

MECHANISMS FOR SUPPORTING INVESTMENT AND RENEWAL OF URBAN CORES. REGENERATION OR NEW QUALITY?

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One of the great challenges in planning is the integration of policy set out in development plans, with the implementation mechanisms that achieve the goals. It is indeed a paradox of planning that after years of intensive work and consultation, we hand the physical realisation of that plan over to others to achieve. This is particularly the case in the traditional centres of towns and cities. They are complex, multi-layered places; physically, socially, economically and politically; a rich tapestry of culture, heritage, architecture, activity and business that is so characteristic of 'real' urbanism. However, it is this diversity and legacy that makes urban cores challenging and often undesirable locations for simplistic planning, development and investment models¹. Comprehensive redevelopment and regeneration inevitably changes urban character because it must reconstruct and densify to enhance values. This paper considers some alternative bottom-up public-private partnership mechanisms that support the investment and renewal of the urban fabric to enhance value through multiple minor interventions and initiatives: Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) and Landlord-led renewal.

¹ This is discussed with some eloquence in Jacobs (1961), Chapter 22.

² Reference is made to sustainable development as a concept defined in Bruntland's Report (1987).

URBAN CORES AND REGENERATION STRATEGIES

- > Planning as a profession generally considers the continuity of the traditional core area of towns as intrinsic to the concept of sustainable development². It is broadly accepted that the heritage of buildings and spaces of the past play a meaningful role in the present and future development of towns and cities. We can point to Paris, Madrid or Copenhagen as successful cities that set a high bench-mark for our ambitions – vibrant, diverse, thriving urban cores that function at the heart of society, politics and culture.

European cities and towns never completely turned their backs on their traditional centres as occurred in the USA. In Europe we are fortunate to have more of an affinity with the city. This does not mean that we are not subject to the same market forces or vulnerable to vagaries of modernist architecture and planning. Outside of their showcase market squares and streets, many cities and towns are not in such good shape. Trends in suburban development (resulting from particular planning, architecture and engineering practices) in the last three to four decades (less in the transition countries) have undermined the primacy of the town centre through a prolonged transfusion of key functions from the urban core.

The breakdown in traditional urbanist development practices entailed the removal of residential, shopping and commercial uses to suburban mono-use zones, ensuring that millions of euro that could be spent on redevelopment and renewal of the urban core was, and continues to be lost to the periphery. While residential suburbanisation originally supported the primacy of the city and town centre, the decampment of business and retail from the core, has had a cumulative and comprehensive impact. Ubiquitous shopping in particular has presented a huge challenge to the function of urban streets to replace lost trade.

Planning policy and development plans do not openly proclaim suburban agendas in their vision or intent. However, they have not proved to be sufficiently robust to limit suburban expansion, or provide such measures to support town centre business districts and shopping cores. While ambitions and aspirations reference great European cities with vibrant street cultures, in reality sprawl is accommodated and most towns and cities are losing investment.

This represents a 'vicious circle' of decline. The loss of investment in the town centres and the parallel investment in the suburbs reinforces car based mobility which is more readily accommodated in suburban road systems. The establishment of major shopping mall complexes means that

expenditure and footfall (a key indicator for retail investors) in the town centre declines. Vacant shop units reflect an unhealthy tenant mix and retail offer, which encourages town centre retailers to follow their customers out from the core. With this, the town centre loses its attractiveness, a portion of its tax base and major investment is effectively suspended.

- > The response to the suburbanisation process has varied over time. The first can be termed 'Auto accommodation' (Mitchell, 2008). This is where cities and towns are changed to facilitate the car; bigger and faster roads are created to efficiently carry the population into and out of the city. This entails the destruction of blocks, buildings, the loss of grain and fabric, and the removal of small and traditional businesses. It also generates an insatiable demand for parking within the city. An evolution of this was the separation (Radburn) and grade segregation of cars and pedestrians (as advocated by Buchanan, 1963). City centre malls have been developed in most cities throughout the world. They deliver the exact same product as the suburban original, but are more difficult and expensive to get to. They demand mega-finance for mega-schemes, involving large scale site assembly, loss of fabric, communities, and generally don't engage with adjoining streets. Office centres are a similar beast to provide for commercial development.
- > Tax incentives and public private partnerships, which both utilise public capital or incentives to leverage private sector investment have been the method of choice for such comprehensive schemes. Financial instruments for area based initiatives are seeking comprehensive regeneration of city centre sites, or redundant industrial complexes. This is pump-priming on a massive scale. This is a different approach from those of BIDs (Mitchell, 2008):

'With few exceptions, the well intentioned comprehensive solutions to the problems confronting city places did not work as well as expected. BIDs take a different tack. BIDs turn away from governmental solutions and toward cooperative public-private forms of service delivery, but without hiding the fact that it is the self-interest of the member businesses that give the BID its impetus. BIDs are less concerned with comprehensive rational redevelopment plans and civic white elephants (like convention centres and big malls) and more concerned with piecemeal solutions that attempt to improve the small things in cities.'

Aside from considering the character, and impact on urban areas that suburban expansion, and area regeneration has delivered, there is an economic imperative as well. In a strong economy local government needs only manage growth and direct investment and development to the right places. The Public Private Partnership (PPP) model works well under economic growth as it allows private investors to have some confidence that the risk they take on is rewarded through a positive return over time. However, in a depressed market, PPP finds infrastructure a much more comfortable field in which to operate (Dubben, Williams, 2009).

The current recession which was markedly announced in September 2008 with the collapse of Lehman Bros. in New York and the banking crisis that followed has greatly undermined the potential for large-scale comprehensive regeneration projects, and in particular PPP schemes. National governments are making significant cut-backs in public expenditure to recover capital being borrowed to stabilise financial institutions. The development market has collapsed throughout Europe and North America. So there is no market incentive for private developers to build, there are few financial institutions with credible lending power, and those with capital available find development and construction a far from tempting field in which to invest (Dubben, Williams, 2009). Tax incentives have been used extensively by governments before to encourage development of depressed areas, and have been very effective (Dubben & Williams, 2009). However, the use of tax exemptions are coming under increased scrutiny at a European level. Therefore, the macro-economic context that has traditionally enabled regeneration to occur has changed dramatically since 2008. This has greatly undermined the capacity of cities to adapt, or be proactive.

Cities are faced with stark choices. Retail vacancy rates on high streets in Ireland and Britain typically stand at 15% to 20%. The perfect storm of recession and competition from the shopping malls is putting towns out of business. Urban centres need

to recognise the challenges they face, and have the capacity to respond in an autonomous and co-ordinated manner.

- > But how can cities and towns support and build upon the services and profile that exists without resorting to multi-million redevelopment projects? Traditionally, public investment and innovation has been at the heart of regeneration and renewal processes. Significant public projects and incentives have yielded significant benefits for private property, and service providers without their collective input. It is interesting to consider how municipalities can or should recapture the value they have created. One approach is to invest in the public domain, through environmental improvements to streets and public spaces, in the expectation that this will benefit properties adjoining such linear interventions. Yet again, this involves significant public monies to leverage such works.
- > In this respect it is useful to think of the town beyond typical development and investor scenarios. **TWO APPROACHES** are considered:

BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT DISTRICTS, AND LANDLORD-LED RENEWAL.

- > These approaches to town and city centre renewal are autonomous, and bottom-up in nature, led by players who are not typically involved in leading urban change: the local business community and landlords. Both can have a huge influence on urban areas, which when captured can have a positive effect on the urban core.

BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT DISTRICTS (BIDS)

- > Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) are an interesting and widely used model of urban revitalisation. Whereas PPP relies on private capital supporting a single consortium or project, or environmental improvement works are dependent on state/local government support, BIDs generate revenue from the existing commercial rates base,

and citizens. BIDs provide an additional and separate revenue stream to municipalities, to address shortfalls in local government support or state intervention. BIDs also care about the existing fabric of the urban core, and making it more attractive for business. By focusing on existing assets, above comprehensive regeneration, BIDs bring our attention to the level of the street. In essence (Mitchell, 2008) *'BIDs are an innovation intended to improve the conditions of city places by taking care of the small things that make up the larger picture.'*

'BIDs proceed from the assumption that small-scale planning is more sensitive to community needs than city broad-based land clearance and large scale redevelopment projects. Second, BIDs contradict suburban development and draw substance from the critique of suburban life and the popularity of growth management policies. Third, BIDs are part of a philosophy that administrative fragmentation helps rather than hinders the modern city. Fourth, BIDs are linked to the economic development policy mania in American cities and to the conviction that the public interest is best advanced through the entrepreneurial activities of public-private partnership.'

Urban centres are complex places with a plethora of uses, ownerships and interests. BIDs effectively provide a legal vehicle to bring all parties together, to act through an incorporated company to improve the business area, and to make it more attractive, competitive and valuable to the benefit of all. But isn't this the role of local government? Why leave something as important as the condition of, and attractiveness of urban centres to private sector interests whose only motivation is achieving a return for their own businesses from the investment?

There are two issues here. Firstly, local governments through departmental organisation and hierarchy are simply not set-up to administer at the street or neighbourhood level, or consider that they have a role in supporting their commercial rate payers at such a micro scale. Jane Jacobs (1961) in her



critique of big metropolitan governance and the departmental nature of local authorities stated:

'If great cities can learn to administer, co-ordinate and plan in terms of administrative districts at understandable scale, we may become competent as a society, to deal with those crazy quilts of government and administration in the greater metropolitan areas.'

> Andres Duany (Duany *et al.*, 2010) noted in the Smart Growth Manual:

'Local planning suffers because governance rarely operates at the scale of the neighbourhood or the block. Just as there is a hierarchy of physical structure – from the metropolis to the neighbourhood to the block – there is a need for a corresponding hierarchy of governance. The frustration that some citizens feel toward their municipal administration arises when these government entities do not correspond to the scale of the people's concerns.'

> BIDs generate revenue by taking a percentage (normally additional) of the rates paid to the local authority. The establishment of a BID requires that the rate payers agree by plebiscite vote in favour of the additional levy. This creates a BID company, which normally has a 5 year term in which to establish itself and yield results, or risk non-renewal.

> The BID concept evolved in Canada and the USA over the last 20 years as a response to the decline of downtown areas, under a system of light local government and minimum state intervention. Today, there are over 1,000 BIDs in America. In New York alone there are 57, and in Los Angeles there are approximately 32. The diversity in the scale and scope of the BIDs is enormous, ranging from small Business Parks with annual revenues of \$20,000 up to major city centre schemes such as the Times Square BID with an annual revenue of some \$6,000,000. In the UK there are approximately 68 BIDs (<http://www.ukbids.org>) with 17 in London, with revenues ranging from £2,500,000 to £40,000 (<http://www.londonbids.co.uk/bid-information.html>). In Ireland, Dublin city centre has recently established a BID with an annual revenue of approx. €3,000,000 (<http://www.dublincitybid.ie>).

The work BIDs undertake range from chewing gum removal to capital improvement works and public transport services (Feenan, Feit, 2006). However, perhaps more important is the fact that a BID establishes a stable, transparent and mandated company which supports the interests of the urban core area. While other approaches seek to utilise influence and partnership, a BID company also has a legal mechanism to underpin and manage progress. Compare the urban core to a shopping mall. The shopping mall has a full time management team that controls everything that occurs within that space; the tenants, rents, where particular stores are located, parking, cleanliness and maintenance and marketing. The town centre attempts to do the same thing, but with a multiplicity of characters and interests, generally pulling in different directions. Of course a BID doesn't gain power over property, but does provide a legal framework in which to engage in town centre management.

Every BID is a separate entity, with its own specific aims and objectives that reflect its location, challenges, management and membership. Not all are successful or have dramatic impacts, but it is telling that the vast majority are renewed.

THERE ARE 7 MAIN AREAS THAT BID COMPANIES ENGAGE IN (Mitchell, 2008):

Marketing: Generally known as place branding or marketing, this activity can range from tacky bumper-sticker slogans to slick advertising campaigns. However, to quote Aaron M. Renn (2010), *'branding isn't about tag lines, messaging, or talking points. Yes, there is an element of that and getting your message out. But branding starts with what's on the inside not messages to the outside. It's about values, authenticity, and what the real product (including heritage) and what a place aspires to. The marketing part just helps communicate that.'*

Cleaning and Maintenance: Street cleaning is perhaps something most readily associated with BIDs. However, it is a core activity for good reason. The street is the front face of

the town. If the pavement is dirty or poorly maintained it sends out a negative message about the place, that emanates a lack of care and pride. Considering the competition, and rethinking of the town as third space, that is comfortable and inviting, this attention to detail is extremely important.

Capital Improvement: BIDs have become involved in funding capital works such as public space improvements, tree planting, and landscaping often in association with public bodies as co-funders.

Safety and Security: People will not visit the urban core and its shopping and commercial streets, or live there if there is a perception that it is not safe. Town centres must be family friendly if people are to spend time there. Otherwise, parents will prefer that their kids go to the mall. Similarly, some cities with vibrant night lives may become disorderly or even violent late at night; so measures to address this – both day and night are pertinent in some towns and city centres.

Economic Development: Development agencies are typically not mandated to bring jobs or investment to a particular location in a region (i.e. the urban core). If a new business desires to locate in a campus style business park in the suburbs, then this is of little concern. Therefore, there is a particular role for BIDs to play in focussing economic development in their location. They need to address whether their district is equipped to address the needs of the market, and that the market knows about it.

Policy Advocacy: Town core regeneration needs a strong policy context to support. However, it also needs to ensure that the local authority and state support this policy in their actions and investments.

Community Development: BIDs have evolved, as have philanthropic objectives of businesses. Some BIDs have therefore become involved in programmes such as education initiatives or work experience schemes.

Of course BIDs have their critics. They have been labelled 'Malls without walls' (Minton, 2009) and of representing an invasion of public interest through the privatisation of open space. Place marketing is often regarded as a tacky or inappropriate device that insults the sense of genuine places. The journalist Anna Minton (2009) is a prominent critic in the UK:

'just like a shopping mall, from which the BID model was developed, the overriding aim is to become a profitable business... Treating the city as a private business, accountable to property developers and retailers rather than local electors, has huge implications for public life public culture and democracy. It creates places which are quite different from the British cities of the last 150 years, focused on revenue and commercial rather than innate value.'

To some extent these criticisms are justified, in that BIDs do operate to benefit the commercial occupiers of the town. Furthermore, the scope of work BIDs become involved in reflects that the product that commercial districts sell is entirely linked to healthy functioning of the town. To criticise place marketing is to turn a blind eye to the social and economic workings of society. We are saturated with advertising. Is London's West End, the London Eye or Buckingham Palace not a vital part of the city's offer? Through media and advertising these elements of London are spread around the world, but they remain relatively authentic.

Furthermore, if a city centre doesn't address the competition from the suburbs - the malls, business parks and housing – what will be left in the core? Are 20% to 30% vacancy levels acceptable or desirable (John Bowed quoted in Feenan, Feit, 2006)?

'A downtown is a living thing and it needs effort to survive. Considering the competition from the malls, I don't think a town can live today without a BID.'

Finally, with less investment and finance available, what are the key elements that will attract people and business to locate in the core? Good governance and an attractive environment. This is highlighted by recent research from the Harvard Business School (Glaeser, Kerr, 2010):



'There is much to be said for the strategy of focusing on the quality of life policies that can attract smart, entrepreneurial people. The best economic development strategy may be to attract smart people and get out of their way. This approach is particularly appealing because the down side is so low. What community ever screwed up by providing too much quality?'

- > The fact that BIDs are autonomous, and very much motivated by self-interest, which essentially seeks to get the maximum benefit from the existing investment is something that local authorities could recognise as a useful partner in delivering incremental change.

LANDLORD-LED RENEWAL – MARYLEBONE HIGH STREET, LONDON³

- > Good places don't just happen by themselves. Good governance has a significant and active influence on the urban area. But who governs what, and how much control do they have? The role of the landlord/property owner is completely overlooked in planning and renewal. The negative effect of an exploitive or disinterested landlord is very tangible. It is manifested in poor maintenance, neglect of facades and signage, planning blight (speculative site assembly), or rent-levels that only accommodate the highest rent yields to the detriment of good and desirable businesses. Property is long-term, slow and conservative in nature. Pension funds hold the freehold on properties in many key shopping streets, which are regarded as safe long-term investments. Such institutions have no interest outside the return on their portfolio. This is the normal predictable model. However, 20% vacancy and depreciating value, does not make sense as part of any business plan.
- > The role of the landlord can be very positive, and have an influence on the health of the urban core that surpasses typical property agents experience or expectations. A notable example of this is Marylebone High Street in central London. Over a period of over 10 years, the careful management of property on this street by the Howard de

Walden Estate has led to a 'repositioning' of the High Street, which has rejuvenated the street and the surrounding neighbourhood/community. Essentially, Marylebone is a study in micro-management of a street.

Marylebone High Street has won numerous awards including being voted London's favourite street by BBC Radio 4's listeners (in a survey commissioned by CABE – The Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment). In its inaugural year, the Estate won The Academy of Urbanism's top award for the best street project in Britain and Ireland. A recent rental survey confirmed that Marylebone High Street was one of only four High Streets in the United Kingdom where rents had advanced over the previous 12 months (Baynham, 2008).

The Howard de Walden Estate owns, manages and leases the majority of 92 acres of real estate, including some of the most beautiful Georgian Architecture in London, dating from a masterplan drawn up 1711. Marylebone is located only 800 m from Oxford Street; London's principal retailing street, featuring international multiple retailers and services. However, Marylebone High Street feels a world away from this.

Typical of many successful High Streets in Britain and Europe, it was a thriving community with independent shops, grocers, butchers and services. However, it lost its way in the 1960's and went into a gradual decline through the 1970s and 1980s towards collapse in the recession of the 1990s. In 1995 a third of all the shops were either vacant or occupied by temporary charity shops who paid no rent at all, but were only there to reduce rates liability. The estate describes this situation as desperate, but this is the level of retail vacancy on retail streets throughout the UK and Ireland, where 20% vacancy is becoming normal (<http://www.businessandleadership.com>).

The estate was motivated to take action, and adopted a unique strategy. The retail profile of the street (retail mix and location or particular types of units) was central to their renewal strategy. They sought to position a new anchor retailer

³ My thanks to Simon Baynham, Property Director and Jenny Edwards, Creative Director at the Howard de Walden Estates who gave up their time to meet me and give a tour of the area earlier this year (23/3/2010).

(supermarket) at the centre of the street to draw more people in from other areas. Great care was taken to choose the right retailer with the right profile/image above larger chains. In this case a company called Waitrose was chosen.

- > The landlord took a proactive and engaging role in site assembly to facilitate this key anchor. This included acquisition of a council property, and providing creative engineering solutions to developing a large floor plate within a Conservation Area, with some 30 units above. However, this and other issues were overcome as both the Estate and Westminster City Council, the local authority, were keen to see the revitalisation take place. The supermarket opened in 1999.
 - > At the end of the High Street, the Conran Shop (design, interiors and lifestyle) took on a derelict tyre depot site that had been empty for many years. This high quality second anchor provided a presence that created a reassurance needed to attract smaller retailers for the standard shops on the High Street. Conran opened in 1998. Over time the Estate has increased its control of the estate from 40% to 70%. This has allowed them to improve the quality of the small units. Uses such as photocopying shops and travel agents for example were offered alternative accommodation in side streets. Space was created for the injection of fresh retail ideas to the street.
 - > Control and possession of the units allowed the estate to address the quality of the space available. Small Victorian shops which were awkward in shape (typically 35 sq. m.) were extended to the rear, and their shape rationalised, so that in many situations the size of the unit was doubled and the street frontage and presence increased. This yielded larger, more open, economic and attractive retail accommodation.
 - > Tenant selection is a critical element of the formula. In the mid-1990s it would have been easy to fill the street with multiple coffee shops and ladies, fashion. While recognising scope for some of these uses, the estate specifically did not want them to dominate. The fundamental objective was to consider – what do the residents and local working population want on a day to day basis and what will make them visit this area as opposed to others? The estate wanted retailers who had a point of difference, were exclusive in terms of their merchandise but not price prohibitive so that they could service the needs of the majority of the community in the area (both resident and working). They wanted to create a friendly urban village which had a uniqueness whilst also recognising that the area was reasonably affluent.
- At the same time they took the view that not all of the street needed change or intervention. It remained important to look after the good elements. The Estate made a special effort to ensure that tenants such as an historic book store and patisserie were retained and offered reasonable lease terms.
- Simon Baynham, Property Director of the Howard de Walden Estate highlights that most retail agents were geared to doing deals with multiples and had no real understanding of what works for the small retailers, who they were, or what makes a street work.
- The Estate also organises a Summer Fayre once a year, when streets are closed to traffic, and some 30,000 people are attracted to the area. This event is an important showcase for the urban village. They have also introduced a farmers market on Sundays, and have turned the street from a 5 day a week trading destination to a 7 day offering.
- Marylebone High Street is not a pedestrianised zone. It is a heavily trafficked London street that has not had the benefit of any expensive environmental improvement schemes. However, it is a successful street. It is diverse, vibrant and a wonderful place to experience. This is down to the careful management of the Estate over a prolonged period, working to a particular vision of achieving an urban village core for living and working communities. The Howard de Walden Estate is not an altruistic or philanthropic organisation; what they have done makes commercial sense. They

now have no retail vacancy, they can attract higher rents, and they have created a more desirable neighbourhood overall, which brings in a higher return on residential rents.

- > Howard de Walden Estate and not Westminster Council have been the instigators of change. The revitalisation has been based on a common sense approach. Their recurring question is ‘**what do we need?**’ They have been proactive in adapting the traditional built fabric to modern needs. Not all tenants and locations are charged the same rent (just like a shopping centre) and all new prospective tenants are not held to the highest rent achieved. They have gone to the market and sought anchor tenants. They have supported what is good in the area, and innovated with new units and users.
- > A common response to this model is that it has only been achieved due to the Estate’s high level of control of property, but this is to miss the point. The important message is to learn from the methodology they have used to manage and effect change, with a vision of an urban village at the heart of it. There is no reason why any landlord or partnership of property owners cannot sign-up to a shared vision, with a common objective of improving the street to the benefit of all.

INCREMENTAL IMPLEMENTATION

- > The mechanisms discussed above are by no means the only innovative or alternative approaches to bring investment to urban cores. Tax Increment Financing (TIF) has been utilised in the United States, where large municipal projects are undertaken on the basis of being able to recoup the debt through a property tax. In Ireland, a similar innovation was achieved in a small rural town called Carlow, where a new arts centre was paid for by a one-off 15% hike in commercial rates for the town. An example of Asset Transfer was used in another town, Waterford, whereby a large well-known glass maker, with industrial premises on the edge of town, was given Council property in the town centre to use as visitor centre,

and attract a different profile of person to the town. There are many other financial instruments to explore as well as partnerships, such as co-operatives and issuing of shares.

These initiatives pose questions about how planners think about implementation at the micro-scale when making plans. Rather than thinking of the town core and development as construction, it is important to start to think in terms of value of the existing and how minor interventions can yield a broad impact. In this respect it is useful to think of the town not only in terms of its hardware – the physical fabric, but also the software – the meaning, value and perception of the place. Bottom-up initiatives engage with the town at the street level. Area initiatives, mega-schemes and mega-finance readily ignore the value of place. What really matters is a thorough understanding of its complexity to preserve and enhance traditional cores (Jacobs, 1961). It is important to analyse what the key factors are in an urban area that attract people to spend time there, and what puts people off.

IN TERMS OF HARDWARE WE MUST CONSIDER:

Quality of building stock. Architectural quality, durability of materials, standards of maintenance, signage and shop facades.

Internal space quality. Do commercial, retail and residential units serve the needs of the contemporary market and meet expectations? Do they afford visitors, users and residents the level of comfort required?

Horizontal Plane. This is filled with messages for people to read about places. It includes pavement materials and width, lighting, street furniture, street trees and public spaces. How is the fabric maintained, serviced and enhanced?

Cleanliness. A street may have the finest materials available, but if it is dirty and unkept such efforts are wasted.

IN TERMS OF SOFTWARE, THE TANGIBLE BUT NON-PHYSICAL FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE OUR EXPERIENCE AND PERCEPTION WE NEED TO CONSIDER:

Quality of offer. Services, retail, entertainment etc.

Autonomy, diversity and independence.

Is there the capacity and entrepreneurship to address issues at the micro level.

Tenant mix and location. Is there an identifiable and logical hierarchy of retail and services? Does the place have the right kind of anchor in the right location?

Third Space. Is the urban core multi-dimensional, is there an identifiable experience in the place where people can spend time without being consumers?

Supporting Services. People have expectations of places and services they find there, from ATM machines to public toilets.

Image and perception. Is there a clear understanding of the values and identity of the urban area, and is this communicated to the urban hinterland and outside world?

Culture. Urban cores are mixed use in nature. Culture and traditions that do not involve shopping or consuming are an intrinsic part of that offer.

Environmental quality. Do elements such as noise, smells and air quality, etc. detract from the experience of the urban realm?

It is the nature of cities to grow and develop through different cycles. There remains a need for large scale ambitious plans, and PPP models will continue to play a central role in that process. However, the mechanisms to deliver investment to urban cores discussed in this paper are not about regeneration in the traditional sense. They are led by the business communities seeking to improve the offer of the urban place through paying particular attention to micro factors that all play such an important part of the complexity of the urban core. They address incremental and incidental intervention that seeks to breathe new life into urban cores, and enable them to address the demands of modern society without comprehensive redevelopment and finance. It is about finding a new quality in 'regeneration'; it is about allowing places to adapt and prosper. <