In Search of the City in Spatial Strategies:

Past Legacies, Future Imaginings

For Urban Studies

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ABSTRACT

This paper addresses the ways in which urban regions are represented in contemporary urban policies. In doing so it critically examines how urban trends are reflected in diverse notions of ‘cityness’ in contemporary policy discourses about spatiality and territoriality. Through a detailed case study of the use, and construction, of the word ‘city’ in a range of urban governance contexts in Newcastle upon Tyne, this paper analyses the political work done by diverse representations, and invocations, of ‘cityness’ in contemporary urban governance. Such representations matter as the way contemporary cities are conceptualised influences policy formulations and policy outcomes. In addition, considerable emphasis is being placed in contemporary urban policy on ‘joining-up’, ‘integrating’ and co-ordinating governance efforts. How conceptions of the city are mobilized to do such integrating work provides insight into the challenge such ambitions present. The evidence from the case study suggests that the capacity of local actors to think about the processes of change in metropolitan regions, and to define the ways in which they can respond, is often limited, as they struggle to define what their ‘city’ actually might be these days. This tends to be to the detriment of collective attempts to maximize conditions for citizens and for investment.
1. INTRODUCTION: THE CITY AS ‘IMAGINED ENVIRONMENT’

“Representations inform our capacity, and our need, to imagine “the city”’

James Donald (2000, 53)

This paper concerns itself with four questions. First, how is the word city actually used in contemporary policy discourse? Second, what spaces, trends and themes are present and absent from contemporary policy discourses and portrayals of ‘cityness’? Third, what meanings are invoked by the word ‘city’? In particular, in contemporary governance contexts where ‘integrating’, ‘coordinating’ and ‘joining-up’ policy is to the fore, it is important to assess how far mobilizations of the word ‘city’ are complementary and to what extent they contradict and compete with each other in specific contexts. Finally, and relatedly, what institutional work does the ‘city’ word do in such ‘joining-up’ efforts, in coalition building, agenda setting, and the discursive production of both political power and the meaning of place?

To address these questions the paper has three parts which follow this introduction. First, we briefly analyse three key transformations that are changing the ways in which contemporary cities are being imagined. We do this by briefly exploring socio-economic, cultural, spatial and technological trends which may influence conceptions of the city both in collective discourses and consciousness and public policy and planning arrangements. We are particularly concerned here with how such trends have undermined ‘modern’ notions of the city as a unitary and internally integrated space that can be easily identified and separated off from the worlds around it. A key question, then, is whether it matters that strategies for the same place make similar points and have a similar conception of what the modern city is
about? Whilst past ideas of the city were always as much discursive constructions as observable ‘realities’ – often invoked and developed to construct dominant notions of order, scale, and governance – ‘unitary’ conceptions of the city are considered to be no longer tenable in describing the world for many reasons.

At the heart of these debates lies a central paradox: proliferating spatial strategies to manage, plan and govern ‘cityness’ coexist with an inchoate series of meanings and representations of a city’s characteristics (Albrechts et al. 2001; Amin, Massey et al. 2000; Healey 2002). The widening efforts by a whole range of governance regimes, stakeholders, and policy makers who, either implicitly or explicitly, are attempting to grapple with, or invoke, concepts of ‘cityness’ co-exists uneasily with a widespread sense of confusion and contradiction about what such ‘cityness’ might actually be about. This matters in the practice of spatial strategy-making especially and in the practice of ‘joining up’ governance efforts. However, we argue that, amidst such confusion, and within the context of increasingly complex systems of urban governance, the notion of the ‘city’ – if invoked in very flexible ways – could be a central coalescing force. Such a conception may provide a ‘lightning conductor’ which helps to integrate, and provide collective meaning to, discourses about urban strategic spatial planning, urban ‘regeneration’ and ‘renaissance’, urban cultural planning, city transport and accessibility, urban ‘sustainability’, and a whole gamut of social, educational and health improvement initiatives aimed at reducing ‘social exclusion’. But does it help to have some kind of unified view and if so how can such a view accommodate the difference that is increasingly recognized within cities? Or should a singular view be avoided? Do notions of ‘city’ help policy-makers at all in governance efforts?

A dominant tactic of many strategies developed for and about urban issues is to invoke
‘cityness’ through the use of metaphors, both implicitly and explicitly (see Fischer 2003). Cities are often constructed as machinic, systemic, corporeal or organic. Their problems and assets are often compared to the pathologies or attributes of bodies or technological systems (Donald, 1999). Such metaphors help the ‘city’ to do political work by tying (or attempting to tie) together multiple actors into governance coalitions. Such metaphors are also invoked to legitimize certain urban governance agendas (while inevitably obfuscating others). This discussion provides the basis for the third part of the paper, where we analyse in detail the ways in which the word ‘city’ is used in contemporary urban and regional policy discourses related to the area of the City of Newcastle upon Tyne in North East England. Through an analysis of policy documentation in urban governance, spatial planning, urban regeneration, health and transportation policy in this particular metropolitan region, we seek to identify the institutional work done by the wide ranging and various invocations of cityness.

The city has always been an "imagined environment" (Donald, 1999, 27; Healey, 2002a). Ways of seeing cities have long been critical in shaping the form, experience and governance of urbanity (ibid.). Such conceptions have proved exceptionally important historically in land-use planning. More recently, throughout Europe and beyond, this policy domain has broadened and redefined itself in a new form of ‘spatial planning’. Such conceptions carry great significance as it is in this policy domain where the contemporary governance for much ‘joining-up’ effort is proposed to occur (Albrechts, 2004; Albrechts et al, 2003; Faludi, 2002; Harris et al, 2002; OECD, 2001; RTPI, 2003; Salet and Faludi 2000). Thus, conceptualisations become more significant due to the possible increase in importance of the policy field. But to perform institutional work, conceptions have to be seen to carry meaning and political authority across policy communities. Such issues, alongside the recognition that many representations of city will exist, is established in academic debate. It is less well
established how such ideas permeate governance practice, however, and this is explored through the case study.

The final concluding section draws together the theoretical and empirical material to discuss how cities are represented in contemporary policy-making; how far these representations reflect/relate to the contemporary problematising of the nature of the city; and how the challenges arising from these concerns might be addressed in future governance efforts.

2. PROBLEMATISING THE CONTEMPORARY CITY

“There exists no privileged vantage point from which to attain panoptic clairsty in representations of the city” (Flusty, 2000, 157).

What is a contemporary city? How can the nature of cities be invoked or described in policy discourses to connect meaningfully with the collective consciousness of urban dwellers and build meaningful urban governance coalitions? Our starting point is that all such efforts to make the word city do political work will inevitably involve what Rob Shields has called "treacherous selective vision" (1995, 245). Because the multiple time-spaces, processes and subjectivities of cities cannot be generalised with one representation, efforts to attach meaning to the word city through words, maps or images will inevitably prioritise certain spaces, people, metaphors and discourses over others. Invocations of the nature of contemporary cityness are therefore inevitably power-laden acts. They will pick out and highlight a small subset of the unknowable totality that constitutes an urban place in an effort to support particular normative notions of urban re-ordering, urban politics, and urban
redistribution over others. This, of course, has always been so. But the dangers of such "treacherous selective vision" are now multiplied in the contemporary context by rapid geographical, socio-technical and cultural transformations in the nature of urban places, which tend to undermine the value or resonance of classical or modern norms and representations of what it means to be a city. We discuss three dimensions to this challenge below.

**Spatial sprawl, technological mobilities, and the collapsing ‘coherence’ of city socio-economies**

The idealised structures of classical urbanism and urban geography – centre and periphery, urban fringe, inside/outside, city/countryside -- are increasingly at odds with the polycentric and dispersed forms and landscapes of most contemporary urban areas (Ascher, 1995, Bertolini, 2000). At the same time, massive increases in technologically-mediated flows - of people, goods, waste materials, information, services, ideas, images, capital and labour-challenge the notion of urban boundaries. Socio-economic processes in cities have never been entirely separable from those operating at wider scales but the levels to which they are integrated and ‘exposed’ to the ‘outside’ is unprecedented (Virilio, 1989, Roberts et al, 1999). This, in turn, challenges the modern tradition of urban planning and governance tended to see cities effectively as unitary objects, coincident with specific administrative jurisdictions and amenable to physical intervention at the local level. As Painter (2000, 13) puts it, new ‘relational’ ontologies of the city involve “starting with the assumption that cities and regions (and indeed states) are not unitary, cohesive or integrated, and that any coherence that does emerge will be unstable, fleeting, and probably unintended and unreproducible” (see Amin and Graham, 1998, Graham and Healey, 1999, Graham and Marvin, 2001).
For centuries, the scale and spread of the greatest cities have far exceeded the perceptive reach of their inhabitants. And yet, the more recent physical spread of cities into multi-centred urban regions increasingly renders obsolete the traditional notion of the physical city as a bounded, traversible space with a defined limit and surrounded by countryside (Van Houum and Lagendijk, 2001). To Skeates, the very distinctiveness of a place called the ‘city’ is now threatened by peripheralisation, sprawl, the blurring of urban-rural distinctions and accelerating technological mobilities (especially information technologies and the automobile) (see Boeri, 1998, 1999). He argues that:

"we can no longer use the term city in the way it has been used to describe an entity which, however big and bloated, is still recognisable as a limited and bounded structure which occupies a specific space. In its place we are left with the urban: neither city in the classical sense of the word, nor country" (1997, 6)

**Globalisation, scale and urban governance**

The second challenge to representations of cityness, which follows from the first, comes from this continued ‘rescaling’ and reconfiguration of cities as economic spaces within globalising capitalism. The idea of the city as an arena of political representation for a bounded, internally integrated array of economic interests is gradually being unbundled by contemporary trends. There are two sides to this challenge. First, local economies are, in many cases, becoming more fragmented as sectors become more tied to non-local circuits of exchange than to Neo-Marshallian interactions within local space.
Second, processes of globalisation are leading to an increasing spatial selectivity of urban, regional and nation state governance processes. This is occurring as redistributive, strategic and Keynesian models of territorial management give way to the entrepreneurial packaging of ‘competitive’ strategic spaces selected and partitioned from the urban whole (Jones, 1997). As Gleeson and Low (2000, 275) point out, the deregulation of Keynesian, strategic spatial planning that has often paralleled processes of neo-liberal globalisation coincides, paradoxically, with intense state fiscal, legal and discursive support to privilege certain investment nodes. Such ‘entrepreneurial’ urban planning has supported state-backed redevelopment of river and water front spaces and major urban festivals, events, and ‘glocal’ infrastructural and technological developments. Rather than orchestrating the development of a city’s territory as a whole within regional and national hinterlands, the emphasis has been on using public funds to subsidise and equip selected strategic local spaces to emerge to anchor a city’s position within national and international circuits of exchange. Such projects, which Brenner labels “glocal scalar fixes” (1998a), generally emphasise the construction of intense local-global (or ‘glocal’) connectivities of strategic spaces, allowing them, in effect, to bypass the surrounding hinterlands of the spatially adjacent, but relationally distant, city spaces (see Graham and Marvin, 2001).

Thus, such processes tend to undermine and problematise the notion of a city as a territorially coherent economic space to be managed, regulated and governed as a whole. In such environments a spatial strategy for a city is frequently merely an envelope for packaging together these elements alongside others that may emphasise greater degrees of protection for areas from development or promote a more relaxed planning regime. It may thus perform a useful integrative function for policies within these spaces but falls short of what a spatial strategy might potentially achieve in a broader sense.
Multiculturalism and the changing urban politics of difference

Thirdly, many writers on the contemporary city emphasise the cultural diversity of contemporary urban life. This diversity is most obvious where it is represented in the cultural demands and practices of different ethnic groups. But the concept of the multi-cultural city can also be extended to include a wide range of other fractures in society, such as class, gender and sexual differences, and, more widely, the diverse cultural practices associated with lifestyle ‘choices’ (Sandercock 1998a,b). Understood in this way, city dwellers typically have multiple identity resources. This may sometimes generate the enjoyment and creativity which is often associated with positive notions of ‘cityness’. But it may also lead to tensions and segregations between groups and psychological angst for individuals.

Many contemporary metaphors of ‘cityness’ thus seek to address the increasing cultural heterogeneity and cosmopolitanism of urban spaces, partly because urban spaces are the key sites and attractors within internationalising flows of people, cultures and religious, sexual and consumption practices. How urban governance discourses and ideas of the city respond to the tensions and opportunities raised by growing heterogeneity and multiculturalism have become key concerns in the urban policy and planning literatures (Sandercock, 1998). This is especially so as such transformations challenge the modernist principles at the heart of urban planning that tend to favour acting in a definable singular ‘public interest’, with rational ‘coherence’ and urban public order imposed on the city ‘from above’ through the expert powers of the usually white, middle-class, middle aged and heterosexual men who, invariably, were the planning ‘experts’ (Holston, 1998). Such traditions of modern city planning tended to favour “rationality, comprehensiveness, planning hierarchy, positivist science with its propensity for quantitative modelling and analysis, belief in state-directed
futures and in the existence of a single ‘public interest’ that can be identified by planners and is gender and race neutral” (Baeten, 2001, 57).

On the one hand, new metaphors and representations of the city may be invoked which celebrate, construct and nurture a positive politics of difference, as Harvey (1996) and Swyngedouw (1999), amongst others, have urged. David Harvey argues that in the contemporary multicultural city:

"The tensions of heterogeneity cannot and should not be repressed. They must be liberated in socially exciting ways -- even if it means more rather than less conflict, including contestation over the socially necessary socialization of market processes for collective needs. Diversity and difference, heterogeneity of values, lifestyle oppositions and chaotic migrations are not to be feared as sources of disorder. Cities that cannot accommodate the diversity, the migratory movements, the new lifestyles and the new economic, political, religious and value heterogeneity, will die either though ossification and stagnation or because they will fall apart in violent conflict” (Harvey, 1996, 437-8)

On the other hand, however, a repressive politics of multiculturalism can easily emerge which discursively challenges and undermines the legitimacy of the multicultural city (Robins, 1999). Idealised metaphors or depictions of urban ‘order’ and nationalist or urban-regional collective memory have long been used to hide or undermine progressive politics of difference (Boyer, 1986). Within cities, immigrants are often reviled because they challenge accepted notions of order, modernity and the city and “contaminate ‘our’ (male, white) order, ‘our’ national, cultural, sexual identities” (Robins, 1995, 7). The exodus of white middle class citizens from city cores is often depicted as a crisis while an influx of migrants to the inner city is cast as an
inner city ‘problem’ rather than a solution to the fiscal and physical impacts of out-migration. Speaking of such debates in the Brussels context Baeten (2001: 65) writes that:

“the perpetuation of dystopian urban governance discourses has profound political implications. It contributes to the persistence of anti-urban sentiments and to the reinforcement of paternalistic, sexist and racist policies that will do more harm than good for the problems it sets to tackle... We are in need of a new armature of urban governance concepts that empowers the disempowered”.

A distinctive characteristic of the three trends discussed above is that they reflect a multi-layered, relational view of cityness (Amin and Graham, 1998; Amin et al, 2000; Graham and Healey, 1999; Healey, 2000). Thinking in this way highlights the increasing size and spatial reach of cities. It is a perspective which emphasizes that increasing linkages between the ‘contents’ of cities and the spaces beyond the administrative boundaries of urban regions can be more important more than internal relationships in relational terms. Coupled with this, increasing diversity makes a singular public interest impossible to locate and define in governance practice. Yet taken for granted routines, ideas and discourses may continue to embody more traditional notions of the unitary, integrated city and, as a consequence, may poorly reflect what is actually happening and reinforce existing power relations and asymmetries. We now further explore these tensions in governance practice and discourse through a case study.

3. SEARCHING FOR THE ‘CITY’ IN SPATIAL STRATEGIES:
A CASE STUDY OF NEWCASTLE UPON TYNE, 1997-2002
Given the above discussion, how do agencies and actors in urban governance deal with these broader processes and ideas which together so effectively seem to problematise and undermine modern notions of coherent, ordered, bounded and unitary cityspaces? How, in other words, are the dynamic transformations above reflected in invocations of ‘cityness’ in discourses of urban governance? What meanings are invoked about the ‘city’ amidst these turbulent conditions and what institutional work is the word city mobilised to do?

In what follows we present the results of an analysis of spatial referents in documents published in a five year period that were intended to express some kind of strategy within the city of Newcastle upon Tyne, the regional metropolitan capital of North East England. Our starting point is that such discourses, and the metaphors mobilized within them, have both a descriptive and a performative purpose (Sayer 2000). Our analysis covers discourses of urban ‘regeneration’, ‘sustainability’, mobility, health and urban planning. This section examines in detail how notions of cityness are being invoked in these contemporary policy discourses.

The documents were selected to represent a range of policy areas. Some, such as the Unitary Development Plan, are actively charged with generating a future vision for the City. Others are interesting because of the ways in which they do and do not invoke ideas of cityness to do institutional work. Some strategies are chosen that are concerned with broader spatial scales. In these cases, we also look for how ideas of cityness are represented and used to perform institutional work. In line with the importance attributed to them in the analysis in part one of the paper, we look particularly for the metaphors, storylines and tropes that are invoked and how these reflect how practitioners interpret the dimensions outlined in part two of this paper. The section is ordered according to the metaphors uncovered in the
analysis.

There are a number of issues associated with using Newcastle upon Tyne as a case study that are important to note. Newcastle upon Tyne is not a free-standing city. It forms part of a conurbation that has exhibited a strongly polynuclear urban form for several centuries, largely achieved through aggregation and coalescence (see FIG 1). And, as indicated in Figure One, development proposals suggest that polynodality will, if anything, increase in the near future. To focus our search for representations of the city, we use the area defined by the administrative boundary of the Newcastle City Council. However, these administrative boundaries cut through the urban fabric, with North Tyneside Metropolitan Borough abutting Newcastle to the East, and Gateshead, South Tyneside and then Sunderland across the river Tyne to the South. Even within the City boundary, there are many individual places with strong local identities that can make agreements within and among administrations difficult.

FIGURE 1, MAP OF CITY-REGION

In addition to these administrative factors, the economic transformation of the area and wider sub-region provides an important backdrop to policy-makers’ attempts to construct metaphors that promote the area in arenas within and beyond the immediate locale. In common with many European conurbations that owe much of their contemporary form to nineteenth century industrialisation, the Tyneside conurbation has suffered from large-scale employment loss in manufacturing industry, in this instance particularly due to the decline of ship-building and heavy engineering. New employment has tended to be in service industries: financial services’ back offices, IT, and call centres in particular. For over thirty years there has been a steady level of out-migration from Newcastle, much of it to the surrounding rural hinterland.
Thus, some development, particularly of new housing, has, in common with many British provincial cities, leapfrogged the conurbation’s green belt and occurred in smaller rural settlements. There has, however, also been a considerable amount of in-filling of land within city boundaries, but beyond traditional settlements, for housing development, often at low density.

However, in contrast to many other UK cities, most new employment, retail, office and leisure development occurred within existing urban boundaries in the 1980s and 1990s. Central Newcastle has retained its prominence in retail, commercial and administrative terms despite the development of new locations beyond traditional central areas, although less robust secondary retail, leisure and office locations have been damaged by peripheral developments. All these trends have contributed toward a greater dispersal of travel patterns across the conurbation and wider (sub) region, in a symbiotic relationship with a growth in car ownership.

So Newcastle is not a free-standing city at the top of a hierarchy of urban centres. Nor is it an administrative area coterminous with a discrete labour market. Like other cities, it has experienced decentralisation within and beyond its boundaries and a complex restructuring of urban space in line with much of the discussion in part two. It is also struggling to accommodate ethnic and cultural difference, albeit from a base as a very white, working class place. As in other places in England, the various policy actors are also struggling to coordinate a range of strategic initiatives to join up governance efforts aimed at improving the economic and social development of the territory and make the sum of the strategies greater than the value of the individual parts. It is to these efforts that we now turn.
Constructing place through metaphor

In general terms, areas will always be (re)inventing themselves both in a material sense as the physical fabric is renewed and developed but also mentally as representations change. Thus, at any one time, a huge array of complementary and sometimes contradictory discourses about a city is under formation, challenge and dissemination. Newcastle is no exception. In broad terms, a shared general storyline exists in policy documents that the City is in a transition from an industrial past to a post-industrial future. Beyond this, a range of diverse metaphors, tropes, storylines and discourses are being used to invoke and promote the new landscape. Some of these are primarily opportunistic, to take advantage of funding opportunities for example. Others are homegrown, coming out of particular policy or cultural communities, often given a helping hand by local agencies. Sometimes the audience for the discourse is external to the city, an inward investment community for example. On other occasions the discourse is primarily internal - a local authority communicating with its citizens for instance. In most of the policy documentation that is analysed below, the ‘City’ appears as merely a backdrop, a descriptor for where things are. But in other instances ‘City’ and other spatial conceptions are invoked to do policy work, to communicate a message or promote a particular argument. It is these latter instances that we focus upon. Table 1 summarises the documents examined, their role, and the institutions responsible for their preparation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Document / Policy Area</th>
<th>Aims</th>
<th>Institutional Responsibility</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tyne and Wear Local Transport Plan 2001-06 (published 2000)</td>
<td>To identify and prioritise transport investment in the wider metropolitan area</td>
<td>Produced by political and officer groupings derived from the 5 metropolitan districts in the conurbation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Realising our potential’</td>
<td>To identify priorities for</td>
<td>Produced by One North</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Document Title</td>
<td>Purpose</td>
<td>Organization/Producer</td>
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<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>North East England Regional Economic Strategy (published 1999)</td>
<td>economic development in the North East region.</td>
<td>East, the regional development agency (a central government directed quango)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Draft Regional Planning Guidance for North East England (1999)</td>
<td>To provide a context for the development of local development plans as well as other strategies produced at regional level</td>
<td>Produced by the Association of North East Councils (ANEC) and then subject to an inquiry panel and formal approval by central government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grainger Town Strategy (various documents)</td>
<td>To regenerate the nineteenth century core of Newcastle city centre</td>
<td>Grainger Town Partnership (a formal public body from 1997-2003, at ‘arms-length’ from direct political control)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newcastle and Gateshead City of Culture Bid 2008 (published 2003)</td>
<td>To harness the cultural identity and dynamic of the trans-Tyne metropolitan area to gain official designation as a first class European cultural space</td>
<td>‘NewcastleGateshead’ - a small partnership organisation between the two local authorities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Fair Chance in Life Action Plan: Tackling Health Inequalities in Tyne and Wear (1999)</td>
<td>To tackle health inequalities and modernise and improve services, especially through links to other initiatives such as New Deal for Communities.</td>
<td>Tyne and Wear Health Alliance: a quango to implement a ‘Health Action Zone’ strategy across the conurbation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City of Newcastle Unitary Development Plan (1998)</td>
<td>To provide policy principles for the guidance of detailed land use regulation decisions</td>
<td>Newcastle City Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competitive Newcastle (1999)</td>
<td>To revitalise the City’s economy through constructing 10 self-sustaining ‘high tech’ clusters</td>
<td>Newcastle City Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Going for Growth’ (main strategy document pub. 2000)</td>
<td>To reverse population loss from Newcastle through the regeneration of ‘rundown’ areas</td>
<td>Newcastle City Council (with inputs from Richard Rogers Partnership)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the discussion that follows, we identify a range of metaphors and meanings derived from the documents outlined in Table 1 that convey how the City was being mentally constructed and conveyed in strategic policy documentation at this time. We recognize that this is only a partial representation of the different ways a city may be constructed at any one moment but it provides a way to uncover how a key constituency, public sector stakeholders, were conceiving of and representing both the city and their role as ‘city-shapers’, in the course of their efforts to develop strategic policies.
The remainder of this section explores how the three trends outlined in Part Two are reflected in policy documentation in the case study.

**Globalisation, scale and urban governance: Representing the ‘City’ as asset store**

The first identifiable storyline from our analysis promotes the ‘City’ as an asset or store of assets useful in creating and maintaining ‘regional attractiveness’. In the Regional Economic Strategy (RES), for example, a language of protecting and improving the environmental asset base is promoted. It is clear that the primary motivation to do so is to attract inward investment, reflecting the dominance of an economic competitiveness discourse in policy-making in the locality and the wider region. This discourse is also expressed in talk of a ‘confident region’. This storyline emphasises the asset of a strong sense of regional identity. It uses this to attempt to build inclusiveness in governance processes and also in justifying efforts at drawing all citizens into mainstream employment. In this context, there is much discussion of communities and building them. This is a rare example in the region of a genuinely visionary statement but it remains mostly aspirational with little sense of how its aims are to be achieved.

A long-standing discourse of concern to an economic development community is that of ‘peripherality’. It is clear that policy-makers are aware of the importance of linkages external to the region in the economic and spatial planning strategies. The North East is seen in both the RES and RPG as a region lying at the periphery of core markets in Europe and, to a lesser extent, nationally. Regional policy actors interestingly try to recast this debate to show that the region is not that peripheral through the use of visual material (see Figure 2) and by highlighting the importance of knowledge and skills rather than distance and physical
contiguity in the knowledge economy. The implications for urban policy actors in the City is that they must invest in skills and knowledge development but there are links here to the ‘attractiveness’ storyline noted above. In a knowledge economy where key workers need to be attracted and retained, a quality urban environment is noted as being critical. Within this discourse, Newcastle City Council promotes itself as a ‘City of European importance’; a position reiterated in some regional policy statements also (see ANEC 1999). This positioning, in a European space in particular, emphasises the asset base of Newcastle, particularly cultural assets and infrastructure, and especially its connectedness through scheduled air links to ‘similar’ European cities (ANEC 1999; NCC 1998). Newcastle is thus promoted as a regional asset, underpinned by the notion that it is the only settlement in the region with the capability of competing on a European / World stage.

FIGURE 2: The North East and Europe (ANEC 1999, p.81)

The region’s cities in particular are referred to as key ‘assets’ both for the existing people of the region and in terms of drawing people and investment into them. The cities act as focal points for various social, cultural, economic and educational activities (ANEC, 1999). This storyline translates down to a focus on ‘attractive places’ at the urban scale and also to individual places as attractive locales. The ‘city,’ then, becomes a (highly selective) collection of locales for such purposes mirroring the concerns expressed by Brenner (1998b) of mobilizing ‘glocal scalar fixes’, thus pouring resources into premium spaces. Here, ‘livability’ as well as environmental quality is emphasized, again primarily as an asset for drawing in inward investment. Newcastle is seen as an economic driver for the region as a whole. In policy terms such aspirations link with central government concerns to promote an ‘urban renaissance’ in the UK for social, economic and environmental reasons. This supports a
focus on town and city centers as well as certain local communities.

Newcastle City Council also promotes itself as a *competitive city* within an explicitly broader context, with the City described as being ‘a competitive, knowledge rich space in a global economy’. Nearby Sunderland, by contrast, is not promoted in this way, even though in population terms it is a larger administration. Sunderland is promoted at regional and more local levels as a ‘Centre of Advanced Manufacturing.’ Implicitly this is a more targeted positioning within a narrower constituency, thus differentiating different roles for cities in a global marketplace.

**Spatial sprawl, technological mobilities, and the collapsing ‘coherence’ of city socio-economies: ‘city’ as critical node**

The ‘City’ was also often invoked as a descriptor in all of the documentation analysed in terms of containing nodes of activity and hubs to connect into when passing through, due to the concentrations of transport links etc. Newcastle City Centre is highlighted as being the key nodal point in the City, and indeed often the region, due to the density of connections here. This area is often portrayed by Newcastle City Council as being the centre of a hub and spoke radial model of urban form, rather than as part of a polynodal, multiplex urban region. This representation fails to acknowledge changes in the spatial form of the City of the last two decades as well as a tendency to see the City as a far more discrete container than in reality it is. Although the City Council’s policy statements acknowledge the existence of overlapping development markets, in one sense it appears to believe its own hype that its area is the only one that matters in certain discourses surrounding business development (see later). In contrast, other parts of the conurbation such as North Tyneside are portrayed
in similar documentation, perhaps more realistically, as being located within “a complex conurbation with a significant degree of interdependence in work place, housing, transport, social and leisure activities…[influential factors] can arise from local, regional, national and increasingly international considerations” (NTMBC, 1996, para 3.3). In this context Newcastle City Centre is perceived as an important destination among many. There are thus different visions of functionality for particular spaces within the conurbation. These can give rise to contestation, however, when questions surrounding transport funding or regional priorities are considered.

**Multiculturalism and the changing urban politics of difference: ‘city’ as cultural artifact**

While economic competitiveness concerns dominated much strategic policy discussion, cultural issues, often linked to this agenda, were strongly emergent in the public sector documentation examined. How far do these documents reflect the diverse or multicultural city in policy discourse outlined in the earlier part of this paper? We focus especially on a bid from Newcastle City Council and the neighbouring borough of Gateshead to be European City of Culture in 2008. The bid was constructed to build on ‘jointly held values’, on the area’s ‘unique genetic code’, as the documentary material termed it. The bid provided the opportunity to develop existing cultural activity in the conurbation, so generating new events and material. It also helped to construct a metropolitan view that transcended individual local authority boundaries and long-standing rivalries. In terms of flagship events and projects, the emphasis again reflected Brenner’s notion of the ‘scalar fix’ deploying particular spaces, particularly the regenerated quayside, where major new arts facilities were opening in 2002 and 2003, with other major projects also located in Newcastle City Centre itself. Acknowledged in some of the policy documentation was a danger that, despite its attempts at inclusivity (references to historical figures and local specificities) much of the City and the
wider conurbation would be bypassed and/or matters of cultural significance within certain communities not addressed. That said, there was evidence of increasing attention to such inclusivity questions as the bid developed.

Linked to the cultural agenda, Newcastle City Council mobilised its cityness in two further ways. First, widespread efforts were made to construct Newcastle as a ‘party city’. This storyline builds on a traditional working class culture of ‘going out’ in a tightly defined, although now expanding, area of the City Centre (Chatterton and Hollands, 2001). The listing of Newcastle as one of the ten top global city travel destinations by a US travel magazine in the early 1990s did much to promote this discourse and city authorities have latched on to its potential in attracting visitors, as have other European cities with traditionally small tourist populations. The use of the party city metaphor garnered negative associations in the late 1990s, however, as a small but increasing city centre population began to question the wisdom of the expansion of facilities catering for groups attracted by the tag and by the resultant noise and other externalities generated. Certainly, the party city discourse focused on a small part of the City and a narrow range of interests and groups. In escaping the confines of this context, Newcastle City Council has also sought to define its area as a ‘cosmopolitan capital’ (NCC, 2000). There are some tensions here between this storyline and the ‘party city’ storyline which is largely aimed at a single dominant cultural group and tends to alienate other users of particular spaces at particular times.

These conceptions collide in the experience of the Grainger Town Project (GTP), a partnership initiative to promote the regeneration and conservation of the nineteenth century historic core of Newcastle’s city centre. In the mid-1990s, consultants envisioned the city in terms of a cosmopolitan ‘European city’, with urban quarters with different characteristics.
Critical to a dynamic, lively city was the notion of a mix of activities intertwining in a ‘24-hour city’ (EDAW, 1996). This increasingly came to mean combining city centre living with the lively entertainment environment of a northern ‘party city’. As the numbers of more affluent residents increased, the strategic approach had to pay more attention to the fine-grain of this difficult combination (Healey et al. 2002). GTP did much to tackle these conflicting concerns and showed how small areas can be useful as a focus for integrating policy concerns.

Other policy documentation was a little less culturally sensitive. From 2000 onward, for example, Newcastle City Council engaged in an interesting process of spatial selectivity through its regeneration strategy, Going for Growth (NCC, 2000). This was partly an attempt to position the authority in line with a national emphasis in regeneration policy. Locally, a key driver was continued population loss from the City as a whole. These losses were particularly focused on certain neighbourhoods. This led Newcastle City Council to focus on areas where the viability of key services was under threat. Using a variety of often highly innovative methods, the Council arrived at a classification of areas into three using a metaphor of the traffic light. ‘Red’ areas were those considered problematic and were grouped together as the ‘middle city’. This consisted predominantly of areas of working class, low cost housing, sometimes with significant concentrations of ethnic minorities. Such a construction, along with tales of the ineffectiveness of past interventions, was used to create an argument that there was only one option for such areas – a large strategic intervention. The intervention selected, partly derived through the use of consultants, was to position new and remodeled ‘urban villages’ in or adjacent to ‘problematic’ areas (Byrne, 2000; Healey 2002b). Visually, the document showed people carrying tennis rackets and in new open-top cars (see Figure Three). Such representations are explicitly not the people who live in these areas currently. There are two issues here. First, this policy represented a significant attempt at gentrification
-- a kind of socio-demographic cleansing of these areas. Second, there was a real danger that the initiative would fail as the people targeted by it would not move back to the ‘middle city’ simply “because there is no need for them to do so” (Byrne 2000: 4). While there are some examples of this process occurring in the conurbation -- heavily linked to land subsidies -- there are no precedents of quite this type or scale within the Newcastle area.

**Figure Three: Regeneration Images of Newcastle’s West End**

Where arguments about spatiality and cityness did arise, they occurred where justification of policy seemed necessary. Thus, the Inner West End was described as ‘run-down’ (JTCG, 2000: 72). This provided justification for a long-standing road scheme to open up the area for development even though the significant dereliction arises in the area partly as a result of the planning blight associated with a 20 year proposal to put a road through it.

Seeing ‘problematic’ inner urban areas in this way is a feature of UK policy discussions and reflects a need by local policy actors to make a case for diverting funds and attention to small areas. The continual drip-feed of money into problem areas led an outgoing Chief Executive of Newcastle City Council to say that for central government civil servants, cities were “places that problems went to get big”. Central government officials appeared to local actors to have no strategic conception of what a city was and how it mattered as an entity. This reinforced a patchwork approach at local level and did little to break out of a highly sectoral approach to mainstream service provision. In part, ‘Going for Growth’ was a local attempt to bridge this deficit by developing a strong statement of city-wide, joined up, strategy. Unfortunately, as we have seen, it was thin in its representation of the city and quickly resorted to familiar segregations and area targeting.
4. THE DIFFUSE AND RARIFIED REPRESENTATION OF A CITY

What, then, does the above analysis tell us about how the word ‘City’ is mobilized in metaphor and representation. As expected, spatial referents are more explicit in urban and regional development documents as opposed to sectoral documents, such as in health policy for example. In these latter cases, a weak spatial consciousness was in evidence. This has some similarities with analysis conducted by Harris and Hooper (2004) in Wales. However, these authors were more optimistic that in Wales implicit spatial referents did capture something of the spatial implications for sectoral policy.

In Newcastle, even in documents such as the Unitary Development Plan, designed to express a spatial strategy, little sense of the particular qualities of cityness of Newcastle comes across. Rather, there are foci on small areas and a lot of thematic discussions aimed at guiding the City Council’s regulatory development control function. The small area focus was also a feature of other policy documentation. Currently, Newcastle City Council is required by new planning legislation to prepare a core strategy as part of a Local Development Framework. It will be interesting to see whether this contains a stronger representation of the ‘city’ i.e. to become less focused toward the regulatory aspects of ‘town and country planning’ and more focused on creating a geo-political spatial strategy (see Harris and Hooper 2004).

The use of the ‘city’ term was absent in other respects too, in that labels that we might expect to find from readings of the academic literature were weak in policy discussion. Terms such
as ‘healthy city’, coined often by the World Health Organisation, and ‘sustainable city’ were actually deployed only in marginal ways in Newcastle. Despite the origins and potentials of such discourses, they were not holistic attempts in our case to look at the city. The ‘City’ was an ethereal referent but without any meaningful content or use as a mobilising force for change. This reflects the engrained power of policy sectors in local government and their close ties vertically to central government where sector activity is regulated and funded. Our case study suggests that the strong, vertical policy ‘silos’ linking urban governance functions to the highly centralized UK state works to detract from a consciousness of the spatial differentiation of the locales into which the policies are delivered.

Overall, a disjunctive set of metaphors, tropes and ideas of what the city is or might be were being invoked in urban governance discourses in Newcastle upon Tyne. This variety in itself is a positive sign of multiple attempts to construct visions of urban futures and reflects the fact that there was no single totalizing discourse in operation that operated to the exclusion of others. However, little explicit consideration, or conception, of what a city might mean these days was evident in our case study. Beyond using the city as a simple place marketing device, little conception of the value of seeing a city in some kind of totality was present, despite some efforts at strategy making. There is, therefore, little evidence of ‘joined-up’ policy-making as far as articulating the ‘city’ context was concerned. Few ideas were shared across the city that could help develop such ‘joining-up’ of conceptions of the city. Getting below this broad level we can now return to the questions posed earlier in the paper to examine in more detail how the city is being mentally constructed and what might be the opportunities and problems arising from such constructions.

First, as the above discussion shows, the term ‘city’ was often used in these policy
discourses as a taken for granted ‘object’ or referent. Little attention was given to its meaning. The term was typically used to imply a ‘container’ that held certain service functions and assets. The meanings in such a use were assumed to be universally understood, with little adaptation to local circumstances. There were few attempts to use such meanings to do institutional work - to mobilize actors or to build institutional capacities to affect some degree of change. This reflects an aspatial tendency frequently observed in the British polity, which in turn remains highly centralized and sectoralised with all sorts of consequences for local efforts to develop policy that reflects local specificities (Vigar et al. 2000). So, ‘Newcastle’ was being positioned within relevant conceptions in different government funding regimes, demonstrating a continued centralisation within English governance. Alternatively, local actors tried to position the City with regard to the spatial maps of trans-national economic actors.

Second, there were few attempts to think through explicitly what a concept of ‘city’ might be for and what its role was, given recent socio-economic change (see also Byrne, 2000). Although under-developed within these diverse conceptions, some implicit recognition of the debates highlighted earlier concerning globalization, spatial splintering and pressures arising from multiculturalism were present.

Third, we note the concerns of Shields (1995) and Brenner (1998a) in the selection of urban sites and processes to represent, and be, the ‘city’. Some spaces were clearly privileged, often very reasonably, for policy attention. Two area types appear to garner most attention in the documentation analysed. First, premium waterfront and central area spaces were being prioritised. This focus was justified partly in terms of using such spaces at the forefront of competition for investment and tourists, thus positioning the City in a European space of
similar cities. It was also justified in cultural terms, with Newcastle City Centre portrayed as being “an essential part of Tyneside’s identity” (JTCG 2000: Newcastle annex, p.2).

In such debates the City was portrayed as a container of assets aimed at audiences external to the conurbation. Certain ‘frontier’ spaces were then promoted in ways that disarticulated them from other, surrounding areas. While there were efforts to make certain key flagship developments accessible to all in the City, these efforts were often struggling against a tide which implicitly privileged certain socio-economic groups for attention whether in a battle for tourists, convention business, or inward investment. In one instance, this can be seen beyond the City Centre and the waterfront with the creation of Newcastle Great Park, a premium space designed to appeal to affluent, highly mobile, skilled, white-collar workers and to attract and retain such workers within the tax base of the City Council. Similarly, the continued focus on long-standing neighbourhoods of concern was useful but somewhat unreflective in its use of the ‘traffic light’ terminology and the early vision statements that inappropriately imposed a vision for such areas derived from that being implemented in the premium spaces.

Documentation from policy sectors such as health, meanwhile, demonstrated little conception of place and space. Certainly, any notion of ‘cityness’ was missing, with many strategies preferring to focus on collections of people or communities, or merely seeing different spatial scales as containers for the delivery of resources. The ‘place’ effects of health policies were poorly articulated in an administrative sense although there was some attention to links between neighbourhood, health and housing agendas, particularly in Health Action Zones. In this latter instance, however, the innovative actions of local actors were reined in by a central state closely allied to an audit culture that forced a refocusing on narrow indicator-based
performance measures derived from a mainstream health agenda. This spatial blindness and selectivity in public policy undermined the emphasis on efficiency and coordination, expressed in the ‘joined-up’ agenda. It also had potential implications for inclusiveness and equality.

Other policy sectors did take a more systematic view of the city and indeed the wider urban-region. In transport - due to the complexities of origins, destinations and network flows - maps and policies illustrated the interdependencies between sites and neighbourhoods at the urban-region scale. Only in the transport section of plans was the polynodal nature of the city and the conurbation clearly acknowledged (see Figure 4).

**Figure Four: Traffic flows in the Conurbation**

Finally, the word city was clearly being used positively in some instances in coalition building, agenda setting and in mobilising stakeholders. The word did indeed operate as a governance ‘lightning conductor’, as a valuable mobilizing metaphor, whose very diffuse meaning, and virtually infinite flexibility of interpretation, makes it useful in the enrolment of diverse stakeholder groups into political coalitions. Such efforts were most visible in relation to the (failed) bid for European City of Culture status in 2008 and in economic development documentation aimed at positioning and promoting the City in a European competitive space. The emergence of ‘NewcastleGateshead’ as an urban construct, mainly in response to the need to develop a broad local base for the European City of Culture 2008 bid, represents a representational innovation that has rapidly gained recognition and in some instances helped overcome long-standing institutional rivalry. That said, ‘city’ was being used in such discourses much less than we expected. Developing a debate on the meaning of the ‘city’
and places within it was thus largely ignored as a political project which could help to make multiple policy interventions more co-ordinated and ‘joined-up’.

5. CONCLUSIONS

What, then, can we draw from our case study in addressing whether conceptual diffuseness and limited attention to how cities are represented in contemporary policy-making matters and how representations of city relate to the contemporary problematising of the nature of the city?

In general, we would argue that there is a lack of explicit attention in urban and regional planning as to what the word ‘city’ might actually mean these days. The many processes of change that problematise the word ‘city’ and challenge its generally assumed meanings have been largely ignored in such discourses. A consequence of this is that the concepts of the ‘city’ that are invoked, reworked or constructed – either intentionally or unintentionally – tend to rely on a diffuse and extremely flexible series of iconic and historically grounded notions of cityness. While such discourses rely on the interpretive flexibility that the word ‘city’ clearly displays, the uses of the word become so loose and diffuse that, any real meaning can rapidly evaporates. Thus the word ‘city’, and concepts of ‘cityness’, become merely a sort of automatic referent in contemporary, entrepreneurial, and neo-liberal policy discourses. Governance agents tend to throw the word around as a signifier of importance. This is in itself interesting and reflective of something of a renaissance for UK provincial cities compared with the 1970s and 1980s when the city and the urban tended to be viewed more negatively. But our case studies suggest that no one within the complex institutional fabric of
English urban governance seems quite sure what a city means anymore. We believe that this inhibits the development of strategy for cities as complete territorial entities. Such a situation reflects a historical tendency within England to retreat to small areas to deal with urban problems, rather than emphasizing the qualities of cities and the opportunities therein to improve quality of life and economic conditions (DETR 1999).

Here we confront a central paradox. On the one hand, the extraordinary interpretive flexibility of the word ‘city’ means that it can be invoked easily in attempts to build, and maintain, all sorts of diverse urban governance coalitions, rather as the terms ‘sustainable development’ or ‘community’ have in other arenas. On the other hand, however, the discourses that result tend towards the vacuous: genuine debates about the nature of the ‘city’ are notable by their absence. It is possible that organizational fragmentation and the small scale of the city addressed in our case study, in relation to its metropolitan context, work to undermine thinking about cityness in meaningful or strategic ways. But, there is a failure in the Newcastle metropolitan region to capitalize on the potential for a rich and dynamic conception of the city to mobilise attention, galvanise meaning, and co-ordinate action. Such a failure is important because cities are imagined as well as physical entities. They are in part dreamt of by citizens through active debate. The way notions of cityness are used and debated in policy talk therefore matters a great deal.

This analysis inevitably raises the normative challenge: How might the ‘city’ be conceptualized and promoted in more sophisticated ways to do institutional work in relation to policy agendas of both policy co-ordination and of ‘inclusiveness’? First, a greater development of a spatial imagination is required. The type examples of a well-developed spatial imagination in a policy culture is the Netherlands, where spatial ordering concepts are
strongly embedded in policy discourses which guide both land use regulation and development investment (Faludi and Van der Valk 1994, Hajer and Zonneveld 2000). These spatial concepts act as co-ordinative devices which guide a variety of actors in the urban scene while also contributing to the development of institutional capacity through the way policy actors imagine their city.

Second, there is a challenge as regards the theorization of cities at the meso level: to creatively connect abstract theories of contemporary cities with practice. Such a challenge necessitates the grounding of some of the abstract theorisations highlighted in the first part of this Paper. Much more attention is needed here to translate such theorisations into normative concepts for strategic and practical policy work. With a few exceptions, there has been little attempt by the academy to assist here, and contemporary theorizations of the ‘multiplex’ or ‘relational’ city have yet to be applied creatively within urban policy communities with any conviction – despite their obvious promise as supports for the creative reimagination of cityness in real policy contexts (Amin et al 2000).

In this ‘grounding’ process, it would be helpful to explore ways to break free from singular representations of the city toward a more sophisticated approach capable of keeping a range of representations and concerns in play. The first step in practice is to acknowledge the changing nature of the contemporary city and the anachronism of modern, integrated, bounded and ‘unitary’ visions of urban form and process as a basis for policy and planning. The second is to understand and listen to the increasingly heterogeneous populations of urban environments. We suggest that policy-makers need to uncover what these heterogeneities - of lifestyle, identity, value and practices - actually are and what they mean for spatial strategy-making and contemporary notions of ‘cityness’. In the first instance, this
requires efforts by policy actors to construct governance processes that can listen to the diverse communities making up contemporary cities.

Third, such a process must be coupled with experimental approaches to urban representation and visualization. Traditional maps and perspectival drawings are ill-equipped to represent the diversity of the contemporary city but their use is taken for granted in much urban planning practice (Boeri, 1998/1999). Yet it is the urban planning tradition which has seen itself as the guardian of city representation. There is thus something of a paradigm crisis for plan-making within the spatial planning discipline. In our case, the key planning document made little contribution to expanding any conception of the city. The difficulty planners face in this task of representation is that in many planning systems, a formal development plan serves the purpose both of generating a conception of a city and the locales within it and of defining the legal and spatial parameters within which rights to develop sites and properties are established. In some parts of Europe, including England, the tight nexus between these two purposes are being separated, releasing the task of expressing a representation of the city to develop in other, more fluid and heterogeneous ways (ODPM 2004).

To bring our discussion to a close, this paper forcefully suggests the imperative of a recognising that there are multiple ways of understanding and represent contemporary ‘cityness’. There is an important link here between releasing the capacity to imagine the city in multiple ways in urban policy and planning, and the search for more collaborative ways of expressing concepts of cityness in spatial strategies, through the exploration of local contingencies, their meanings and consequences (Healey, 1997). There are signs, through processes of devolution in many national contexts, that further authority for city-regions is
likely to be forthcoming. Thinking through what this freedom means for concepts of cities and the places within them, as locales and ambiances in processes of strategic spatial strategy-making, will be essential if the co-ordinative and interpretive aims of such strategic efforts are to be realised.

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