled by the opposition Labour Party were attempting to develop forms of "municipal socialism" (Cochrane, 1988) in opposition to the policies of the Conservative national government. This led to the abolition by the government in 1985 of both the Greater London Council and a tier of Metropolitan Counties which had been established barely a decade earlier. By the following decade, budget reductions and compulsory outsourcing of services had removed many of the means to pursue alternative strategies from the direct control of local authorities requiring an accommodation with neoliberal policies and alignment with private sector interests in the form of so-called 'new public management' in order to achieve relatively limited policy objectives.

The Manchester region still aspires to the role of alternate metropolitan growth pole to London and the south-east (e.g. Peel Holdings 2010), but had fewer direct mechanisms with which to pursue this aim than London which had a new city wide authority reinstated as the Greater London Assembly (GLA) in 2000. The other English metropolitan counties abolished at the same time have only recently been replaced on a piecemeal basis, beginning in 2007 and continuing under the coalition government.

Such city regions coupled with ‘smart specialisation’ have been identified as a key to participation in the global economy. MacNeill and Steiner (2011) argue that simple formulations of “new economic geography”, “knowledge-based economy” and “innovation” place an emphasis on network and clusters which require careful management and a distributed approach to leadership in order to create a strong institutional base. They illustrate their argument with an examination of the roles and stages in the re-structuring of industry clusters in the Austrian region of Styria/Steiermark leading to increased specialism and higher added value in established sectors. Sotarauta and Pulkkinen (2011) draw on the formulation of ‘new institutionalism’ set out by March and Olsen (1984) and subsequently re-evaluated by them (March and Olsen, 2008). They argue that to achieve smart specialisation, the institutions within a geographical area must engage in a form of institutional entrepreneurship to create and support the relationships necessary to achieve synergy, however, such ‘smart specialisation’ has become an objective of many locations seeking to revive or develop a local economy.

By the first decade of this century the largest 600 global cities already contained 1.5 billion people, and are projected to accommodate 25% of the global population by 2025 (Dobbs et al 2011). Asian megacities have populations larger than many smaller nation states and their reputational resources are equivalent to those of many nations. Less visible second and third tier cities and less central regions are joining the competition to attract domestic and international inward investment. One UK government-commissioned report identified some 270 Chinese cities with populations above 1 million people as sites of potential inward investment 35 of which were judged to have sufficient infrastructure and institutions to justify immediate investment (China Britain Business Council, 2008). In this context a lack of differentiation between the offers from different locations, coupled with intensifying internal competition could lead to sub optimal outcomes. In order to avoid this possibility, individual locations need to sustain their unique characteristics while delivering the level of services and infrastructure expected in an international context, and to distinguish their offer within a coherently structured national brand portfolio.

Tourism raises the profile of a city and heritage is recognized as a driver of tourism income and of distinctive identity for destinations. Place branding, at national, regional and city levels, has become a recognised component of development policy (Anholt, 2010, Govers and Go, 2004, 2009) and a means of combining the perspective of heritage with contemporary resources and facilities.

Go and Trunfio (2012) set out an approach to the co-creation of city brands combining an ‘inside-in’ and ‘outside-in’ analytical perspectives to sustain a coherent and inclusive branding process. The outside-in perspective is comparative in nature, evident in top-down governance, both a reality and pre-condition, due to the overarching and necessary interdependence between tourism imagination and the media. In contrast, the inside-in perspective considers the need for stakeholder engagement in the creation of a competitive country brand identity. Such engagement offers means of repairing the divisions created within UK conurbations by the EU referendum campaigns.

Go and Trunfio argue that identity lies within the overlap between three knowledge domains and policy development which have so far developed largely independently from one another:

- the positioning of the country’s attractiveness, a task often entrusted to the tourism destination organization, if any,
- the social, technological and economic development carried out by the respective authorities
- governance intended as a mechanism to bring about an integrative approach between ‘inside-in’ and ‘outside-in’ analytical perspectives.

Successive attempts to gain national and international prominence for regions lagging behind the mainstream economy have seen a range of initiatives based around high profile hallmark events. In addition to the massive global sporting events of the summer Olympics and the soccer World Cup, or the high value, high technology spectacle of Formula 1 racing, smaller flagship events have developed around the need both to kick-start regeneration in urban areas and to raise their profiles in the competition for inward investment. Cities compete for a number of more modest events which are passed between locations. During the 1980s the United Kingdom government imported a German model of garden festivals developed to aid post war reconstruction. The objective was the revival of a number of declining industrial cities through a change of image. In the city of Glasgow this was relatively successful, but in the city of Liverpool there was more minimal impact on the local economy with, for example, little local labour employed on many of the contracts.

Florida's (2002) insight into the role of creative sector within conurbations and its value in attracting a qualified and diverse workforce has itself led to a commodification of these sectors by administrations anxious to improve the attraction of their location. Nevertheless, Markusen and King (2003) demonstrate the validity of the social and economic dividend of artistic activities. Subsequently, in 2008, a Capital of Culture event produced a broader and more sustainable impact for Liverpool (Little; 2010). This European Union initiative had been cloned in to a domestic event within the U.K. meanwhile twin cities now share the main European title for a year each. Other cities have developed regular annual international festivals, Edinburgh annually since 1947, Manchester established a biennial event in 2007 and in 2013 Leeds celebrated the golden jubilee of its International Piano Festival.

Data and Methods

This paper draws upon the author's previous participant observation of urban regeneration and campaigns on behalf of social enterprises within UK city regions and on secondary reports of events and the responses of communities and of local authorities (Little, 2009; 2010, 2012).

While Knowles (2006) suggests that the British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan may not actually have characterised the key uncertainties of a political environment as "events dear boy events", it is unanticipated events like those described below impacting on the city region of Manchester from 1981 to 2017 which can unsettle a carefully planned brand strategy and demand a rapid response. At the same time, the mobilisation around such disruptive events can engage the public in the co-development which lends authenticity to the narratives presented to the outside world.

Findings

Place brands, whether for countries, cities or regions, retain a strong element of path dependence. Braun (2011) explores this in relation to Rotterdam. Liverpool, also a port city, leveraged its status as 2008 EU Capital of culture to consolidate a strong and positive culture brand. In doing so it produced a selective narrative of the city's recent past and significant events were only re-acknowledged in subsequent years (Little, 2009). Nevertheless, when seeking visibility in North West England's knowledge economy of science and life sciences, the Liverpool First agency found that Merseyside, beyond the Liverpool city core, retained older negative connotations. To escape these new brands with different and wider spatial references such as the 'Mersey corridor' or 'Atlantic Gateway' were developed.

Manchester's path dependence has a literal element, as the city pioneered a number of key transport innovations in its industrialisation and is a strong supporter of the HS-2 high speed rail proposal from London to the northern cities promoted by the U.K. national government

Manchester's status as the international centre of the cotton and textile processing industries during the 19th century was reflected in its unofficial name, Cottonopolis.

This 19th-century prominence was derived from range of innovations in both technology and transport infrastructure. The switch from water and steam power in Manchester and its surroundings gave an advantage over locations to the north and east in the Pennine valleys which utilised waterpower. The demand for coal to generate steam led to the construction of the Bridgewater Canal. This first component of what became a national canal transport system opened in 1761, becoming the first artificial waterway not based on an existing watercourse, crossing the river Mersey on the first aqueduct of the modern era.

The improvement of technology in the first decades of the 19th century increased output dramatically. This in turn led to for a bottleneck in the importation of raw materials and export of finished textiles. Manchester was reliant on the Port of Liverpool, and by the 1820s the capacity of existing roads and canals was inadequate. Proposals for a railway between Liverpool and Manchester gained approval from Parliament in 1826. When completed, this first inter-city route contained a range of innovations which became commonplace in subsequent railway construction.

By the end of the 19th century port to rail transshipment between Liverpool and Manchester were regarded as restricted and expensive in a time of prolonged recession. A project to create a 36 miles (58 km) long ship canal utilising the rivers Mersey and Irwell was completed in January 1894. This made Manchester, 40 miles (64 km) inland, Britain's third busiest port.

Manchester has a parallel history of social and political dissent and innovation. In the Jacobite rising of 1745 a Manchester Regiment was raised in support of the rebellion against the Hanoverian monarchy. The Chartist mass movement for expanded suffrage was met with force at St Peter's field, now central Manchester, an event referred to as Peterloo in ironic reference to the battle which ended the Napoleonic wars four years earlier. At the end of the 19th century the Manchester-based Pankhurst family were central to demands for female suffrage while the cooperative movement, pioneered in nearby Rochdale, was based in the city. In the 20th century a mass trespass movement based in Manchester led to the establishment of a national park system and the right to roam in the countryside following demonstrations and arrests in 1932.

Unrest returned in July 1981 when riots occurred across British cities, including Manchester with unrest in and around Moss Side, south of Manchester City centre lasting for some 72 hours local shops were burned and looted. Moss Side had been a migrant destination particularly for Caribbean immigrants over the previous decades. Contemporary commentary blamed, alternatively and in combination, racial tension, mass unemployment and policing methods.

The opening of the Hacienda nightclub, an initiative of Factory Records, in May of the following year marked a turning point for Manchester's popular music culture, providing the basis of favourable comparison with neighbouring and rival Liverpool. The strong club culture that grew up around this initiative gave rise to the term 'Madchester' and was instrumental in attracting students to the city's growing universities, and in underpinning pride and identity for the region's youth.

Such key informal and counter cultural initiatives were eventually incorporated into the corporatist narrative of the shifting local government ethos. The Gay village which is now a key sub-brand within Manchester's leisure sector was initially a political response to the policing policies of the Chief Constable associated with 1981 riots. Binnie and Skeggs, (2004) describe the contradictions of its presence within the city brand portfolio and suggest that this reflects Zizek's (1997) identification of the division and incorporation of previously marginalised groups by late capitalism.

Cochrane's (1988) view that the post-riot period of the 1980s saw a shift towards alignment with private sector interests is supported by Quilley (2000) who suggests that Manchester is the most interesting case of transformation from municipal socialism to an entrepreneurial local authority, not least because of its relative success in the physical and cultural transformation of the city.

In this period, Manchester produced bids for the 1996 Olympic Games hosted by Atlanta, being eliminated in the first round of voting and for the 2000 games held in Sydney., reaching the third round in 1994. These unsuccessful bids forged regional networks and built the confidence which underpinned successful bids for high profile Millennium lottery funded projects and for a successful bid for the 2002 Commonwealth Games.

Cochrane Peck and Ticknell, (1995) argue that the politics of Manchester's Olympic bids powerfully symbolise many of the supposedly transformative features of the new urban politics presented more widely as 'New Public Management' (e.g. Boston et al, 1996),

Following the successful Commonwealth Games bid Manchester was one of eight cities hosting the 1996 UEFA European soccer cup and became the target of a massive truck bomb detonated by the I.R.A. This devastated a substantial area of the city centre, fortunately with no fatal injuries largely due to the significant level of policing for the tournament.

1996 IRA bomb attack in the city centre was leveraged to trigger a £1.2bn redevelopment which completed the post-war transformation of the area (Quilley, 2000). This commercial and civic robustness coupled with technical innovation constitutes the mainstream narrative of Manchester's development.

The 2002 Commonwealth Games represented the culmination of the physical renewal efforts that Manchester drove forward in the wake of the 1996 bombing. The main athletics stadium was designed for conversion to the new home ground of Manchester City, the city's 'other' soccer team, and formed the centrepiece of a regeneration corridor into east Manchester. This was intended to be reinforced by an extension of the city's 'Metrolink' light-rail system which was finally completed in 2017 with a second city centre crossing to relieve congestion on the extended system.

While post-bombing redevelopment took shape, the BBC signalled its intention to move jobs to Manchester in 2004, and after a long gestation significant departments arrived during 2011. The relocation of key BBC radio news resources and other programming to Salford began in 2010 giving greater visibility to Manchester and North West England at a national level.

The importation of a model used in both Dubai and South Korea, complete with the deputy director of the Seoul Media city, represented a traditional approach to job and capacity creation, building on existing but relatively limited capacities. However the leveraging by local higher education institutions with a faculty of the University of Salford relocated within the development reflects an understanding of the role of intellectual capital in the so-called 'knowledge economy'. The expansion of the region's capacity in the mass media and social media through this support suggest the possibility of a convergence of the strands of social and technical innovation that have characterised Manchester's past.

Building on a long tradition of North West media production, the visibility of Media City UK provides the prospect of more direct global networking that could transcend the territorial trap (Agnew, 1994) of the national government's emphasis on "localism" evident in the replacement of *Regional* Development Agencies with *Local* Enterprise Partnerships and reassert Manchester's historic global prominence. However, in 2011 further civil disturbances in Manchester reflected the contradictory stresses created by top-down government policy making in the face of recession including the dismantling of regional policy and the substitution of poorly resourced alternative partnerships under the banner of 'localism'

Civil unrest spread from north to south London with considerable loss of property before erupting in four other major cities. Beginning in Tottenham on Saturday 6th August by Monday 8th August, unrest had spread to 44 areas nationally, including Manchester and adjacent Salford, with an estimated 13,000 - 15,000 people were actively involved in the riots across England (Riots Communities and Victims Panel, 2011).

Five lives were lost in addition to the fatal shooting by police which triggered the initial Tottenham riot. These disturbances preceded the “Occupy” movement, part of a wider and more focussed international expression of dissatisfaction with the governance of financial institutions and with national government austerity programmes.

In 1981 the national government insisted that the widespread disturbances were criminal and not political but in August 2011 Prime Minister Cameron contrasted the 1981 ‘political’ riots with subsequent 2011 ‘criminal’ disturbances.

Immediately after the civil unrest of 9th August 2011 the slogan ‘Love Manchester’ appeared. Manchester had launched a campaign utilising the slogan derived from I ♥ NY, This widely imitated campaign originated as an initiative taken in a troubled decade for the U.S. city, in which local government debt impacted on services and perceptions. Countless cities, including Manchester had already created their version of the iconic slogan, but the city council now placed it at the core of a campaign which also co-opted the same social media alleged to have been used by the rioters to avoid police and to coordinate attacks (Newburn et al, 2011; The Guardian, 2011).

In May 2017 a suicide bomb attack at an Ariana Grande concert at the Manchester Arena targeting a predominantly teenage audience caused 22 fatalities and significant serious casualties. Within hours a symbol of solidarity and resistance for the city appeared in the form of hitherto relatively obscure symbol from city official coat of arms – a stylised worker bee which featured at the top of the crest symbolising the industriousness of the city. In recent years it had appeared as a minor decorative detail in public buildings and on street furniture but within hours it was appearing across the city. Thousands of young people queued for hours to receive bee tattoos in return for donations to an emergency relief fund. Very quickly the public transport and commercial premises began to display this new symbol of unity This spontaneous and inclusive addition to the city’s brand portfolio became a symbol of solidarity and resistance and a striking example of co-creation (Little and Go, 2013)

Discussion

The re-scaling of both living and working spaces in developed economies during the last 100 years has led to cities and regions which no longer fit easily into the new networks of production. Trickett and Lee (2011) argue that to develop policies which re-connect with the altered economic landscape, regional leaders and policy makers in older conurbations must take account of the historical path dependencies which created these places, and the potential for unintended effects from any intervention. The experience of Manchester shows that narratives shared by stakeholders are a key resource for the development of social cohesion in the face of disruptive events.

Manchester City Council has been Labour controlled and close to successive Labour governments but has also adapted to an entrepreneurial frame of reference, negotiating with all comers. The city has maintained its historic aspirations. The presence of nationally and internationally significant universities and research institutions in and around the city, and the convergence of technical and social innovation through the vehicle of Media City indicate that Manchester retains its capacity for innovation and impact.

In the immediate aftermath of the disturbances of August 2011 the Manchester local authorities deployed traditional communication forms as well as co-opting the social media

identified by some commentators as central to the propagation of unrest and criminality (Ball and Lewis, 2011). These efforts sit within a conventional approach to brand management and development in line with the neoliberal notion of 'New Public Management.' Manchester as a city within the reconstituted greater Manchester region and within the broader context of north-west England was able to call upon a related set of nested brands and identities.

The much more viral response that followed the 2017 Arena bombing counters the process of corporatisation and de-politicisation in which the forms of corporate communication have been replacing traditional democratic discourse (Cochrane 1988). The 'leave' vote in the EU referendum reflected disillusion in the ability of local, national and supranational institutions to deliver meaningful results on the ground. The subsequent 2017 General Election saw a significant increase in participation by younger voters, a reversal of previous trends suggesting a potential conflict in expectations between a re-energised public and corporatised local institutions.

The new Greater Manchester city region mayoral office and associated bodies face the task of managing the development of the new institutional relationships made possible by the latest round of devolution to city regions. The 'institutional entrepreneurship' this demands (Sotarauta and Pulkkinen, 2011) will need to reflect an emerging bottom-up appreciation of the city region's identity, How these take shape will be a fruitful area for further investigation.

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