Editorial

Global competitiveness versus community identity: Can culture be the answer to managing this uneasy balance in towns and cities?

According to a recent United Nations report, the population of our planet will reach seven billion people this year.[1] It is nothing new to say that this milestone will be attained in full knowledge that poverty, environmental decline, unsustainable consumption levels, global migration flows and uneven demographic growth will remain some of our more pressing long-term challenges for generations to come. In fact, the physical impact of man on our planet has been so dramatic over the last century that an altogether new geological epoch has been adopted by many scientists: the Anthropocene.[2] Similarly, in socioeconomic terms, leading thinkers have suggested that the (still) affluent West has made a transition from the 'Age of Transformation' (1978–91: Reaganomics) and the 'Age of Optimism' (1991–2008: the 'end of history') to today's 'Age of Anxiety',[3] where one actor's gain is increasingly coming at the expense of another's, just at a stage in global geopolitics when some of our biggest problems — including nuclear proliferation and global warming — require new levels of cooperation through partnership working with former military foes and present-day competitors in global markets. Once again, cities should be leading the way on this front as the body of knowledge and practice in innovative public-private partnership solutions to urban challenges continues to grow.

Yet, much to the dismay of some analysts,[4] the short-termism, and lack of decisive action and clear strategic focus displayed by many Western governments (largely as a result of the global financial crisis) is leading to underinvestment in the infrastructures that our cities rely on to prosper and even survive on a sustainable basis into the future and to remain competitive in the global arena. Increasingly, there are voices that advocate a change in paradigm whereby investment is prioritised over consumption as a strategic focus[5] in a similar way to the approach that India and China have decided to take towards their cities and growing population. Indeed, there are those who see cities rather than states increasingly as the new centres of governance of the future; a situation that may eventually lead to a strategic clash between some cities and the countries that gave birth to them.[6] The seeds of this potential strategic clash are being sown today in the form of cultural factors that may, if left misunderstood and unmanaged, represent a ticking time bomb. This issue of the *Journal of Town and City Management* deals with culture in the multifaceted manner it deserves by exploring its complex relationship with communities, local government, businesses and other key stakeholders.

Growing global migration flows around

the world are creating major challenges for cities, which are often the focal departure and arrival points for these flows. However, these flows are also creating opportunities like never before in human history. In countries like Spain, where the resident Chinese population was a mere 10,000 in 1995, the number of resident Chinese immigrants has grown to 240,000 today. It is estimated that by 2020 Spain will attract one million Chinese tourists a year,[7] which may have important strategic implications for tourism and nation branding. This growing resident ethnic community is bringing not only an exotic touch to Spanish society but, crucially, a very dynamic sense of entrepreneurship, different work ethics and new expectations with regards to the types of service and governance that city and regional authorities should provide. The story is echoed in Great Britain, where a recent study by the influential Pew Research Centre[8] pointed out that one in four migrants to this country today are Muslims and that the UK's Muslim population will rise from 2.8 million today to 5.5 million within 20 years. Based on current trends, the report forecasts that nearly one in ten Britons will be Muslim by 2030, which would be equivalent to the population of Kuwait.

In this issue, John Eade (Centre for Research on Nationalism, Ethnicity and Multiculturalism at the University of Surrey and Roehampton University (UK)) explores some of the integration issues faced by Polish and Bangladeshi migrants in London from a cultural perspective that, if recent events in Northern Africa are anything to go by, city leaders can ignore only at their peril in political discourse and governance — faith. On the other hand, Stephen Shaw (Cities Institute, London Metropolitan University (UK)) provides a historic review of the development of city quarters as hubs for ethnic minority communities with special emphasis on London's Brick Lane Bangladeshi community, also known as 'Banglatown'. The review shows the fragility of these *ecosystems*, where policy interventions by local government linked to urban regeneration, rebranding and social integration programmes can result in unintended consequences, which may sometimes even accelerate global homogenisation processes locally through standardised place branding approaches that pay little attention to the views of local businesses and residents. This conclusion is echoed by Mihalis Kavaratzis (University of Leicester (UK)), who explores critically the relationship between culture, place making, place marketing and branding with references to contemporary urban policy and practice. Kavaratzis advocates that culture should be used as an innovative mechanism to foster and nurture more participatory approaches to city management that involve local communities in strategic decision-making processes affecting all aspects of place branding and wider governance issues, with recent developments in Budapest (Hungary) as an example of innovative best practice in this field.

In a similar vein, Magdalena Florek (Poznań University of Economics (Poland) and European Place Marketing Institute) argues the as yet largely underestimated value of emotions in the kind of ties that communities develop to their place of residence. It could be argued that many cities, much like flowers, have developed complex mechanisms for attracting visitors and inward investment, even when this process of attraction is surely only a first step in a very competitive world where cities increasingly seek to achieve sustainable competitiveness. Yet, as in biological systems, attractiveness alone is not enough to achieve sustainable competitive advantage. Instead, sustainability is rather linked to retaining individuals (and often their families too!)

through the (bilateral) development of loyalty ties that encourage those people to work and live longer in these cities. In turn, urban *ecosystems* will also benefit (very much symbiotically) from the cross-pollination of values, knowledge and experience that incomers will bring with them. It is perhaps these intrinsically human and logic-defying characteristics, such as loyalty, attachment, self-sacrifice and love that could define some of the economic migration flows of the future, particularly for highly-qualified professionals for whom emigrating is often a question of choice rather than necessity. Similarly, as quality of life grows in importance in the rankings of city attractiveness, it is likely that culture will become a more enduring element in city management interventions as a manifestation of a community's sense of belonging, identity and, ultimately, happiness and satisfaction expressed through their direct and voluntary engagement with local place making projects.[9]

In business terms, this renewed confidence in urban environments as desirable places to work, live and visit can only lead to the type of innovative partnership initiatives explored by Caroline Vosburgh in her case study of the Galleria Studios. As the arts sector enters another year that will be defined by further budget cuts and uncertainty, it is the type of venture outlined in this case study that may well offer a new way of integrating creativity into the private sector and urban revitalisation interventions through collaborative multidisciplinary partnerships guided by the principles of the creative city.[10] On the other hand, James Kennell (University of Greenwich (UK)) provides a stark warning regarding the applicability of city-based cultural models of development in smaller towns, where town centre managers and community leaders often lack the resources or support to evaluate the feasibility of implementing tailor-made

interventions. This is particularly applicable to British seaside towns, which, in spite of their rich heritage and quintessential character, often remain a far cry from the bustling mass tourism centre status they enjoyed in Victorian times and largely until the early 1970s, except during the First World War and World War II. Kennell discusses some of the efforts made over the last two decades to regenerate these towns socioeconomically through a focus on culture — with Margate as a fine case study — and argues the role of culture in fostering a more community-led approach to urban revitalisation, which is more likely to deliver sustainable outcomes to smaller towns.

As the role of communities grows in urban revitalisation interventions through a focus on culture, one of the issues that local authority policy makers and town centre managers will increasingly begin to face is the need for decision support systems that help to target key stakeholder groups and evaluate the impact of funded interventions. The paper by Stuart Strother (Azusa Pacific University (USA)) provides a fine example of how such decision support systems and their methodologies (in this case, the welfare weights technique) can be applied to urban projects and interventions where high levels of complexity would make it difficult and time-consuming for downtown management teams to reach optimum solutions. Although similar quantitative analysis techniques and decision support systems (eg expert systems, neural networks, fuzzy logic) have been used by computer scientists and engineers in major urban infrastructure projects for over two decades, this approach to design, monitoring and evaluation has only recently entered the town and city management arena. In fact, a recent transnational research project co-funded by the European Commission through the Education and Culture Directorate

General's Culture Programme (2007–2013) found that key performance indicators are rarely used in culture-led urban revitalisation programmes and events and, when they are, they rarely follow data collection methodologies that would make them comparable to existing town centre management indicators.[11] As a result of this, the study developed a full battery of indicators and methodologies that built on a variety of existing town and city management indicators and piloted data collection methodologies in a variety of cultural events in Italy, Spain and the UK, opening the field for further benchmarking and comparative studies worldwide. Although the monitoring and evaluation of the impacts of culture-led urban revitalisation interventions remains a contentious topic, it would seem only sensible that computerised techniques (eg decision support systems) that have helped major urban infrastructure project teams to reach optimum sustainable solutions for decades should become commonplace in socioeconomic projects with similar or even higher levels of complexity, where city managers at present often face having to make executive decisions with incomplete information. However, as evidenced by the type of transnational partnership that carried out the research study on key performance indicators for culture-led urban revitalisation programmes, the process of taking knowledge forward in this field must involve closer links between academics and practitioners. Only this level of cooperation — often in the form of knowledge transfer partnerships and joint applied research studies — will result in the kind of multidisciplinary solutions that our towns and cities require to take them to a new level of competitiveness regionally, nationally and/or globally. It must be one that builds on what is clearly most difficult to replicate by competitors: each urban centre's unique sense of identity, with culture as the quintessential exponent of its residents' idiosyncrasy.

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