2 Local leadership and economic regeneration in Leeds

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Re-building an economy: the rise of the entrepreneurial city

The recent economic resurgence of Leeds owes much to its developing role in the international economy, and more specifically to its changing role as a regional centre in the UK and European space economies. The Leeds economy is not a simple passive receptor of external competitive pressures and other restructuring impulses: in a variety of ways the civic leaders of the city have set out to attract, maintain and promote economic development in Leeds. In doing this they have in part sought to react to changing external economic conditions and to the policy directives of the national state in particular, but they have also sought to follow their own course, in response to more localised needs, histories and contestations over preferred policy approaches. Leadership in this policy area in Leeds has primarily rested with local government, although in recent years the emphasis has shifted towards the corporate city alliance of major institutional players across the public and private sectors. It is important in this respect that whilst attempts to regulate economic growth occur at various spatial levels, supra-national, national and local, in recent years it has been widely argued that as part of the after-Fordist search for a new sustainable regime of capitalist accumulation the local state has become an increasingly important site of action for economic regeneration policy (Mayer, 1992; Peck and Tickell, 1994; Tickell and Peck, 1995).

This section introduces aspects of the policy and academic background to the distinctive ‘Corporate City’ approach to local economic development adopted in Leeds. Later sections provide a brief introduction to the dominant position of the local authority through to 1980, followed by a more focused
examination of attempts to create an economic development strategy for the city since then. In particular, the chapter focuses on the work of the Leeds Initiative, which since 1990 has been central to attempts to pursue a corporate city model of public-private partnership action, building a consensus around a strategy for Leeds, and beginning to effect some change.

In the British local government literature of the 1970s, a new corporate approach was advocated as a means of bringing about a shift within local government from relatively unstrategic responses to duties and powers, to a more generalised, strategic responsibility for the well-being of people within an area (Bains, 1972; Stewart, 1973; Keith-Lucas and Richardson, 1978; Cochrane, 1993). This was seen to involve improved high level executive powers within the local authority, and improved working with other local agencies concerned with the overall development of an area, in particular those engaged in the delivery of 'welfare state services.'

Successive central government policy interventions since 1979 have combined to make the same style of inter-corporate working a central element of local authority work, as local authorities have lost responsibilities (such as opt-out schools, further education colleges and the former polytechnics), been forced to comply with Compulsory Competitive Tendering, and experienced resource cutbacks which have hit discretionary spending. In addition, their local external operating environment has altered dramatically, with the re-distribution of powers and resources to a wide range of non-elected local bodies, such as health trusts, Urban Development Corporations (UDCs) and Training and Enterprise Councils (TECs). The combination of increasing resource and legislative constraints on local authorities and an increasingly complex array of edge-of-state bodies, has generated a general shift in policy emphasis from local government to local governance.

In this process of the fracturing and dispersal of powers and resources to a wide range of new bodies operating at the local level, the role of local government has altered dramatically. In particular, it has shifted from being predominantly a frontline provider of services towards being a facilitator and enabler, working with other local bodies to ensure that services are provided within a strategic context for the area as a whole, in a cost-effective and equitable fashion. Local governance then represents a more porous system of power sharing and resource coordination than in the days when many more services were delivered directly by local authorities themselves. Within the still emergent system of UK local governance, accountability has become a major concern: local government has a direct electoral link, which gives it a unique position. However, it is not an unassailable position, as local councils struggle to improve upon the rigidities of representative democracy, notably through experimentation with various forms of participatory democracy (Clarke and Stewart, 1991).

In looking at how the corporate city works, it is also helpful to refer to some of the approaches to urban development which have come out of the United States in recent years. Of particular note are two highly influential bodies of work have grown up around notions of growth machines/growth coalitions, and urban regimes. Growth machines are usually created by coordinated business interests concerned to promote local growth, through permissive land use policies. These "place entrepreneurs" (Logan and Molotch, 1987, p.3) usually coalesce around property interests, whilst seeking to mobilise others behind their strategies, such as local utilities and universities, and even in some cases successfully coopting neighbourhood organisations in pursuit of their agenda (Goetz and Sidney, 1994).

Typically growth machines seek to put their case as a 'value-free' one at the political level, whilst mobilising local media interests, which also have a place-bound local interest in growth, in backing pro-growth politicians and strategies (Logan and Molotch, 1987). Attempts to 'depoliticise' economic development represent an attempt to construct it as an arena where growth is regarded as a self-evident good, amenable only to public consensus (Peterson, 1981). This can be related to the contentious logic which has seen economic development powers in the UK increasingly placed with quasi-autonomous development bodies, such as TECs and UDCs. In practice, however, development policies are often highly politicised and divisive at the local level, and in some instances it may well have been precisely because of local friction that independent bodies or partnerships have been formed (Judd and Ready, 1986). Indeed, it is in part this politicisation of local economic development, and also in part the need to address issues raised by international restructuring processes (Leitner, 1990), which have contributed to the continuing so-called rise of the entrepreneurial state (Eisinger, 1988). Responding to increasing inter-locality competition, the entrepreneurial (local) state seeks to encourage private investment, incorporating both supply side interventions to subsidise mobile capital (e.g. subsidised taxes, land, buildings and training), and more recently demand side interventions, working with firms in pursuit of opportunities to develop new or expanding markets. Where there is a strongly mobilised entrepreneurial state, private sector-led growth coalitions, formed primarily to overcome 'state' barriers to development, may be less appropriate than attempts to create productive public-private sector relationships.

It is in this area that urban regime analysis is particularly helpful, with its emphasis on different models of private and public cooperation. As most influentially articulated by Stone (1989), urban regimes emerge from a political or financial incapacity of local government, and are structured around attempts to mobilise private-public sector actions through informal mechanisms. In this argument, the emphasis is less on the coercive powers
and countervailing strategies of public and private sectors, and more on the processes of working together on common strategies. Regimes as such do not exercise power, but instead use “civic cooperation” (p.5) between those who are able to mobilise significant institutional resources in support of development within a city. Typically, members of a regime will benefit from both material and symbolic gains; they will also tend to mobilise around areas of mutual interest, with an emphasis on small manageable tasks, rather than holistic grand visions (DiGaetano and Klemanski, 1993).

As with growth machines, the business sector finds itself in a privileged position within these regimes, in large part as a consequence of their considerable resources (Harding, 1994). Community interests are typically marginalised, except where they are sufficiently able to mobilise protests and articulate alternative strategies such that the main players can no longer ignore them.

It is possible to identify a number of different types of regime (see for instance: Stone, 1989; DiGaetano and Klemanski, 1993; Harding, 1994). Most notable in the present context are the various form of pro-growth corporate regimes, which seek to bring public and private sector activists together around a vision of economic development for the city, which is typically focused on creating and meeting city centre development opportunities. These may be market-led, focused on reducing the role of local government regulation, or government-led, with an emphasis on subsidising the private sector to invest through grants, loans, site provision and so on (DiGaetano and Klemanski, 1993). Caretaker regimes tend to be service delivery-oriented, rather than seeking to transform a city’s economic prospects (Stone, 1989). Progressive regimes typically adopt a far greater concern with equity issues, and can manifest themselves as either social reform oriented, centred on community rather than business development, or anti-growth/growth management-oriented (DiGaetano and Klemanski, 1993). Progressive regimes then, provide an alternative vision of what economic development means and how it takes place, with an emphasis on whole community participation, growth which incorporates explicit redistributive mechanisms, and possibly alternative local mechanisms for engaging with local residents (Clavel, 1986).

The corporate-centred approach, with its central emphasis on public-private partnership, has arguably been the dominant form of urban governance in the USA since the 1980s, leading to considerable concern about the policy scope for more ‘progressive’ strategies (Clavel, 1986; Nickell, 1995). As with growth machines, corporate-centred approaches typically concentrate on land use issues, especially city centre property developments (Stone, 1989). In emphasising these concerns, the corporate city typically privileges the government and private sectors, with the community sector again often able to exercise only marginal influence (Stone, 1989; Harding, 1994).

It is when the notion of the corporate city is juxta-positioned with ideas of a progressive city agenda, that the shortcomings of the corporate city model are most clearly highlighted. Reacting to the perceived near hegemony of the corporate city approach in US cities during the 1980s, Clavel (1986) set out to try to identify alternative strategies, which he labelled as progressive, where community development needs were placed centre stage rather than economic development. In progressive strategies, economic redistribution issues were accorded primacy along with, or instead of, economic growth. In addition, mechanisms were in place to mobilise a wide section of community interest groups to help shape a city’s development agenda. Although in a minority, significant numbers and variants of the progressive city were identified, not least those where environmental concerns are to the fore (Judd and Ready, 1986).

There are substantial difficulties in translating these models to the British context (DiGaetano and Klemanski, 1993; Harding, 1994; Peck and Tickell, 1995), not least because British local authorities have, until recent years, had sizeable financial resources and greater powers in the development field relative to their US counterparts, notably in land use planning. Alternatively, urban governments in the US have generally enjoyed greater political autonomy than in the UK (Levy, 1992), and have been less prone to central government prescription over their activities. Accepting the importance of local democracy, British business leaders have generally been less ready to articulate a coherent development strategy in opposition to the perceived political legitimacy of local government. Added to these differences, British local authorities also hold a considerable degree of political legitimacy in seeking to represent community groups and interests themselves, albeit not unproblematically. For all these differences, it is possible still to see that the US models have a degree of salience for British cities (DiGaetano and Klemanski, 1993).

Harding (1994, p.375) refers to the late 1980s development of partnerships in British cities “as something of a compromise model - a growth machine or corporate/entrepreneurial regime with a muted social agenda,” a description which describes the Leeds model reasonably accurately. Leeds appears to incorporate elements of both the corporate city and progressive city models, with added ingredients of its own. In the shape of the Leeds Initiative, the main public-private partnership vehicle in the city, there is an almost classic example of a corporate city approach. For instance, in its early years there was a strong emphasis on city centre flagship development, meriting a separate section and full page in Leeds Initiative Annual Report of 1990/91. This, however, had disappeared as a
Changing styles of governance: from "I am Leeds" to "corporate city"

A number of very good histories highlight the distinctive municipal politics of Leeds in the Victorian era, a period when civic leaders very much set out to influence the development of the city overall, in particular seeking to build a regional supremacy within Yorkshire (Hennock, 1973; Fraser, 1980; Burt and Grady, 1994). It is worth recalling Bateman's (1986) view, that Leeds' regional ascendancy within Yorkshire was far from a natural one, and that its leaders very much had to compete with other towns and cities in the region for this role: Wakefield not Leeds was the administrative centre for the West Riding County and subsequently for the West Yorkshire Metropolitan County Council, whilst Bradford retained strong regional leadership ambitions, as part of its historical rivalry with Leeds.

For most of the twentieth century a consensus existed that leadership in Leeds was to be in the hands of the local authority. Party political control has been fairly volatile, so that the form of more or less constant Labour leadership experienced in cities such as Sheffield was not replicated in the city. This may have contributed to the politics of pragmatism which has been pervasive in Leeds for much of this period: certainly the policy differences between local parties appeared to be negligible for considerable periods of time. According to Hartley (1980, p.438), so weak was party political ideology in the immediate decades following the second world war that changes in political control led to little policy change. Indeed, much of the business of policy formation and implementation was said to have been left to council officers. In place of ideological conflict, Hartley argues that party politics was dominated by charismatic personality politics, centred on who could claim the glory for any policy successes, with Sir Charles Wilson providing the model which later politicians in part sought to emulate. It is worth looking in a little more detail at the larger than life Sir Charles and his vision for the development of Leeds.

In the 1926 Leeds Tercentenary Official Handbook (Hirst; 1926), the frontispiece talks of the book as "a brief account of the origin of Leeds, the growth of its Vast Industries and the Romance of its Great Municipal Services." According to a chapter titled "The 'Do-it-all' Corporation"

The Leeds Corporation does more than purvey water, gas and electricity, run the tramcars and dispose of the sewage. It nurses and shields the inhabitants from the cradle to the grave...

By the Corporation the citizens are protected from the adulterator who would poison us with bad food, from the short-weight cheat, from the mischief of fire and the attentions of the thief that walks by night or picks pockets during the day (p. 65).
Following a list of responsibilities which covers two pages, the text resumes

These are a few of the many little known duties attended to unostentatiously by our fatherly Corporation so that the health, education, livelihood and personal safety and comfort of the citizens can be promoted (p. 67).

The paternalism of the "fatherly" corporation of this period was clearly embodied in the approach of Sir Charles Wilson, who joined the council in 1890, became its leader from 1907-28 (with a short break), and was also elected as a local member of parliament from 1923-30. As a 'municipal imperialist' it was Sir Charles' stated ambition to expand the boundaries of the city, aiming to control everything from the Pennines to the sea (Meadowcroft, 1980, p.416). When questioned about improving local government at one inquiry he famously went on record as saying "I am Leeds" (ibid). A self-styled wheeler dealer, Sir Charles set out to expand the city's municipal sphere of influence through boundary extensions which saw the city absorb outlying areas such as Shipley, Roundhay, Seacroft and Crossgates (1912), Middleton (1919), and Adel (1927) (see Hartley, 1980).

In jocular fashion, Sir Charles is teased in the city's Tercentenary Handbook, as being "a man of dignity if not of humility," with the view expressed that if he were to ever have a statue erected to his memory it would have to be manufactured out of brass. The tone of this piece, presumably sanctioned by him, is impish in itself, not least as it assesses Sir Charles' municipal ambitions

If he has a weakness it is his ambition to see Leeds surpass in size and population any other city in Yorkshire. In seeking to extend the city no man has schemed with such pugnacity (Hirst, 1926, Leeds Official Tercentenary Handbook, p. 70).

Other charismatic leaders were to follow, most notably the Reverend Charles Jenkinson, whose efforts in the 1930s towards slum clearance are still remembered many years later (Bateman, 1986). Seventy years on, the very basis of much of the municipal pride evident in the Tercentenary Handbook has disappeared, with nationalisation, privatisation and compulsory competitive tendering, amounting over the years to a wholesale dismantling of activities previously undertaken by the local authority. The basic utilities, water, sewage, gas, electricity and sewage, have all been transferred to other forms of ownership and are now organised at a broader geographical scale, with the effect that the city council is no longer in control over these services, nor is it necessarily the major stakeholder for the new providers of services to the city's people and businesses. This said, with an annual budget of around £1 billion in 1995, assets of £3 billion and a workforce of 34,000, the city council remains the single largest employer in the city.

Testing the waters: early efforts towards local economic development

Whilst it is possible to portray the immediate post-war decades as relatively free of political dogma and with policies largely led by powerful council officers (see Hartley, 1980), the policy outcomes were not always well-regarded locally, as conflicts over housing policy illustrate (Gibson and Langstaff, 1982; Burt and Grady, 1994). In the area of planning and economic development too, business leaders frequently railed against what they perceived as restrictive planning policies. This was a period when planning officers around the country engaged in similar policies to remove 'non-conforming' and noxious industries where possible away from residential areas, a process often facilitated by road building and housing renewal programmes (City of Leeds, 1972). Not surprisingly perhaps, business people felt under pressure from such interventions, which together with the annual arguments following statutory consultation over the business rate (since abandoned), often led to both public and private acrimony, as one of today's elder statesmen in the business community recalls. He moved his factory out of Leeds because

I had increasing frustration with the local authority in Leeds, who would not give permission for this, that and the other... [so] eventually we moved out... One of the reasons Leeds has become a financial centre is because there was such a lot of bureaucracy in the '50s, '60s and '70s, I think a lot of companies moved away... The planning office was very strong. The smaller towns, Dewsbury, Batley, even Bradford, Pudsey, they were a bit more responsive, encouraged people to create jobs. So you tended to keep away from the local government.

By the early 1970s, talk of compulsory purchase of industrial premises was already being seen as problematic, as costs rose and the availability of finance declined (City of Leeds, 1972). Instead, a gradual shift began to emerge which favoured a more strategic approach to local economic development, although initial efforts to bring this about during the 1970s were blocked by senior councillors and officers who felt that local economic circumstances did not merit such an active approach (Mawson, 1983). Attempts to engage in productive relationships with the private sector were also set in train, most notably the launching of Project Leeds, a joint venture
between the Chamber of Commerce and the local authority, and the concept of Leeds as the "Motorway City of the Seventies" (Burt and Grady, 1994). By the late 1970s industrial development officers had been appointed and action on providing industrial land development was being pursued more vigorously than hitherto (Mawson, 1983).

Politically, the council had been hung or Conservative dominated for much of the 1970s. Following the return of a Labour-dominated council at the end of this period (Labour have been in control ever since), the economic development activities of Leeds began to alter dramatically, both in scale and in leadership. Development issues were still mainly addressed through the Planning and Property Department of the city council, with no separate economic development body either within or outside the council. The in-coming Labour administration brought about a radical shift in emphasis, focusing on analyzing the local economy and seeking to intervene where appropriate to improve local job prospects.

They used to talk about planning giving jobs and things like that, but not in terms of attempting to influence the local economy through training, through grants and all those mechanisms... I think that its fair to say that when George Mudie became the leader in Leeds, that was one of his platforms - that the economic base had not been looked at, not been thought about. Market forces got it wrong, and he began to wonder what we could do about it (business leader).

Historically, it was argued, Leeds had benefitted from having a large number of small and medium sized firms, without a single dominant employer or dominant sector, and from firms which had strong local roots. By the 1970s, with multinational takeovers, these roots were seen to be weakening with a series of takeovers and rationalisations bringing about local job losses.

The mechanism used in the early 1980s to instigate a more active era of local economic development was to take on responsibility for the council's land holdings.

There was a small body at that time called the Land Sub-Committee and its job was to buy and sell land in Leeds; it had millions of pounds but nobody knew it existed... So we took over the Land Sub-Committee... and then started to use the land sales strategically. Yes we sold land, but we sold one piece of land to fund ten people in the industrial development unit, to go round and start the action. And that's how we started building up local employment development strategies. It got parodied a bit as exclusively co-ops, it wasn't - a lot of it was quite commercial activity (local politician).

The analytical base was strongly sectoral, with local politicians and officers for the first time starting to set up a database on local firms, using the City Library to obtain information about them in the first instance. As the emergent industrial development unit began to expand its activities, in particular seeking to assist small firm start-ups at the neighbourhood level, the external political environment in the city became increasingly fraught.

I can show you the press cuttings from when [we were] doing the strategy: 'Red Ruin: extreme marxist... says people can run their own lives'. And we got hammered: mention gay and lesbian - I was taken to court by [the local paper] for giving them a nighttime, and plastered with shit through my letter box and my windows ripped in... It was a very violent time because it was seen as a 'left' strategy, and the left were under very heavy attack for doing it. And as George was leading that [strategy] it became convenient for them to say George Mudie's a Chicago City boss... The trouble was, the [local paper] and others colluded all the time to just hammer us (local politician).

Certainly, for this local politician, the early 1980s had been politically heated, a view which stands in some contrast to the more usual local view that Leeds has always avoided the intensely politicised battles which were experienced in some other cities. From this perspective, recent attempts to view Leeds as a city without major political tensions represents either a form of collective amnesia or a form of retrospective whitewashing.

The other ingredient in economic development at the time was the West Yorkshire Metropolitan Council. The main advantages associated with the metropolitan county were the wider strategic perspective of the West Yorkshire sub-region, and the greater resources it was able to bring, most notably with the formation of the Yorkshire Enterprises, which set out to help fund small firms (see Gunnell, 1990).

By the mid-1980s, the neighbourhood emphasis of local economic development activities became subject to criticism within the council leadership, primarily on the grounds that visible signs of progress were slow in manifesting themselves. For a period in the mid-1980s, economic development activities lost their ascendancy, re-emerging with a property focus with the creation of the Leeds City Development Company (LCDC) in 1988. This was in fact an existing company which was revived as a public-private development venture by council leaders in an abortive attempt to see off the imposition of an Urban Development Corporation on Leeds (see Whitney and Haughton, 1990; Haughton and Whitney, 1994). For a brief period in the late 1980s, the LCDC was a major player in promoting development in the city centre, drawing in private sector partners to work
on sites owned by the city council. The advent of the property recession in the late 1980s, and the growing dominance of the much better funded Leeds Development Corporation (LDC), the local urban development corporation, however, meant that by the early 1990s its role became greatly diminished.

By the late 1980s, as the vacuum left by abolition of the county council became apparent, and as a new local leadership took control of the Labour Party, a more active approach to economic development in the council once more emerged, centred on the Leeds Development Agency. This embraced the property dealing arm of the council, the Leeds City Development Corporation, and a wide-ranging economic development unit remit, including a strong analytical capacity, a sectoral support strategy, and an inward investment team. Keen to stress a pragmatic approach, the new developments became more centralised within the Civic Hall, and explicitly eschewed some of the less-conventional approaches to community-based economic intervention in the early 1980s.

There was a realisation, perhaps, that a lot of effort was being put into forming co-operatives but very few long-term jobs were being generated through that route. If you look at what happened in the 1980s in small business start-ups and self-employment there were a huge number of people who went into that part of the economy, very few in co-ops. On an objective assessment of how best to use officer time to maximise the benefit to the Leeds economy, co-ops dropped off the agenda (council officer).

This was an important staging post to the events of the early 1990s, as the city council learnt to work with the private sector and with private sector-led quangos, such as the LDC. Certainly, the private sector welcomed the change in political leadership, with the new leader, Jon Trickett, generally seen as more consultative than his predecessor. Alternatively, the council were seen by many in the voluntary sector as uncomfortable in working with them, as the next section illustrates.

The Leeds Initiative: corporate city embodied?

The main stakeholders

Launched in June 1990, the Leeds Initiative has come to be a major part of the institutional landscape of Leeds as far as economic development is concerned. Very much construed as a rapprochement between the public and private sectors after a period of some tension, the new body was set up as a joint exercise, chaired by the leader of the council, with the President of the Chamber of Commerce as the vice-chair. It is one of its trademarks that the main participants believe that they were central to the creation of the Leeds Initiative concept: this sense of shared ownership has helped to keep the main partners as solid supporters.

The Leeds Initiative does not have a formal constitution, being instead a loose federation of the main institutional stakeholders in the city, namely the city council, the chambers of commerce and trade, the major local newspaper group, the regional trade union congress, both universities, the UDC and the TEC. These form the main 'board' of the Initiative, with the senior executive of each organisation expected to attend the regular meetings. One consequence of this high level attendance based on institutional affiliation was that the members of the board were all men for the first four years, after which Jude Kelly, director of the West Yorkshire Playhouse was invited to join. There is still no representation of the voluntary sector at this level. The loose federation structure of the Leeds Initiative is very much underpinned by a sub-structure of working groups, which exist with varying degrees of formality. As Kevin Thomas and John Shutt (Chapter 5) illustrate for engineering and Adam Tickell (Chapter 6) for financial services, these can emerge with a strong separate identity and a formal constitution, in both these cases employing executive officers. In some cases, local groups which are strongly linked into national initiatives, such as the Environment City (see Chapter 11) and Opp2K (see Chapter 15) groups, have been placed under the Leeds Initiative umbrellas. Other sub-groups are less formally constituted, such as the Gateways and Corridors group (aiming to improve the aesthetics of the main approaches into the city). Membership of the sub-groups can be drawn from a much broader base than the main board, usefully widening the net of participants. The structure of the Leeds Initiative is undoubtedly one of its main assets.

It's a very loose association. All of its different arms are separate entities in a sense. That's its strength. I suspect that had it been the more normal type of organisation with a central committee and subcommittees it would probably not have got off the ground (trade union leader).

The loose association model works because of the flexibility it allows to enable sub-groups to develop at their own pace, as they learn ways of operating and begin to clarify their objectives and priorities for action. In the early days it also had the advantage of being politically expedient, in that it could have been fairly readily dismantled if the partnership had not worked. A common version of events leading up to its formation, told here by a leading player in the city, is that the city council heard that the
Chamber of Commerce had commissioned a consultancy firm to provide a strategy for Leeds, using a City Action Team grant. This evidently set some alarm bells ringing.

And because relationships between the Chamber and the council had not been so good, I mean they just sat in different rooms and shouted at each other, I rang the chamber people and said "Look, if you produce this without consulting the city council, you’re just going to pull things further apart. Why don’t we make an effort to get together?"... Bluntly it took me a long time to persuade [council leadership]... to sit around the table. And we eventually did it surreptitiously one night in the Merrion Hotel... There was a lot of fending and sparring, before the thing got off the ground. And it was a reaction to that, i.e. we can always break it up easily if things go wrong [which dictated the shape of the Leeds Initiative].

Very quickly, such fears of partnership disintegrating receded into the background, and the Leeds Initiative became a widely respected vehicle for pulling together the public and private sectors around local economic regeneration initiatives. Its six objectives remain to:

- Promote the city as a major European centre.
- Ensure the economic vitality of the city.
- Create an integrated transport system for the city.
- Enhance the environment of the entire city.
- Improve the quality and visual appeal of the city.
- Develop the city as an attractive centre for visitors.

Something of the flavour of what the Initiative was setting out to achieve and its modus operandi is further revealed in its first annual report (Leeds Initiative, 1991, p. 1), which trumpets achievements in terms of acting:

- as an agent for creating a city-wide consensus on the future of Leeds, drawing in ideas and views from a wide range of agencies and institutions and from the people of Leeds;
- as an important advocacy and lobbying agent for Leeds presenting the City’s needs and assets in Government and increasingly in Europe;
- as a focus for the development of City networks bringing together the resources of the Initiative members and, just as important helping other organisations find project partners and giving advice and assistance to existing schemes; and
- as a catalyst for its own special projects.

Using these same four key ingredients, the position five years later can now be reassessed. In drawing together stakeholders to form a vision for Leeds, progress is now evident. The Leeds Initiative has become the vehicle for a wide-ranging review of the economy of the city by a broad group of local groups and individuals. As part of the information sharing process, the city council and TEC both work closely on economic analysis, to prevent duplication and strengthen overall capacity.

In terms of advocacy and lobbying, the Leeds Initiative was the successful vehicle for providing a united front to external bodies, resulting in the attraction of investment of £42.5m in the Royal Armouries museum, and a successful first round bid for Single Regeneration Fund (SRF), bringing in £17m. The symbolic importance of both these should not be underestimated. The Royal Armouries bid was very much led by the Leeds Development Corporation, with strong support from the city council, with the Initiative providing the necessary evidence of a united front between the public and private sectors. In the process of working through such bids, some of the sharp antagonisms between the LDC and the local authority did diminish, a situation helped by the fact that three influential local councillors sat on the LDC board, whilst the LDC was on the Leeds Initiative main board. The SRF bid was important in that it followed an earlier unsuccessful bid for City Challenge funding, which had evidently failed to portray that it was backed by a 'deep' local partnership. The SRF grant is administered through a sub-group of the Leeds Initiative, a group which for the first time has allowed a greater representation from local voluntary and grassroots groups (see below).

The downside of having to focus on the pursuit of government grants has been that this has tended to work against attempts to bring about a broader strategic framework for local regeneration activities. Forced by central government to make funding bids in partnership, at times this has led to the adoption of what one partner referred to as "lowest common denominator" project proposals.

The third key ingredient, building stronger networks across Leeds, remains a powerful beneficial influence for those involved.

It has opened doors and has been very useful. It does mean that I can pick up the phone and speak to anyone in the city without them saying 'who?', and that's terribly helpful (Leeds Initiative board member).

Without the Leeds Initiative we would all have remained in splendid isolation (business leader).

Certainly for the private sector, the Leeds Initiative is seen as a powerful...
voice for the city, a role which is enhanced by the strong involvement within it of the Chamber of Commerce. The Leeds Initiative has also served as a vehicle for greater engagement with the regeneration quangos created by central government for Leeds, the UDC and TEC, both of which had some early problems in establishing local credibility and legitimacy. Alternatively, for those not directly engaged in the Leeds Initiative network, there has been a sense of growing isolation from local decision-making, a prospect which has most hit community and voluntary sector groups.

... people like the Chamber of Commerce and the universities feel at least they can sit round a table with the Council... The impression I’ve got is that it has enabled a very important conduit of information to be opened up... in theory people with a stake in the city, at that level, can have their voice heard. My problem is that sooner or later you’ve got to filter that down to the communities that make up Leeds and not just the vested interests of the powerful places in the city (community leader).

... the Leeds Initiative is very much about business, it is very much about industry, commerce and the local authority. It is not about smaller organisations or people who perhaps have needs and want to put these forward (voluntary sector).

The final ingredient for reassessment is the work of the individual sub-groups in bringing forward innovative projects. Again, the overall assessment has to be a positive one, in so far as new projects have been instigated, and the spending priorities and timescales of individual partnership organisations have sometimes been successfully 'bent' or coordinated in pursuit of the collective regeneration goals (a number of chapters in this book look at the work of such groups in greater detail). Although there is some criticism locally that "What the Leeds Initiative has developed into now, is largely a department of the city council" (business leader), most players accept the inevitability and even the legitimacy of the local authority's dominant role. In part this reflects the democratic legitimacy of the local authority, and its own internal requirement to be seen to be accountable for those of its activities which are conducted through the Leeds Initiative. It is also fair to say that the local authority is the main provider of financial resources and staffing support for the Leeds Initiative.

It’s inevitably a local authority-led partnership, but that’s not a bad thing: someone’s got to drive it, and in a sense what it’s doing (quite bravely in a way) is inviting all the other people who are part of the Leeds Initiative to have an input into the decision-making (business leader).

Community and voluntary groups: secondary stakeholders?

There have been a considerable number and range of 'progressive city'-type alliances formed in Leeds over the past decade. These include the community development initiatives around housing management and community enterprise entered into by the residents of Belle Isle, the business sector-inspired interest in fostering community economic development in Ebor Gardens (Business in the Community, 1994), and the community activism of the Kirkstall Valley Campaign in responding to development threats in their area (Chapter 13; People of the Valley, 1990).

At the local level, the richness of this vein of community activity is remarkable. However, this activism has yet to be incorporated into meaningful engagement at the strategic level for the city as a whole, whilst many local activists still regard the city council as antipathetic to local activism. At the same time as civic leaders publicly agonize about the need to ensure that local people get more of the jobs being created in the city, the organised groups at local level too often feel that they face incomprehension about their potential to contribute to the development of the city as a whole, at times veering towards outright hostility.

In the 1970s and the 1980s much valuable work at the neighbourhood level in Leeds had been funded through the local authority under two central government schemes, the Community Programme and the Urban Programme. As these were wound down, the city council’s will and resources to maintain a high profile community base were seen by community activists to have receded for a period, as it refocused on city centre development and working with the private sector. That the local authority was unsuccessful in its bid for City Challenge was possibly a consequence of the poorly developed community base. One related consequence of failing to obtain City Challenge funding, was that as other local authorities were rediscovering and remaking links into local community groups as a part of the regeneration process, the local authority in Leeds went down a different route, courting the major institutional players of the city through the Leeds Initiative. Given the traumas of the first half of the 1980s, attempts to rebuild positive links with the private sector were both important and necessary: the problem is that community groups feel they have been neglected in the process of providing a strategic vision for Leeds.

The relationship between the economic development focus of the Leeds Initiative and the broader community development desires of grassroots groups has become increasingly uncomfortable. The continuing centrality accorded by the major Leeds Initiative players to the local authority in leading on community development work reflects both a degree of contentment that it should continue with its 'traditional' role in this area and
a disinclination to challenge how it sets about doing this. In addition, it has to be said, there is a lack of a common interest in intervening in this sphere. In other words, though many of the city’s leaders want to see community development initiatives taken forward, they do not see this as part of the role of the Leeds Initiative, but something which is done separately through individual organisations or left to the local authority to get on with. As one business leader forthrightly expressed it:

the city council can concentrate on the community issue. They’re not actually of interest to a lot of people on the Leeds Initiative.

For those excluded from, or on the margins, of the corporate city, there has been a growing concern about the development agenda which is being set for the city, and the role which community groups have been accorded within it. The lack of grassroots involvement is clearly seen to be warping the priorities of the Leeds Initiative. So whilst it is acknowledged to have

a very impressive track record in some respects, in dealing with the big questions of bringing the Royal Armories together and in partnerships and so on, it would be nice to feel that that magisterial power of different interests in the city could actually be brought to bear on some of its more intractable problems (community leader).

Many community groups feel they have a legitimacy in their own right, and whilst accepting the role of political leadership from the council, they are increasingly keen to open up alternative mechanisms for influencing local development decisions. That the Leeds Initiative still has no voluntary sector representation at board level five years after its inception is widely seen as an indication of a council leadership more at ease with the private sector than with the grass roots. From such perspectives “It [the Leeds Initiative] has become something that is very detached and has moved another level up: it has lost contact with the roots” (voluntary sector).

Already, a process of evolutionary change is underway. As noted earlier, the new SRB sub-group of the Leeds Initiative is for the first time bringing a limited number of community groups into the ambit of the corporate city, albeit at a second tier level. Within months of its designation, some community sector members of the new group found themselves confronted by a style of corporate working already so embedded that it appeared as if their incorporation was in danger of becoming largely symbolic. Community leaders complained bitterly about the opacity of processes of bidding for funding in particular, and the seemingly secret mechanisms for soliciting and deciding on which bids should go forward. These tensions are still being struggled over (June 1995), but it does appear as if, bit by bit, in a process of gradual and mutual learning, some form of acceptable accommodation is being worked towards, which provides community groups with more than a symbolic role, whilst decision-making processes have been opened-up. Given the unsatisfactory speed with which central government expected the new arrangements for SRB to be put in place, and the tendency of the local authority still to assume it has an unchallengeable sole right to decide on local community development priorities, some initial feelings of local disquiet were perhaps to be expected. What is important is that a first step towards incorporation of community interests has begun. Whether it will be sufficient to stabilise and maintain the corporate city approach against alternative pro-growth regimes, or progressive city alliances, remains to be seen.

Conclusion

Jon [Trickett, the council leader] has understood the PR of corporate image for Leeds. He has done very, very well. The press image of Leeds is very high, we get no flak. [Previously it was] very highly politically contested... Not now. It seems stable, visionary: 24 hour city. 'Cafe Leeds,' the images are getting across. There is a very, very strong corporate dimension to Leeds and that is a good thing... what is sometimes glossed over, are the conflicts and the tensions and the divisions that are still within the city that are not being addressed by that corporate city (local politician).

For all its corporate city resemblances, it would be misleading to regard the Leeds Initiative as having yet evolved as the umbrella group for the overall strategic development of the city, even though its leaders sometimes choose to cast it in this role. Instead, it is possible to see the Leeds Initiative as a vehicle for mobilising public and private sector interests behind a broad economic development vision for the city, with a growing number of areas of policy development, mobilised through the sub-groups. It has also developed a useful informal coordination role, and most importantly a central role in presenting a public image of harmonious public-private relationships when wooing inward investors or seeking central government or European Union grants. However, in seeking to build consensus around economic development issues, the Leeds Initiative for its first four years in effect side-lined community development issues, albeit with occasional hand-wringing about the need to make sure that some of the new jobs being created went to local people. The problem with this initial focus on the
views of the major institutional stakeholders of the city is that it has perhaps unwittingly sidelined some powerful grassroots voices, voices which are already clamouring to be heard not just at the neighbourhooV level, but on a city-wide stage. The more successfully the Leeds Initiative is able to project itself as the 'corporate' voice of the city, the louder the calls will become for inclusion from those on the margins. The next step for the Leeds Initiative has to be to engage with such groups in as productive a fashion as possible, at all levels, from setting the grand strategic visions, to making it work on the ground. The dangers of doing anything else are all too apparent.

It's one thing to project the city as an exciting, innovative, forward-looking, prosperous place, which it is in part, but that should not be at the expense of actually covering up some of the rottenness and severe deprivation that is actually around in parts of Leeds. Underneath there may be a great deal of frustration and anger, and unused energy, from people who want to have their voice heard (community leader).

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References


People of the Valley (1990), Kirkstall Valley Development Plan, March, Kirkstall Valley Campaign, Leeds.