**Hung, drawn and Cultural Quartered: Rethinking Cultural Quarter Development Policy in the UK.**

**Abstract**

Throughout the last two decades, cultural quarters have been used by many local councils across the UK as attempts to redevelop and revitalise declining urban centres. Cities have spent millions of pounds developing cultural quarter policies, justified by the prevailing rhetoric of culture revitalising the local economy and the creation of a ‘cultural milieu’ that stimulates creative industry activity. However, in many cases in the UK, visitor numbers remain lower than expected and in some cases, flagship projects have been sold off or closed down. High rents force out small and freelance creative industry actors, and (non-commercial) artistic interventions are strictly policed. Forming part of the wider debate on the political circumscription of the creativity paradigm, this paper argues that cultural quarters have been viewed within a predominately economistic, dichotomous and simplistic framework. This paper will argue that there is a need for a more practiced-based, subjective account of CQs that goes beyond such a traditional framework to include the more deleterious practice such as community impoverishment, precariousness and short-termism.

**Introduction**

Cultural quarters (hereafter CQs) have emerged in the policy imaginary and rhetoric of the last two decades as tools for urban and economic regeneration across many UK cities and towns. Since the first ‘experimental’ and (sometimes) informal interventions in the 1980s in cities like Sheffield and Manchester, they have slowly become a structured, planned and formalised practice hailed as a solution to many socio-economic problems affecting UK cities pre and post- the recent recession. However, the literature analysing these interventions is polarised between promotional ‘how-to manuals’ (Landry, 2006; Montgomery, 2008; Roodhouse, 2006) and critical case studies (Christophers, 2008; Evans, 2009; McCarthy, 2005; Moss, 2002; Porter and Barber, 2007; Shorthouse, 2004). It can be argued also that from the rapid growth of the economic discourses of creative industries and creative cities, the attention towards CQs has increased exponentially. Indeed, as Oakley (2004: 68) noted, “no region of the country, whatever its industrial base, human capital stock, scale or history is safe from the need for a ‘creative hub’ or ‘cultural quarter’”. Nearly 10 years hence, this has proved the case as more cities develop CQs justified by, or linked to a cultural regenerative paradigm. However, to date, while there has been literature that has identified the broader dynamics and consequences of these interventions on the local scale, far less attention has tried to systematise the forces and powers which drive the development of CQs across the UK, and hence couch these within the wider narratives of neoliberal urban development theories. Moreover, the role of culture within a CQ as more than a consumption or production determinant has yet to be addressed holistically. This paper then, highlights these apparent lacunas and offers a viewpoint that could be utilised critically in future work to begin addressing these issues. To do this, the paper first offers a critical review of the literature and the development of the concepts and ideas around CQs, considering its connections with other literature on politically co-opted creativity themes, such as creative clusters and creative cities. Then, considering the key neoliberal forces and power relations behind the development of CQs, the paper proposes a move beyond a dualistic, instrumental and traditional framework of CQ development, to a more subjective, practice-based account of the incumbent processes that have deleterious consequences.

To this end, the rest of the paper is structured into two main parts. First, we critically engage with the economically deterministic concept of the CQ and their role in the neoliberal development of cities, with particular emphasis on the political and economistic valorisation of ‘culture’ within CQs as part of a consumption or production dialectic. We also consider the hype surrounding CQ policy and their establishment as a new tool for urban governance structures in UK. In particular, we highlight some key neoliberal characteristics of this new management of urban space. In the second part we consider the importance of understanding issues of differentiated cultural values and stakeholders through a more inclusive, less instrumental account of CQs that considers some of the problematic process that a CQ engenders – namely community impoverishment, precariousness and short-termism. Finally we draw conclusions from these loose categories in relation to the traditional framework presented in the first part. In particular, we argue that the result of the proliferation of a standardised CQ ‘template’ has a deleterious effect on the spaces of local and differentiated cultural expression and creative commons, questioning how ‘cultural’ CQs actually are.

**The Economic Determinism of Cultural Quarters**

Before outlining the literature, it is pertinent to clarify what actually a CQ is, as there is an extensive literature on CQs, with varying (and sometimes ambiguous) definitions (see McCarthy, 2005; Porter and Barber, 2007; Roodhouse, 2006, Shorthouse, 2004). The concept’s origin is linked to the development of locally based cultural industry policies in a few UK cities during the 1980s, namely Sheffield, Manchester and London. The emergence of new cultural scenes particularly clustered around often disused areas of these post-industrial cities was seen as a great opportunity to maximise on the growth in consumption of cultural goods and experiences, which also encompassed the potential to re-design and re-develop declining urban spaces (Brown et al., 2000). However, since these first works on cultural industry clusters and artists’ reuse of declining urban areas emerged, further connotations and arguments have been added to refine, define and classify the emergence and development of CQs within policy and local government vernacular. First – influenced by the DCMS’ definition of the ‘Creative Industries’ drawn up in 1998 – there has been a shift from the term ‘cultural quarter’ to ‘creative quarters’ and ‘creative hubs’ (see Oakley, 2004, Evans, 2009). This reflects the wider shift to the urban policy lexicon toward ‘creativity’, which has been utilised more readily on the global stage (see Peck, 2005). Second, influenced by the literature on industrial clusters *a lá* Porter, some urban governments and policy institutions have instead talked of cultural districts and cultural clusters (Pratt, 2004). In both these augmentations of the initial CQ articulation from the 1980s, they have used prevailing political economy narratives to couple CQ development to the economic regeneration of cities. In the former, they are linked to the benefits of creativity and innovation, while in the latter, the economic advantages of agglomeration and local linkages are emphasised. However, in both cases, the broad definition of a clustering of cultural and creative activities remains relatively constant.

Some authors have tried to identify and classify the various definitional characteristics of CQs. Santagata (2002) proposed a classification based on the type of cultural goods and services supplied and the kind of knowledge that is generated and protected within the agglomeration. He distinguishes between cultural districts that are industrial, institutional, museum or metropolitan. The first two are based around the production of creative goods (either from an industrial base or from an institutional framework). The other two are based on the clustering of traditional cultural institutions such as museums or other forms of cultural consumption centres such as cinemas and theatres. Institutions (public or private) play a key role in the historical establishment and development of cultural districts and therefore also in their classification. Legner and Ponzini (2009) offer a geographical classification of the range of activities across cultural clusters, cultural districts and CQs, suggesting that the varying policy frameworks (i.e. bottom-up versus top-down) allows for a distinction between clusters or quarters; with clusters being more ‘bottom-up’, and quarters being more ‘top down’. Such a simplistic binary however can obfuscate the often complex and institutionally varied process of CQ formation. Therefore, given the diverse range of terms and nuanced definitions, different political and urban institutions (and indeed some academic literature) adopt the terms interchangeably.

While reviewing these definitions and classifications is a viable starting point to discuss the development of CQ policy in the UK, it is also important to notice that often CQs (or creative clusters) have been considered as planning interventions, but lack an investigation of the institutional power and subjective contestations behind these activities. Moreover, the effect of the narrowly defined application of ‘culture’, as well as the role of smaller (economic and non-economic) cultural producers has been problematized. Furthermore, while in most of this literature there is an assumption that the production and consumption of culture come together in these spaces, very little attention has been placed on the real connections and supply-chain relations between consumption and production in CQs. In fact, if we look at the literature and case studies (for an overview see Chapain and Comunian, 2010), there seems to be a general assumption that creative clusters place a stronger emphasis on economic production (Ettlinger, 2003, Crewe, 1996), which catalyses policy and public intervention. On the other hand, if talking about CQs specifically, then the emphasis is on consumption. Cultural producers are present in CQ rhetoric, however they are often seen as secondary to the creation of a flagship institution (see Evans, 2009; Mommaas, 2004; Pratt, 2008; Comunian and Mould, 2014). While in policy documents and rhetoric, there is a clear aspiration for the integration of a consumption/production dynamic, the actualities of such integration have not been sufficiently interrogated. Literature has tended to focus either on the networks of productions, or the role of cultural consumption and the visitors’ economy (Shaw et al., 2004), creating a further dualistic premise in CQ characterisation.

A more general critique of culture-led urban regeneration is that it follows a neoliberal agenda (see McGuigan, 2005). CQs have not been immune to such an agenda given the array of descriptive accounts of CQ formation, often purported by those involved in the private consultancy institutions hired to initiate and promote them. Montgomery (2003, 2008) for example, outlines a detailed prescription for a successful CQ. Among a detailed list of consumption and creative industry production facilities, he argues that cultural activity in a CQ “should include production (making objects, goods, products and providing services) as well as cultural consumption (people going to shows visiting venues and galleries)” (Montgomery 2003, 296). The emphasis here (as has been also noted previously to be in the academic literature) is on the importance of production and consumption to the success of a CQ, as the former creates wealth and profit and the latter is the means by which it can proliferate. There is then a sense that a CQ is inherently a vehicle for wealth generation and urban redevelopment, or at least that is the primary, central function. Social engagement and community-orientated cultural activity often are lower down the agenda unless bonded to a profit-making operation.

The spread of the CQ across the UK speaks to the fact that urban regeneration discourse is determining cultural activities along economistic and instrumental lines. By means of promoting particular urban locations, culture is being further promoted as a ‘place making’ tool, one that can be integrated into marketing strategies and used to attract tourists and other externalised capital resources. As such, the clamour to construct these CQs inevitably leads to the emancipation of privately-formulated CQ ‘models’ which in turn, produces the ‘serial replication’ of CQs across the country (McCarthy, 2005). Posited against the backdrop of the recent financial crisis and the onset of the coalition-led policy of austerity, the desire to spend money more efficiently only exacerbates inexpensive ‘tool kit’ CQs models, further creating homogenous urban landscapes under the rubric of the CQ as they are ‘copied and pasted’ across UK towns and cities.

These identifiable ‘models’ of CQs are evidenced through the material used to promote them. Montgomery (2008) for example suggests that there is a triumvirate of characteristics critical to the success of a CQ. They are *activity*, *built form* and *meaning*. Activity covers a range of cultural and creative economic characteristics, from ‘the strength of small firm economy’ to the ‘presence of an evening economy’ (Montgomery, 2008: 309). Second, the built form of the CQ must contain ‘fine grained urban morphology’ and an (undetermined) ‘amount and quality of public space’ (*ibid.*). In analysing the built form of a CQ, he suggests that;

“In the more successful quarters this design ethos is carried through into architecture (modern, but contextual in that it sits within a street pattern), interior design (zinc, blonde wood, brushed steel, white wall) and even the lighting of important streets and spaces (ambient, architectural and signature lighting, as well as functional). All of these reinforce a place’s identity as modern and innovative”.

(Montgomery, 2008: 307 – 308)

Essentially, there is a suggestion CQs need very specific architectural styles and use particular materials that represent the contemporary working environments of the modern economy. While aiming to promote some original design-led style, the unreflexive take up of this approach has produced standardised spaces, with strong corporate aesthetics (Julier, 2005). Finally, the CQ has to have meaning, which Montgomery (2008: 310, original emphasis) argues centres around its culture, as “culture after all *is* meaning”. However, what this ‘meaning’ purports to is chronically under-developed.

Landry (2006) and Roodhouse (2006) also forward a premise of the CQ as a catalyst for urban change, one based on prescriptive processes, or in other words, a ‘model of best practice’. These (often quite detailed) prescriptions of CQs, are of course not a derivative from the local urban council, but from the architects, construction companies and interior design firms that are part of what Wilson (2004) describes as variegated systems of processural space-mobilising constructions. The networks of private companies, in negotiation with the commissioning councils will pinpoint the built form that is seen to be conducive to cultural and creative industry production. But in doing so, homogenised office spaces and replicated ‘incubator’ spaces proliferate within CQs, narrowing the resource base for those cultural activities that do not conform or require these very specific (and often expensive) urban spaces.

As well as the presence of ‘incubator spaces’, CQ ‘models’ will often (in many UK cases) centre on a ‘flagship’ development (Comunian and Mould, 2014). Often a large-scale cultural institution such as a museum, art gallery, major performance centre or cinema is built in the targeted locale with projected large visitor numbers and the promise of auxiliary and related cultural production businesses and institutions. Classic examples often cited within the literature include the Tate Modern in London (Newman and Smith, 2000), the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao (Plaza et al., 2009) and the Sage in Gateshead (Miles, 2005). These large-scale developments are however standalone instances of culture-led urban development, whereas more recent CQ initiatives have sought to use flagship developments as part of a wider strategy of urban renewal. The co-locational presence of these large purpose-built cultural institutions can create schisms with local cultural production. Indeed, as Newman and Smith (2000: 22) argue, “the land-value impacts of large venues and sites of cultural consumption work against small and marginal cultural enterprises […] building up the image of a cultural quarter may itself encourage high-value uses and thus operate against small-firm relocation and start-ups”.

Given the overall preponderance of economically deterministic characteristics of CQs (that can be linked to a neoliberal agenda of culture-led urban development (Peck, 2005)) that this section highlights, it is clear that there is a heavy reliance on CQ characterisation as an economically and politically charged narrative. However, the fundamental question remains somewhat unexamined, namely, where is the ‘culture’ within these CQs? Are CQs forever to be characterised as neoliberal urban regeneration schemes yoked to a production-consumption definitional nexus? This paper goes on to ask if there is a more progressive account with which to understand CQs as part of the urban fabric. The next section therefore will identify and detail the existing framework of CQ that is based on economically deterministic characteristics. It will then offer an alternative view that takes into account a suite of deleterious practices that are not captured by such a framework. Our aim is to highlight how these processes and institutions of small-scale cultural production, local engagement and/or long-term community development, while differentiated (perhaps marginal) from mainstream CQ discourse, can be included in a more subjective, practice-based account of CQs.

**From Dualistic to Differentiated CQs**

We have seen in the previous section, how many classifications of CQs have been concerned with the mapping of different outputs, economic models and forms of CQs. Rather than considering levels of diversity in the nature of the cultural products or size of the cluster, we want to capture the alternative dimensions of a CQ by considering issues of differentiated cultural practices that are not immediately economistic.

Combining the critical and analytical review of the existing literature in the previous section with a brief but thorough analysis of all the policy literature on CQs in the UK[[1]](#footnote-1), it becomes clear that there is a tendency of local councils and urban promoters to oversimplify the concept of culture within CQ to an economic imperative. More specifically however, such analysis identifies three main types of CQ; one based on a large cultural flagship institution as the main driver of growth; another based on the creation of functional and rentable ‘incubator spaces’ for creative and cultural production; and the third based on boutique and/or chain store retail developments. This triumvirate model mirrors the broad production-consumption spectrum by which CQs are characterised in the literature discussed in the previous section. The further analysis of policy literature identified the key stakeholders involved in the development of CQs as either locally-sourced (existing small businesses, charities and/or cooperatives) and therefore the CQ develops organically (i.e. bottom up); versus a CQ that is developed via policy intervention from ‘above’ by a city council and/or national government in partnership with private companies (top down) (also see Legner and Ponzini, 2009).

Such an instrumentalist typology has a symbiotic relational existence with the development of CQs. In other words, the more such a model is perpetuated, the more systematic and replicative CQs become. As has been mentioned in the previous section, this overtly economistic and neoliberal framework leaves little space (if any) for the exploration of the issue of where the ‘cultural’ is within the CQ narrative. As such, we offer a tentative alternative viewpoint, one which moves away from the frameworks of the current (academic and policy) literature which has the outcome of creating a putative instrumentalism along prescribed economistic lines. Such a viewpoint is not concerned with the creation of an alternative framework, but to emancipate the under-represented cultural and social characteristics that are affected by the development of a CQ. To do so requires not only a focus on how they are constructed (and the public-private institutional nexus it entails), but also to identify those processes and people that are affected, but not already recognised; be they local residents, small scale cultural workers, or users in the longer term that are not yet articulable. We argue that there is a need to focus less on frameworks and how they coerce CQ development to fit into a particular typology of design (i.e. a replicable, economically mobile model a la Montgomery (2008)) and more on the practices and processes of those who build, use and are affected by CQs. Then we can begin to realise a more nuanced view of CQ development – one that ‘makes room’ for the cultural, social and community-orientated practices *as well as* the more economic neoliberal processes that build the CQs in the first instance.

In order to position such a view, it is useful to identity three ‘processes’ that are embroiled within CQs development, but are often under-represented or ‘hidden’ in current frameworks and evaluative methods. These processes we have articulated as *community* *impoverishment*, *precariousness* and *short-termism*. The initiators of CQs have been well-versed above, and their public-private constitution problematized (e.g. Julier, 2005; McCarthy, 2005; Christophers, 2008; Evans, 2009). So, we are proposing that these processes need to be brought into a qualitatively constituted viewpoint of a CQ that does not rest on an economistic and instrumental framework. We of course realise that isolating such processes is, in itself, an instrumental process and can risk mirroring the very thing that we are looking to transcend. However, we see this very much as a starting point of inquiry, rather than a peremptory classification to be rigorously followed. It is therefore merely a humble ‘step in the right direction’, and have used such delineatory categories purely for the purposes of clarity.

*Community impoverishment*

There is often an entrenched incommensurable dichotomy in policy interventions and CQ development; they seem to cater either for tourists or for the local population, with the economic determinism prioritising the former to the social detriment of the latter (Christophers, 2008; Mommaas, 2004; Evans, 2009). As we have already seen, this paradigm sees the promotion of a globalised consumption culture that homogenises, and can cause a location to lose ‘cultural individuality’ (Bailey et al., 2004). Such urban regeneration processes aim to offer the widest choice of cultural consumption and production opportunities, instead of rediscovering a sense of place, history and belonging; a process which is linked to a larger on-going debate on who should be the target for cultural development of cities (see Zukin, 1985). Such a trend to cater for visitors rather than embark upon more complicated and socially-inflected procedures to cater for local communities means local services suffer from lack of funding, and are often displaced (Donald and Morrow, 2003). As such, an oversupply of tourist-orientated retail and leisure functions (cafés, nightclubs, restaurants, cinemas etc.) coexist with a lack of community facilities or social services. Therefore a more socially inclusive CQ ideology needs to address such concerns. Purely commercial concerns need to be counter-balanced by non-economic, non-profitable services.

A concrete example of community impoverishment can be seen with the case of MediaCityUK in Salford. As a CQ, it is perhaps one of the most controversial given the national (and some international) (in)famous exposure garnered during the planning, construction and first few years of operation (Christophers, 2008). The financial backing of the project (estimated to be nearly £1bn) was almost exclusively from private sources (with one real estate company the sole backer), creating a CQ (combined with the wider development of Salford Quays) that while politically and nationally foregrounded, is privately managed and resourced (Mould, 2014).

The area is characterised by highly privatised and corporatized aesthetics, with high-rise buildings housing business space and luxury accommodation, both of which come at premium rental rates. The area has been characterised as economically uneven (Christophers, 2008; Salford Star, 2011), with highly deprived wards surrounding the relative luxury of MediaCityUK, moreover, the council has had to divert funds from social services to cater for MediaCityUK’s auxiliary services. For example, Salford Council spent £330,000 on a bus service between Salford Crescent Bus station and MediaCityUK. Such an endeavour is questionable given the expense and lack of funds the council has for more fundamental social services, given it has seen large budget cuts through the national government’s austerity program (Salford Star, 2011). The more general critique of the impoverishment of MediaCityUK and the wider Salford Quays area as a CQ has also pointed toward the lack of engagement with existing cultural infrastructure and creative community initiatives, characterising the overt ‘top-down’ narrative. An example includes the demolition of ‘Graffiti Palace’, a stretch of wall along the Orsdall canal which has replaced with commercial developments linked to MediaCityUK. Also, the Secret Gardens Festival in 2012 was an attempt to directly engage the local residents with MediaCityUK via creative and digital technologies, yet other than the celebratory event itself, there has been no sustained collaborations (Haywood and McArdle, 2012). The perceived lack of community and local level engagement serves therefore to ossify the view of the predominately economic priorities of the CQ as an urban locale, and the defenestration of community level social offerings.

The area then is very much a CQ characterised by high-end production, consumption and a lack of local community cultural intentness. In essence then, any cultural provisions are very much of a professionalised, corporate nature that is utilised for distinct financial rewards in retail and leisure consumption on the one hand, and the production of cultural goods (although mainly media, television and advertising artefacts) on the other. MediaCityUK then presents a specific perspective that mirrors many other privately-led CQ developments in the UK (and indeed internationally); in that it is dependent on the commercial exploitation of creativity, and the impoverishing effects on local social provisioning that it inevitably entails.

*Precariousness*

From the vast array of political documentation on CQs, it is clear that often public policy makers and urban promoters will equate ‘culture’ with commercial institutions and flagship developments, i.e. something that can be built and consumed. During the CQ planning process then, while large cultural institutions, cultural partnerships and investors find easy access to committee and planning discussions, this is often not the case for local creative industry firms, freelancers and practitioners. As such, the physical spaces are not designed with such production in mind. As the cultural and creative sector is populated mainly by small and medium size companies, freelancers and sole-traders (Mould et al., 2013), it is almost impossible for the voices and needs of the sector to be heard or to play a role in shaping CQ development. Therefore it is critical that any articulation of a CQ needs to redress this imbalance, and start to incorporate the ‘grass-roots’ cultural enterprises. These small firms and their workers (mainly freelance, part-time or interns) are often characterised as ‘precarious labour’ (Bain and McLean, 2013, Gill and Pratt, 2008; Hracs, 2009; McAuliffe, 2012, Ross, 2009). Such precariousness, rather than being guarded against by large-scale creative and cultural industry institutions, is instead glorified through the creativity paradigm. For example the recent trend of pop-up urbanism seems to glorify the precariousness of creative/retail work, celebrating the innovative and agile nature of such work. However, the realities are that the large majority of creative industry workers live subsistence lifestyles and struggle for new work (Banks and Hesmondhalgh, 2009). Incubator spaces, temporary work spaces and the like are often part of a CQ provision, but if their rents are affordable, they are only so for the short-term. After a certain time period of residency, the subsidised rents are taken away and if the incumbents have not progressed to fully-fledge profitable companies, then it is difficult for them to stay, and so the cycle of nomadism starts again. Such a view, if taken in isolation risks festishizing local, small-scale production as a panacea for the problems inherent in the CQ process. But instead of posting them as the rightful end users of CQs, there is a more pressing need for the CQ development process to be more sensitive to their (often non-economic) needs and to recognise that precariousness is a fundamental part of creative and cultural work.

Such an example of the precariousness engendered by CQs can be seen in the Ouseburn area, located one mile from the East of Newcastle city. From the 1970s Ouseburn was declared an Industrial Improvement Area (the first in the Newcastle area) in response to changes in government policy aiming to revive derelict areas through industrial policy. Alongside a co-operative that was formed by existing businesses, a formalised Trust (called the Ouseburn Trust) set up in 1996 primarily out of fears that the prevailing urban development being undertaken by real estate developers could threaten the remaining Victorian heritage in the Ouseburn area (Gonzalez and Vigar, 2010, Bailey et al., 2004).

Despite the presence of the Trust and a desire from incumbents to maintain its unique productive capacity, Ouseburn highlights how a creeping formalised CQ development policy can catalyse precariousness within the creative workforce. Previously, Ouseburn has remained distinctly rooted in the working-class context of the area. Indeed, the role of the Ouseburn Trust was very much seen as an asset to the preservation of such socialities within the local community, something that was shared by the incumbent local artists, and cultural and creative producers who had been there since its inception in 1982 (Comunian, 2011). However, this approach soon had negative repercussions as the area was marginalised in reference to the broader cultural development of the city, in particular in relation to the mainstream culture-led regeneration taking place on the Quayside because of the distinct lack of sustained profit-making (and therefore rent-paying) practices of the resident businesses. At the marketing and promotional level, Newcastle-Gateshead Initiative (NGI) developed the first CQ map of the city. In it, five CQs were included: the Quayside, Grainger Town, the Haymarket, Chinatown and Jesmond, but no mention was given to the Ouseburn Valley which had the largest co-location of artists and creative practitioners in the area at the time. However, a creative production cluster, however large, if it is uncoupled to a cultural consumerist aesthetic, it is increasingly not in keeping with the political economic rhetoric of what a CQ is to be. With the refurbishment of the Grade II listed building at 30 Lime Street and the establishment of a new flagship cultural institution (the ‘Seven Stories’ national centre of Children’s Book opened in 2005), there has been a growing attention towards integrating visitors’ experiences and attraction. But they are introduced the expense of the incumbent local producers who are seeing their rents increase because of it and subsequently displaced. Overall, the grassroots development of Ouseburn Valley was strongly linked to the affordable working space that it has offered to local artists and craft people, and the establishment of the Trust has allowed local businesses and local artists to resist the rise of rents that comes with property speculation. However, the pressure from local and national government agendas towards attracting more economic investment and growth to the area has been overwhelming, and many properties have been given over more commercialised and corporatized cultural consumption activities. This is increasing the precarious working conditions of creative workers in the Ouseburn Valley and the push towards favouring economically driven creative activities rather than amateur artists or precarious workers is eradicating the areas distinctiveness and creating a more ‘identikit’ CQ.

*Short-termism*

The third process of ‘short-termism’ is perhaps universally applicable to the broader problems of neoliberal capitalist and political agency. When looking at CQ strategies and proposals, there is a clear tendency from planners and developers to adopt a short-term perspective (what has been widely been seen as ‘short-termism’ (Carley, 2000)), and is a systemic quality that directly affects the other two processes. In other words, short-termism fuels the economic imperative to prioritise commercial services, often with the involvement of ‘outside’ companies and private investors, over investment in local services and amenities. It also implies that investment and support is spent towards starting the CQ (for instance with initial funding available for start-up companies) but very little in the way of support or guidance after the first few years, and so we see precariousness increase. Furthermore, this also supports a new form of competition amongst cities and CQs, where capital attraction strategies and localised advantage might move/attract new companies (but only for a very short period of time). As Gray (2009: 19) argues, “it assumes that every city can win in the battle for talent and growth. Creativity scripts, however, are better understood as “zero-sum” urban strategies constituted within the context of uneven urban growth patterns”. However contrarily, some arguments within the literature suggests that investing in ‘grassroots’ creative industries can prove to be more beneficial; “the development of a viable indigenous sector is crucial to providing a long-term basis for employment in the industry” (Coe, 2000: 392). More than this though, if CQ formulation engages with local non-economic community production *as well* *as* small-scale industry producers, it can be more inclusive and ‘culturally robust’, in that it is not predicated upon a narrow set of homogenous commercialised cultural provisions that can move on very quickly. But a fix on short-term boosterism negates such a view.

Take for example Sheffield’s CQ, which was one of the first to be developed in the UK. It was predicated on a pre-existing cultural vibrancy (particularly a thriving music scene) which led to the development of the National Centre for Popular Music (NCPM) in Sheffield. Forwarded as a millennium project, construction was completed in 1998 and it officially opened in March 1999. Sheffield council commissioned the NCPM, drawing on lottery funding in an attempt “reassert the local within global cultural flows” (Brown et al., 2000: 440). Costing £15 million to build, the NCPM hoped to attract half a million visitors per year according to the promotional material. With poor visitor numbers and a failed £2 million re-launch as a live music venue, it was bought by Sheffield Hallam University in 2003 and is now their Student Union building. The positioning of the NCPM in Sheffield’s CQ was a deliberate ploy to stimulate the local creative industry community and compliment the vibrant music industry within Sheffield with a flagship institution (Brown et al., 2000). However, despite the relative success of the surrounding incubator spaces and vibrancy created by the adjacent university, the low level of visitor numbers was not enough to maintain the centre economically, and hence it had no other option but to shut down.

The failure of the NCPM and the subsequent reuse of the building as Sheffield Hallam University’s Student Union, purports to a number of different issues, but notably, the high levels of intervention from the council during its implementation in the 1980s (including the NCPM and infrastructure upgrading) were due to the desire for short-term job creation at a time of severe deindustrialisation in the city. Sheffield’s CQ is still suffering as a relic of an overtly production-focused interventionist short-term strategy, lacking the leisure and ‘mixed’ economy features (Moss, 2002), as well as the social and local cultural sensitivity that would retain users and residents. However, these perceived problems of Sheffield’s CQ emanate from its comparison with subsequent CQs featuring a mixed economy *a la* the Montgomery (2008) model. Despite the failure of the NCPM, the area remains relatively productive in terms of its cultural industry activity, for example business spaces such as the Workstation have high occupancy levels and there are graduate employment links with the adjacent Sheffield Hallam University. However, the CQ is not the ‘national’ hub that it has hoped to be in the original remit as it remains an area predominantly devoted to production rather than consumption of cultural products, therefore adhering to the traditional models of CQ development.

**Conclusions**

Looking at the extensive literature on CQ we could argue that much has been learnt about the development of CQ in UK in the last decades. However, looking more closely, we see homogenously designed urban spaces, failed flagships projects and the boom of private consultancy firms offering CQ design services, and the uncritical and unreflexive take-up of CQ as a neoliberalised ‘model’ of urban renewal across the UK. As has been argued throughout this paper, this has been achieved through a predominately traditional typological framework that is yoked to a perceived production-consumption and top-down-bottom-up axis. We have argued that more needs to be understood about the nuances and exact practices of CQ development that cannot be so easily identified as part of a production or consumption paradigm. While the discussion and analysis in this paper is more of an introduction and marker toward a more critical engagement with CQs, we have attempted to offer a more holistic and culturally-sensitive reading of CQ development that takes into account local communities, the effect on cultural work and the long-term (non-economic) goals. These are of course arbitrary groupings of practices to be sure, and other more nuanced and specific cultural and social idiosyncrasies could be articulated. But what they represent (and what we want to purport) is a move away from pragmatic instrumentalism to a focus on the (often deleterious) practices of those affected by CQs, as this is what’s needed to fully appreciate the full impact of CQ development in any given area.

Without these subjectivities being referenced, there will always be one big question that remains: who are CQs for? It seems obvious that commercial and economic power plays a key role in shaping the profile and nature of CQs which means that small-scale creative and cultural producers, and local needs and long-term goals are regularly squeezed out of the discussion. The role played by developers and rent value cannot be underestimated and can completely change the configuration of CQs (as is the case in Salford, with MediaCityUK being built and financed by one large property company (Christophers, 2008)). We have focus on three processes that we have seen as immediately obvious in terms of their non-consideration in CQ development. However, what our discussions demonstrate is that they are three articulations of a multifaceted, complex neoliberalised process. Community impoverishment and precariousness are inevitable consequences of a short-term agenda, which comes as part of the package of contemporary CQ development. While consultants tend to promote re-design and embellishment of public spaces for CQs, these actions are only leading towards the attraction of outside investors and large commercial entities that will empty the CQs of any locally incumbent producers who cannot afford the new rental spaces, and marginalised existing communities through the up-scaling of the housing stock and other gentrifying activities. Furthermore, it seems obvious that in recent developments, the market-driven end of the creative industries (media, software, design) is being favoured rather than the more artistic and often less economically viable sectors (craft, performing arts, visual arts). The former are now more profitable sectors, but they are populated by larger companies that fed on short-term locational incentives that are offered by CQs. This causes an even greater clamour for short-term ‘boosts’ that such companies can provide and hence propagates even more community impoverishment and precariousness. It is therefore timely to begin to question the validity of such a CQ policy; a question which we have begun to pose throughout this paper. But such an inquisitive viewpoint risks a fetishization of local and community-based actors if they are posited as a panacea for the ills of commercial, neoliberalised CQ development. Our arguments though have pointed to the fact such a focus on localised, non-economic, community activity should simply be included into the development discussions rather than marginalised.

The paper argues for the need to take into account what Healey (2006) calls the ‘relational complexity’ of local dynamics in the governance and planning processes of CQs, because there is a difficult balancing act needed between cultural consumption, cultural production and fostering a cultural (non-economic) milieu. We have argued throughout this paper that to date, the balance is far too skewed in favour of the first of these. Thinking about these narratives together as a suite of inter-connected and often conflicting processes, rather than as part of a dichotomous cultural-production/top-down-bottom-up framework can help to deconstruct a rhetoric ‘fast-urban policy’ fuelled by a very narrow, and economically determined view of creativity and culture (Peck, 2005) which has dominated CQ policy to date. Rather than taking for granted that large cultural investments and CQs help local creative industries and the local community, it is important to consider what kind of tangible benefits they can provide and verify and evaluate if these benefits are tangibly felt, rather than just theoretically forwarded (Comunian and Mould, 2014).

The key question of what kind of culture is promoted and fostered in CQ development also needs further investigation. We have deliberately avoided the definitional quagmire of the term ‘culture’ (with all its multidisciplinary understandings) as it is far beyond the remit of this paper. But, from our introductory analysis of CQs, it is clear that many of them promote a culture of pure production and/or consumption, by either the institutional public culture (especially in flagship projects) or the leisure, retail and entertainment consumption culture. While enjoying restaurants and cafes can to be described as a cultural experience – if CQs are to engender the political rhetoric of improving the local cultural commons, CQs need a be substantially shift in their planning mantra. CQs pay very little attention to the role played by subcultures, informal scenes, community creative initiatives and general creative freedom of expression. Spaces tend to be highly regulated, securitised and often sanitised to cater for outside visitors and shoppers rather than communities sharing values and community cultural practices. Diversity and heterogeneity of cultures is often ignored – the culture of a CQ is hence too narrow, and economically deterministic. It’s time to really explore what kind of culture we want in a CQ.

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1. Which has been mapped at http://goo.gl/maps/1j6K [↑](#footnote-ref-1)