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Harding, A. (2004) *City thinking: Transformations in principles and practice* (UK)

***City Thinking: Transformations in
Principles and Practice***

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For Submission to: Urban Studies
Not for quotation

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Abstract

This article analyses the variety of models and styles that have been employed in the delivery of publicly funded urban research in the UK in recent decades. Whilst they have generated a large volume of useful material and insights, they have also been slow in meeting a growing need for more customized, context-sensitive, cross-disciplinary and dynamic urban intelligence bases that are accessible and useful to – but still independent from – ‘urban’ policy-makers and practitioners.

This situation could change as some significant shifts within the UK policy context that are identified within the paper interact to encourage a new, more vital and ‘connected’ approach to urban research. However, whilst there are some signs that this is beginning to happen, we suggest that more deliberate and strenuous attempts are needed to build city-regional intelligence capacities and infrastructures if that transition is to be fully achieved.

To explore these issues the article is divided into the following sections. First, an examination of the changing context in which urban research is taking place, including an identification of the key actual and potential drivers for change. Second, a consideration of the key contextual determinants of the shape and nature of national urban research – the way in which the UK Government ‘sees’ and fails to see – cities. Third, it reviews some of the key models of national urban research, considering their strengths and weaknesses in terms of informing policy choices and directions. Fourth, based upon recent work the SURF Centre has undertaken for national government on city-regional intelligence capacities and processes, it explores the constraints and opportunities for developing more context-sensitive urban research. Finally, it reflects upon the future and the key ingredients of what are seen as effective and valuable urban research programmes.

1. The revitalization of urban research?

Three main trends are altering the context in which 'urban policies' are defined and delivered which have far-reaching implications for the demand and supply of 'urban' research programmes. Each of the trends can be seen as responses to the constraints and possibilities opened up by globalization and how this has challenged the notion of nationally bounded economic, social and political processes and the notion of undifferentiated 'national' responses to 'national' problems and potentials. By definition, these trends are cross-national, but the particular responses they help to produce inevitably take different forms, depending upon individual national (and sub-national) contexts and peculiarities. In this article we concentrate upon the UK for the simple reason we know a great deal about this context. However, there are parallel developments taking place in other countries which await responses to this article, as well as further comparative work.

The three main trends are: first, a tendency toward the devolution and decentralization of powers and resources from the national level to sub-national public authorities and agencies. We can see this particularly, but by no means exclusively, in policy areas related to economic production (Oakley 1998). Second, a growing recognition of the importance of cities to regional and national economies (Sassen 2001; Storper 1997). Third, selective reforms within higher education which are designed to encourage better connections between universities and their localities and regions (May and Perry 2003; Robins and Webster 2002).

These trends are part of a 'globalising logic'. Whether we are addressing the deepening and widening of the European Union or the formation or extension of cross-national trading blocks in other parts of the world, we

have a process of supra-nationalisation as the leading manifestation of a growing recognition that the flow of capital, goods, people and images is intensifying (Castells 1998; Sassen 2000) in environments increasingly unconstrained by national boundaries and needs to be regulated – if at all – at a cross-national scale. We also have various forms of ‘sub-nationalisation’ based upon the recognition that the national scale is not only too small for the performance of certain traditional governmental functions, but also too large for the effective performance of others.

At one level we would expect the above trends to be strongly inter-related, to have produced a significant strengthening and rearticulation of ‘urban’ policies and to have begun to transform urban research agendas and the ways in which research programmes are defined and delivered. The narrative would be as follows: as national governments have found traditional, centralised forms of economic and social regulation to be increasingly ineffective in a globalising world, there has been a corresponding search for more place-sensitive sub-national governing arrangements. These would be better able to achieve the following: support territorial (and hence national) competitiveness; provide for a sustainable balance between economic, social and environmental objectives; recognize the need to support those territories that contribute most to national competitiveness in view of the development of the information economy; mobilise key public agencies behind targeted and differentiated sub-national development strategies, not least higher education institutions which can act as ‘knowledge factories’ within localized information economies and stimulate greater demand for the development of an intelligence base upon which targeted, differentiated strategies can be built.

This reading begs several important questions about the extent to which institutional restructuring processes, sub-national policy changes and higher education reforms have been driven by similar 'globalising logics'. If these initial observations are justified, there remains a question over the extent to which there is any real connection and co-ordination between the agents that have been most affected by these changes? Investigators have thus examined the dynamics of relations between economic development and pre-existing forms of governance and social capital (Leibovitz 2003). Within the UK, each of these trends is well established if policy reactions are any indicator, but they can just as easily be viewed as tentative and mutually disconnected.

Take the process of devolution and decentralization. Recent national (Labour) administrations have taken the historic step of creating new, directly elected, devolved Governments of one form or another in the non-English nations (Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland) and in the London metropolitan area. Within the remaining English regions, which account for around three-quarters of the UK population, this process has so far delivered only unelected Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) and a commitment, to be realized during the current Parliament, that the three most northerly regions (North West, North East and Yorkshire and Humberside) – those that have been most adversely affected by processes of economic restructuring – will be allowed to stage popular referenda on whether to create what would be comparatively weak elected regional authorities ERAs). Only in the case of London is there a clear urban/metropolitan component to the devolution/decentralization programme.

There is little clarity as to whether the overall purpose of these reforms is primarily democratic - a response to clearly articulated sub-national

demands for greater autonomy - or technocratic, i.e. a wish to improve the efficiency of local service delivery, as opposed to economic, that is a specific wish to promote regional innovation and competitiveness. Whilst the Labour Government has recently committed itself, in the medium term, to the erosion of inter-regional disparities within the UK (REFERENCE), there is little in its devolution/decentralization programme to suggest how such an outcome can be achieved.

In terms of transformations in urban policy, the picture is equally ambiguous. Whilst the UK has long had the reputation, internationally, of having the most developed and formalized set of specific urban policy instruments (REFERENCE), the bulk of which are devoted to the somewhat imprecise goal of 'regeneration', it remains the case that urban programmes have tended to be dominated by a single national department – currently called the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) - rather than being supported and pursued across Government as a whole.

Resulting initiatives from the ODPM have been relatively lightly financed, short-lived and experimental, as well as operating in isolation from more established policy and expenditure areas. Their modus operandi has been to attempt to tackle the most acute urban problems through special, localized physical and economic initiatives targeted upon the 'worst' urban neighbourhoods. Only recently, through the activities of a working group linking the ODPM, the national Treasury and the Department for Industry, the key local authorities serving the core of the major conurbations outside London (Birmingham, Bristol, Leeds, Liverpool, Manchester, Newcastle, Nottingham and Sheffield) and some of the RDAs, have discussions on urban policy been linked specifically to the contribution of key metropolitan areas to national competitiveness. These discussions, whilst potentially prefiguring

a significant break with past practices, have not yet had any discernable impact on national policy design or expenditure choices.

Finally, in terms of higher education policies and expenditures, it is true to say that the UK's national research councils have increasingly stressed the importance of applied work that can directly support innovation and competitiveness. In addition, some funding has been earmarked to facilitate 'outreach' activities that promote closer connections between individual universities and the communities – primarily the business communities – within the localities and regions in which they sit (HEFCE 2002). Yet we have also seen a trend to improve the international competitiveness of UK higher education through the concentration of research funding into a dwindling number of elite institutions which remains unconnected to any spatial development policies. Overall, the effect of this pursuit of 'international excellence' is to favour certain urban areas – particularly London, Oxford and Cambridge, all of which are located in the most prosperous UK regions – over others, irrespective of their actual or potential contribution to national economic growth. As a result these initiatives are full of unexamined assumptions about connectivity and the consequences of activities in terms of economic and social contributions at different spatial levels.

We can find evidence that some of the contextual changes that we might expect to reshape the nature and delivery of publicly-funded urban research have clearly happened within the UK, but in a somewhat muted and contradictory form. To explore the issues and potential further, we now turn to a key determinant of the parameters and nature of urban research programmes – how central government understands cities – before looking at

the various models and styles that have characterised urban research in recent years.

2. How Government Views Cities

in terms of UK urban research and how the above have related to practice, we need to ask how cities are viewed by Government and with what consequences? In addressing this question we find it useful to draw upon research that SURF has completed on the way in which different national government departments effectively define and view cities (Marvin and May 2003). The results of that work are summarised in Table 1. Here we present three ideal types of the city, as viewed from Whitehall and describe how they vary on a number of axes.

The invisible city viewpoint is supported by civil servants whose priorities are clarity according to procedural tradition and the avoidance of what are seen as impediments in relation to policy formulation and implementation with cities. The emerging cities viewpoint is more complex. It certainly involves those who are key to the development of the Government's urban policies - for example, through an input to the production of the first Urban White Paper for over 20 years in 2000 (REFERENCE) - but it has much less weight in other mainstream spending departments. Views regarding active cities are manifest among those civil servants who have worked in both the centre and local authorities. In particular, they are concerned that the centre does not take the opportunities available to develop more mature relations with the cities. At the same time, the active city represents the least preferable viewpoint for those who adhere to an invisible cities mode of construction because it means developing the type of engagement that they seek to avoid.

Table 1: A Comparison of Three Whitehall Viewpoints

	Invisible Cities	Visible Cities	Active Cities
Context	Central Control - Local dependence	Central – Local Partnership	Urbanising National Policy
City	Defacto City	Cities - Problems and Potential	A Corporate View of Cities
Scale	Single Local Authority	Emerging Typology	City-Regions
Relations	Uniformity and Homogenous	Earned Autonomy	Central – Urban Compacts
Status	Dominant Viewpoint	Emerging Viewpoint	Preferred (Dreaded Viewpoint)

To understand these dynamics and their relation to urban research, we now turn to a more in-depth examination of these three views.

Invisible Cities: Standardisation and Homogeneity

Cities are regarded within this viewpoint as marginal to the delivery of central policy. Where they are visible they take the form of “defacto” cities. It is a ‘spatial accident’ that results in large number of clients or problems being concentrated in particular cities. The centre sees standardised surfaces, not cities and/or emerging city-regions. The dominant style of relations with the periphery is a uniformity stressing the standardisation of service delivery. The scope for differential treatment based upon an alternative understanding of context and possibility then becomes ‘policy-acceleration as exception’: that is, area-based initiatives in places that are regarded as having a particular concentration of problems.

What results is a symptomatic and reactive policy, rather than a medium term view aimed at tackling the conditions which give rise to, for example,

relative deprivation. The result easily becomes the abandonment of the responsibilities of central government for tackling issues of poverty and social exclusion in the face of what are seen as overwhelming global forces (Byrne 2000), with a resulting burden upon cities which, at best, might achieve a certain degree of amelioration (MacGregor 2001). New partnerships and forms of strategic thinking that take account of differences in interactions between the global and local for general and specific benefits, are lost in this process.

This viewpoint is embedded in the highly centralised style of governance in the UK. Cities have historically had a low level of autonomy in their relations with the centre, particularly when compared with other European cities. Since the 1970s the centre has increasingly restricted the autonomy of cities as it has attempted to control local authorities that have challenged national priorities. Given this, the centre has increasingly sought to ensure national policies are delivered at the local level through a set of formalised structures, targets, indicators and performance measures, thereby providing a distance from the implications of policies through a set of administrative devices that are abstracted from given contexts. What we see here is the avoidance of engagement via a preference for the mediation of relations through standardised forms that are presumed to be neutral in conception and operation.

Within this frame of reasoning little room is left for viewing cities as anything more than single local authority boundaries. The dominant tendency becomes one of ensuring similarity via uniform standards across the periphery and an avoidance of active political engagement. The justification is constituted by the idea that national policies and practices at the centre permit all places to achieve their full potential, regardless of any apparent

differences. Similarity becomes the basis of knowledge and differences are regarded as its negation.

Visible Cities: Emerging Possibilities

The visible cities perspective is encapsulated in the Urban White Paper. Cities are not simply sites of problems, but offer significant opportunities. They do make a difference to the effective delivery of national policies and structural factors explain concentrations of problems, whilst different forms of governance shape differential performance. There is a greater recognition that different types of cities have both problems and potential, as well as a need to move beyond standardised relations in order to create negotiated relationships that develop context-sensitive national policies. How is this manifest?

Following the 2000 Urban White Paper the centre developed the process of engagement with cities through two mechanisms. First, the ‘Towns and Cities Initiative.’ The proposal here was that the then Urban Policy Unit (UPU) within the ODPM would “work directly with partner towns and cities, and that Ministers.... [took] a direct interest” in the lead-up to a major set event on urban policy promised in the White Paper - the 2002 Urban Summit. “The UPU will listen to what the partner towns and cities tell us about what the Government needs to do to tackle problems and remove obstacles to progress” (REFERENCE). Second and referred to briefly earlier, there was the formation of the “Working Group on Cities, Regions and Competitiveness” (REFERENCE). This stimulated an important debate about the potential role of cities and city-regions in national economic policy.

The Group comprises representatives from the main Government economic Departments, the Core Cities, and the RDAs. Its terms of reference are “to

make recommendations for policy changes and practical actions to enable the major regional cities to fulfil their potential as drivers of the urban renaissance and the economic competitiveness of their regions - and thereby strengthen the national economy's capacity for growth" (REFERENCE).

Taken together these shifts create a new context for tighter engagement between the centre and cities over the development of national urban policy.

Those who adhere to this view argue that the above, dominant viewpoint, has not allowed cities to develop their potential and a much closer engagement between the centre and cities is needed to accelerate its realisation. Cities have a much more powerful role in shaping the context of central service delivery, economic performance and their material characteristics. Rather than seeing cities as being a focus for problems whose differences are not matters for central concern, there are structural reasons why cities find themselves in this position. What we see here is an acceptance that broader structural shifts in the economy, income inequalities and matters of governance require more customised forms of central intervention in liaison with cities and regions.

Despite this recognition, there are still major difficulties in taking this approach forward to a more nuanced and sophisticated understanding of the characteristics and potentials of different types of cities. This is because of a latent tendency to regard cities as homogenous, as well as a site of ordering according to the edicts of central policy. Nevertheless, elements of this viewpoint have the potential to address limitations by assisting in building an understanding of the cumulative effect of policies in different places. That would mean recognising cities' potential contributions to national economic strategy and the type of national policies that could realise this potential in partnership with cities. After all, this is set against a background within

Whitehall whereby the urban agenda does not have the same degree of visibility, resources or high level political support as the regional or neighbourhood agendas.

Active Cities: Ambivalence in Action

The final view is the most marginal of the three. It argues that the centre needs a more active view of the economic and social potential of cities in the delivery of national strategy. There is recognition of the need for a coordinated and joint approach with cities as key players in developing a mutual understanding of their needs and potential. The delivery of policy would be based on compacts drawn up between the centre and cities specifying the type of relationship that should exist, leaving the role of national policies as designed to more rapidly and effectively accelerate the realisation of jointly agreed visions of cities' future development. The desire for homogeneity is now countered by recognition of diversity. Difference is seen as a source of knowledge, not its negation, whilst along with recognition, there comes the need for redistribution.

A more customised approach to the development of city-Government relations is apparent in this perspective. Key to this is the development of relationships with groups of local authorities, rather than atomisation through relations with single authorities. To this extent context-sensitive knowledge is not seen as a threat, but a pre-condition for a more nuanced understanding in which conventional boundaries do not make much sense for the formulation and implementation of key strategic economic and planning issues facing cities.

At the same time these sub-regional boundaries have been identified as a key site for intervention by a number of the Regional Development Agencies

and Government Offices. In this sense this viewpoint exhibits a more strategic view of the units that the centre needs to engage with and focuses on building an in-depth understanding of the problems and potentials of different city-regions and free standing cities.

What we see here is a belief that tight formulaic relations with high levels of central control do not work. Instead, a more relational and dialogic approach is required with changes in power relations informing a move towards greater co-responsibility. Meaningful negotiation is then required to agree priorities and terms of delivery with an enhanced role for local flexibility. This might, for example, take the form of jointly negotiated compacts between the centre and cities recognising the interests of each and how they overlap. Thus, cities recognise that national policies are key to improving their potential, but they require a different type of settlement and relationship with the centre that gives them greater freedoms and flexibilities to work in areas established by more localised needs and priorities. This viewpoint recognises that flexibilities should be given up at central level. The centre would expect groups of local authorities to collaborate in providing feedback and proposals to the centre. The cities themselves would also have to come to their own mutual agreements about how collaboration across city-regions is developed.

Much of this viewpoint is clearly undeveloped. It represents a desire by those who have experience of operating in cities and at the centre to develop a mutual or relational approach to the development of urban policy. It is a frame of reasoning informing practice which is yet to have its time.

Nevertheless, it stands in direct contrast to the dominant viewpoint at the centre. That is why its proponents and the cities simultaneously prefer this viewpoint,, as well as dreaded by supporters of the conventional approach.

With the above impediments and potentials in mind, we now move on to examine the potential provision of futures capacities and research capability for city regions in England. This provides us with a further basis for the formulation of our proposals.

3. Styles of Urban Research

The research upon which this section is based involved a content analysis of futures policies, Internet searches and analysis of futures documents. The objective was to develop a greater understanding of urban futures as built *within* and *between* three sets of sources. First, forecasts of urban futures based on quantitative work. Second, urban future processes designed to stimulate a wider debate about the future development of cities and third, how relevant research frameworks develop knowledge about the prospective development of cities.

Forecasts, Trends and City Regions: Quantitative Data and Intelligence

Reviews of key trends and drivers by the Cabinet Office Strategic Futures Unit (Short Review of Published Material on Key UK Trends: 2001-2001 June 2001, Strategic Futures Thinking: meta-analysis of published material on Drivers and Trends June 2001) both revealed that data availability and information at city and city-regional level was weak when compared to the national scale.

The TCID (SPELL OUT) was designed to provide ODPM with a comprehensive set of indicators to track progress and “better understand change in urban areas”. (ODPM, 2002, The Development of a Town and City indicators Database, Urban Research Summary Number 3). Commissioned through the Urban Policy Evaluation Strategy, the TCID will support the State of Cities Report in 2005 by establishing the 2001 baseline position of different types

of urban area, highlighting the key dimension of urban change and measuring performance through 75 indicators that cover the five visions in the White Paper. The ODPM decided “largely for practical reasons of data availability and relevance” to focus on 257 Primary Urban Areas (PUAs) of more than 20,000 people based on the built up census enumeration districts.

The use of 257 PUAs raises three key issues. First, they vary significantly in terms of their size, importance and functions, making it very difficult to compare units meaningfully or to understand their dynamics of change. Second, the PUAs are not linked to the typology of towns and cities used in the Urban White Paper that divides the urban system into city regions, freestanding cities and market towns etc. Finally, the PUAs cannot currently be aggregated into local authority districts, city-regional or sub-regional boundaries. Consequently, the TCID will currently be of little value to cities or city-regions because the data refers to boundaries that bear no relation to existing or emerging governance structures, with the emphasis being on monitoring rather than building a prospective understanding of potential development trajectories.

Shaping Urban Futures

‘Cities for the Many and not the Few’ (Amin, Massey and Thrift, 2000) is a document based on an urban seminar series sponsored by geography departments at the universities of Bristol, Durham and the Open University. It is designed “to pose bigger questions about how we might imagine cities for the new century” by building “a framing vision: of what and who cities are for, and what kinds of societies they might most democratically embody”

(p.v). The document sets out general principles about how the future of cities might be re-imagined in different ways.

In the first place cities are seen as distinctive sites of intense social interaction that constantly juxtapose differences that generate both excitement and fear. Consequently cities: “can be the hope for the future or the dystopia of despair. The policy question is how we take hold of these paradoxical characteristics and build on them in such a way as best to draw out their potential.” {REFERENCE(9)}. Second, the document argues that the focus on the knowledge economy narrows debate about the future development of the urban economy. Finally, the document argues for a form of urban citizenship that supports the: “reconstruction of cities as a plural and open-ended process” (p.v) by recognising local needs and questioning central control. In its conclusion the document argues that the central question is “less about the range of policy options available, and more about what we want from our cities and how best to achieve the desired goals” (p. 45). Yet there remains little advice on how this could be achieved, what processes might be appropriate, or how this might be different from current policy options because: “if cities are for the many, then it is not for the few to legislate their form in advance” (p 46).

Researching Cities and City-Regions: the ESRC Cities Programme

The UK Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) – the major government-supported sponsor of social science research, with nominal support from the ODPM’s predecessor Department (Environment) launched, in 1997, a major research programme on Cities. The Programme, "CITIES: Competitiveness and Cohesion", had a budget of £4 million and ran until 2002. Four major, integrated case studies were undertaken - London,

Bristol, Liverpool/Manchester, Glasgow/Edinburgh - as well as 20 other projects on key research topics

http://cwis.livjm.ac.uk/cities/fs_projects.htm).

The Programme had three main themes: the competitiveness of cities, social cohesion and future urban strategies. It was noted that: “More research and better strategies will not solve Britain's urban problems. But they will contribute to an understanding of context and specific measures which could make Britain's cities better places to live, work, learn and play”. In the Programme there was also an: “intention that major projects will form research partnerships with those involved, at national and local levels, in shaping and running Britain's cities” (REFERENCE TO BOTH QUOTES).

Research from the programme was brought together at the national level in the report ‘The State of English Cities’ (DETR, ESRC Cities, November 2000), published in conjunction with the Urban White Paper. This reviews the key evidence emerging from the programme and makes specific recommendations for the development of urban policy.

In this document we find three sets of issues relevant to city-regional futures. First, the report argued that cities can have significant “regenerative or propulsive impact” on their regions especially where they are centres for higher education, a focus for knowledge transfer and innovation, significant employers over a wide catchment and have a profile that identifies them with the region (2000, p. 15). Consequently the aim of urban strategy should be to sustain this competitive strength and spread the benefits to other parts of the region. Second, while the “trajectories of urban areas are to a large extent governed by external factors, local level policies and structure of territorial governance” (2000, p. 33) can impact on growth rates at urban and regional levels. The problem is that the effective governance scale is

often larger than a local authority boundary but smaller than a region. While partnerships may compensate for the absence of formal government structures it is argued that cities with “fewer transactional costs” (REFERENCE) in developing policies will be more successful. Finally international evidence suggests that the sub-regional scale is the most critical as functional economic entities for planning, skills development and many aspects of infrastructural development including transport environment and housing (2000, p. 46). The key recommendation is that there is a need for a framework that can join up initiatives at a range of different scales based on a hierarchy of priorities at regional, city-regional, city and neighbourhood scales.

At the local level the Integrated Case Studies provided a context for linking local research expertise with city-regions. We can see from these that they mainly focused on the city-regional scale and examined the affinities between competitiveness and social cohesion agendas. Local policy makers and politicians were actively involved in the research usually as respondents but occasionally serving in an advisory capacity. Second, a high level of analytical expertise, knowledge and resources was built up on the city-region but this could only be systematically maintained for the life of the project when key researchers often moved on to new career opportunities. Finally, the research process had a highly retrospective orientation attempting to explain past performance and trends. While funding was available for dissemination there was no specific support for developing the prospective analysis of the key research findings.

Learning Lessons

What we see in the above overview of urban research capacity is that intelligence and data at the city-regional level are poorly developed in comparison to both local, regional and national data sources. Unfortunately the most recent national investment in town and cities data cannot provide data at either a local authority or city-regional level. Generally speaking, public information and data capacity is rarely systematically utilised to develop a prospective understanding and is more usually used for monitoring past performance or supporting bids for funding. The deficit of data at the sub-regional scale and the need for prospective capacity is increasing being met from commercial sources. Consequently regions and the centre have relatively little understanding of the potential of city-regions.

We also find useful lessons from national futures exercises. Understanding the positioning of cities in the world economy and their capacity to reshape is key for any city future. Clarity in thinking about the purpose of cities and who is involved and excluded from futures thinking is key. Developing tools and resources that can be used to build and develop futures thinking at the local level is crucial. Yet there are significant deficits that require urgent attention. Here scenarios need to be developed for the English cities rather than importing them from another context. Processes are required that enlarge the range of social interest involved in futures exercises in order to ensure initiatives are not dominated by local government or private sector interests. In addition, methods that can deal with the complexity of enlarged city-regions requiring cross boundary collaboration need to be developed.

We can see in the above considerable potential, but the question remains how to link this capacity to policy priorities at city regional level and the

potential for informing changes in urban policy formulation and delivery. Research programmes can fund dissemination to national policy makers where the generic, strategic and overarching findings of research like the Cities programme can be properly discussed. The State of the Cities report clearly draws on an evidence base that supports the development of a city-regional perspective. However, such reports have relatively little to say about individual cities. There were only 4 integrated case studies whose linkages with their local context were often informal and ad hoc with few resources or incentives for research to engage critically in prospective thinking. Evidently one solution to this problem was the development of the “City Foresight” process that would have brought cross sectoral interests together and created an institutional context for thinking about the future. In the absence of such a conduit the systemic linkage of the capacity within local universities to city-regions will be difficult to achieve.

4. Engaged Urban Research

When it comes to linking capacity to context to potential development, it is necessary to examine the dynamics of urban research, as well as policy. In the oscillations between continuity and discontinuity that may be detected in its unfolding history, we see the impulses of one form of pragmatism (Mounce 1997) with its liberal-reforming humanism, providing a foil against which radical approaches emerged that drew their inspiration from Marx and Weber. This latter group mixed political activism with studies of the city and an emphasis upon social conflict, power, access and control of resources and the systems of production, consumption, exchange and distribution.

Here was a disparate group of writers in the 1960s and 1970s united by criticisms of urban trends and inspired to study the urban with emphases on the above issues. They stressed comparison and interdisciplinarity and were clearly influenced by the turbulence of the late 1960s and were, in this sense, Gouldner's (1971) 'radicals' who themselves sought to embody Marx's idea of praxis. Yet this zeal, when faced with the intransigence of the system they sought to change led to disappointment: "Consequently, they gave up political engagements, reconceptualized their own identities and continued with 'normal' science, developing already raised questions. Moreover, since their own theories successfully replaced the 'old enemies' in the hegemonic position in the field, they were no longer perceived as radical" (Milicevic 2001: 773).

The writings of those who sought change through studies about the social world and engagement with it, can easily become writings about these endeavours as acts of futility. This leaves current generations bewildered about the purpose of their work and can easily add to retreat through self-referentiality (May 1998; 1999). For these scholars the lure of theoretical purity was perhaps more enticing. Yet to continue with the enthusiasm and momentum that is needed to try and influence urban reform cannot be the province of a relatively small group of scholars as the personal costs without sufficient support are too high, whilst institutional absorption is often the outcome of what appears, at first, as radical and innovative programmes of work.

Just how can the study of and engagement with urban phenomena be the province of one discipline? This is not to suggest it does not bring its own distinctive issues to bear upon issues. It is, however, to suggest that the urban, as with all social phenomena, is not amenable to study through the

gaze of those who training refuses to see the limits, as well as strengths, of their modes of analysis. This leads to calls to 'open' the social sciences (Wallerstein 1996). Therefore, in the last fifteen years of work in this area there has been a body of fresh, forward-looking studies that come from sociology, political science, geography, economics, comparative literature, planning, anthropology and architecture (Amin and Thrift 2002; Drennan 2002; Madsen and Plunz 2002; Judge et al., 1995; Hall, 1997; Soja 2000).

We can see this as due, in large part, to how changing concepts have been generated through the global to action in context. Social theory enters the stage and attention turns to debates about global cities, but without connections between made to elements of urban life and so to exhibiting a context-sensitivity (Sassen, 1991; Marcuse and van Kempen, 2000). What occurs here in the unfolding of urban research is a movement away from the difficult but also productive relations between theory and data and academic practice and policy engagement. Whilst social theory is so far removed from the locale in which action takes place, it does not appear to have implications for informing context-sensitive (not dependent) research which learns from the past and so exhibits a modesty in its aspirations (Thrift 1996).

We have seen within city-regions an intensification in diversity with varying reactions. Commodities are, as Benjamin (reference) argued, about dreams and this leaves the city as a site of conflict, tension and also vibrancy and novelty in a global and unequal age. As Sharon Zukin puts it: "The future of American political and economic hegemony in the world is at stake, along with the meaning of citizenship within this country and the future of cities as economically dependent and ethnically mixed. The combination of fusion cultures and economic dependence is highly volatile. How the great public

spaces of modernity absorb and reflect the tensions, and create a more inclusive vision of separate identities, is part of the visible struggle to enter the 21st century” (1995: 260-261). Related to these micro politics is the changing nature of cities in terms of shifting scales of governance, as well as the role of the built environment. In respect to the latter, the main question is the extent to which objects are attributed with particular meanings and with what implications for action (Werlen 1993), as well as the consequences of how policy configures and is configured by what Lefebvre (1996) characterized as the architects’ ‘system of significations’: planning. In the urban arena, where there is no end to the process of becoming, but instead one of continual transformation. Understanding these elements is key, but inseparable from changes in scales of governance.

In recent years urban studies has been a major intellectual arena in which alternatives to the idea of nation-state control have been articulated through debates on globalisation and world city formation, where cities are seen as localised nodes within a global hierarchy of inter-urban relations, rather than being neatly enclosed within national space (Taylor, 1996). The city, therefore, is not only a field of encounters and exchanges among individuals and groups who accord and are accorded different levels of significance to spaces and places within it, but the nature and boundaries of the city and region are continually being re-configured as key economic terrains in their own right. This appeals to those in cities who seek to place them on the ‘world map’.

Just how many cities aspire to be ‘world-class’? If all those that wished so achieved such a status, the criteria would change in order to work to attain a new hierarchy of relations in the oscillations between aspiration and ascription. These aspirations also play into the hands of the notion of ‘flows’

and 'connections' in which a disembodied globalization is not assumed to discriminate on the grounds of place. In effect, it works in a positive fashion to bolster the ideology that markets do not discriminate and political governance has no effect in the face of such forces.

This is where an engaged urban research programme can work not simply to enter into the instrumentalism of the problem-solution equation, but work productively at why such problems are defined in that way and with what consequences for how they are seen? In this sense scholars contribute to understandings of globalisation as a multi-layered space of networked interdependencies and inter-scale articulations in which processes not only of de-territorialisation, but also of re-territorialisation occur and there are changing spatialities of state power in relation to urban governance (Le Galès and Harding, 1998). This is important as developers, managers, utility infrastructure companies and agencies, social movements, national and local government and processes of capitalist accumulation make the city a site of opportunity, contestation and disaster.

The materiality of the built environment, biology and social and cultural processes, mix with the economy and systems of governance to configure possibilities and are often drawn upon to structure the determination of outcomes that are, upon examination, the product of contingency and hence open to revision: "Such a view of the urban leads, in turn, to the common implication that 'the city' can be 'impacted' as an objective 'thing' by external processes of economic, cultural or technological 'globalization'" (Graham and Marvin 2001: 411). Nevertheless, the possibility for exposing dreams as contingency rather than necessity, there is a need for greater interdisciplinarity in investigation. Such a mix provides for new avenues of inquiry and prevents disciplines becoming stagnant, as well as acting as a

check upon exaggerated claims. In this respect urban scholars have continued emphasising the continued importance of localisation processes in the context of intensified global economic interaction (Friedmann and Wolff, 1982; Sayer, 1985; Friedmann, 1986; Scott, 1988; Storper and Walker, 1989. Sassen, 1991; Amin and Thrift, 1995).

Institutional Challenges

How does all this possibility within urban research relate to new forms of engagement around the issues that inform the development of cities? How might the work that is currently conducted become influenced by a process of negotiations between researchers and policy-makers within particular contexts? When addressing these issues, the nature of our discussion shifts to one of joined-up thinking across institutions around changing forms of scale.

In the face of these changes institutions resort to a variety of responses. Research by institutional theorists has emphasised the following: acquiescence, compromise, avoidance, defying and manipulation (Oliver 1991). From work conducted within SURF on city-region development and the role of universities in the knowledge economy (see Marvin, May and Perry 2003; May and Perry 2003), we are able to detect attempts to re-scale activities, according to different levels of understanding, as well as success. Universities, for example, face changes according to the same dynamics that are effecting cities, but their consequences vary according to the levels of institutional power they possess. At one level they may protect academics from the immediate effects of the changing environment, at another they will work to prevent the type of engagement that leads to innovative work in partnership with others.

In two cases, changes in the city-region were assumed to have more profound implications for a university whose identity and student population were largely drawn from the region and whose research was located in pockets of excellence. In another case, a university with global aspirations and a strong resource base was seen as a necessary part of the strategy to become a world-class city. This university was 'in' but not 'of' the city-region. Students were recruited from outside of the area and the nature of research was governed by central Government funding mechanisms in which a national exercise around peer-review, rather than local and regional engaged practice, was rewarded via the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE). As a result, changes in scale and possibilities arising from different levels of activity were seen as representational (in terms of marketing the university within a global city) and additive (attracting more fund to existing patterns of research production) to the mission to achieve world-class status. In general, internal practices were largely unaffected by these environmental changes.

In terms of changing aspirations and levels of scale, we conducted work on four city-regions: Newcastle-Gateshead, Greater Nottingham, Greater Cambridge and Greater Manchester. Their activities over the last three years have focussed on the articulation of city-regional visions and plans to guide strategic developments. However, the reasons and techniques for producing such visions differed in the four areas. In respect to techniques, two categories emerged. First, there were those that have a greater reliance on traditional methods of strategy formulation as the means for long-term thinking. Second, there were those in which innovative and creative futures thinking processes had been undertaken as a complement and not replacement, for traditional strategy formulation.

In Greater Manchester and Newcastle-Gateshead, the development of a sub-regional strategy remains the main vehicle for long-term thinking. Although limited use had been made of visioning and brainstorming techniques, a number of difficulties emerged which hindered the adoption of more creative sub-regional futures, despite a greater awareness of the need for anticipatory thinking and collective working at the sub-regional scale. First, there was interest in futures work and anticipatory exercises but there was no strong commitment to futures activities. This may reflect a lack of capacity in this area or uncertainties about how to proceed. Most partnerships also faced difficulties in terms of limited resources and pressures on partner time and commitment (including the important issue of partnership fatigue).

Second, futures work was restricted by the difficulties in securing shared commitment amongst partners, particularly in the case of Greater Manchester where there are ten local authorities. This is not to say that those partners did not invest effort in co-operation, but that it was difficult to reach a consensus that went beyond a lowest common denominator approach. Third, in both areas there was evidence of tensions over the potential dominance of the core city in city-regional or sub-regional partnerships. More powerful local authorities tend to be active simultaneously at many spatial scales of activity and may use scale opportunistically, only participating in partnership activities when there are clear gains for their interests.

Fourth, the 'top down' role of the RDAs and Government regulatory frameworks in shaping sub-regional agendas was crowding out distinctive bottom-up approaches and this had implications for approaches to futures thinking. RDAs tend to strongly promote an economic development agenda. In particular, in both of the two case study areas a single vision for the sub-

region had been developed, which tended to (purposely) reflect the wider regional vision through a process of 'tailored translation'. Fifth, where attempts to think long-term had been driven by external considerations and pressures, visions and strategies tended to be less ambitious and more difficult to formulate. Bottom-up initiatives designed to produce mutual benefit tended to lead to more creative and innovative approaches towards the future. Finally, there are a variety of concerns, particularly in the case of Greater Manchester, over the potential effectiveness and impact of sub-regional strategies. The fear that sub-regional strategies will ultimately be relegated to the shelf and be used only for the purposes of external representation, rather than internal cohesion, is well articulated. Indeed, there was little confidence that strategies would have a large impact on the way in which the sub-region thought or acted, despite a desire that 'some way' be found to maximise effectiveness and impact.

In the two other case studies (Greater Nottingham and Greater Cambridge), specific futures thinking initiatives had been undertaken. In Greater Nottingham, members of the Greater Nottingham Partnership developed a major initiative to understand the future across a range of sectors (including higher education_ entitled 'Greater Nottingham in the 21st Century: Reflections on the Future' (2000). In Greater Cambridge, the Cambridge Futures exercises offered new ways of conceiving and dealing with growth pressures in the conurbation through the development of a number of different interactive scenarios (REFERENCE).

What we see here is the sense in which not only does Government policy pulls in different directions, but the willingness and capacity to think ahead and become engaged and thus become more proactive and less reactive, is variable. When it comes to harnessing the expertise that exists within

universities for this purpose, however, the continuation of a peer-review system of research evaluation which takes little account of context exacerbates this situation. International excellence, measured against the submission of journal articles in particular outlets, leaves little room for research that engages at a local level, unless it is seen as part of more global (socio-theoretical) debates. Against the background of central government departments failing to see cities as anything but passive and pursuing urban policies through institutions which are differentially bounded according to their scales of operation, the scale of the task is daunting.

Ways Forward

How might these different elements be joined-up? As we noted, the invisible cities view leaves little room for dialogue between assumed and actual performance in terms of 'making a difference' to a pre-existing state of affairs. The information gathered in the process works to structures possibilities because a crude form of performance appraisal takes the place of understanding difference and diversity and so the potential of cities. A frenetic set of activities is constructed around its servicing in the guise of a quiet and sustained production of information gathering at the peripheries. Criticisms of the validity of such processes and how they work to curtail potential developments will then fall upon deaf ears for they question the very pre-suppositions upon which this view is based at the centre.

Accompanying this is a particular view of the formulation of policy. Essentially, it is a centralised command and control model in which communication over both the conception and execution of policy is assumed as given. A model of action is then posited that is accepted by peripheries that separate their knowledge base from the social and economic conditions

under and through which they work in given localities. Knowledge by acquaintance is overcome through knowledge via a particular set of descriptions as demanded by the centre. Correspondingly, their understandings become targeted as if their discretionary knowledge unproblematically informed, as opposed to interacted with, the conditions in which their actions take place. The overall effect is a "depoliticized simulation of truth" (Poster 1990, p. 62) which fails to recognize that: 'The chances of translating knowledge for action into knowledge in action are immeasurably improved once it is recognized that the probability to realize knowledge is dependent on context specific social, political and economic conditions' (Stehr 1992, p. 121).

The modes for seeking to determine 'how' by 'what' (May 2001b) then incorporate forms of monitoring that seek to traverse city spaces, but which create tensions and contradictions that are played out at the level of the peripheries, as opposed to the neatness of the fictionalised views that can easily come through performance and output indicators. As there is a separation of the city into discrete elements which are assumed not to interact, so at city-region level there is an absence of thinking across areas and how they impact and interact upon each other to produce different results from those intended. Policies then take no account of the complex geography of urban areas. Government departments recognise neighbourhoods, local authority districts and regions as appropriate scales for policy delivery, but there is little pooling of resources at the level of what are fuzzy cross-district entities that are today's urban agglomerations.

Cities become regarded as passive in what is a process of disaggregation through disengagement. Little effort is made to enlist their participation in the development of potential futures, thereby leaving influence to work at

other levels: for example, connections between centre and periphery actors seeking influence within particular social networks, or groups of cities seeking a voice in the formulation of national policy but within the parameters set by this view. The results is a separation between conventional views and those needed in the process of constituting 'new spatial imaginaries' in which 'heterogeneous interaction' is seen not as an impediment to development, but the very essence of the city (Graham and Marvin 2001, p. 407).

With cities being rendered invisible, we see the power of the centre expressed as the disengagement from potential and at the periphery a parochial competition that acts as an impediment to citywide strategies. Technocracy is triumphant through detachment. However, it is engagement that is needed to develop imaginative, participative and productive urban futures. Here we would expect policy-making not only to inform decision-makers choices "but educate participants imaginations...cultivate appreciation and good judgement, not only exercise power responsibly, but empower others to act responsibly, to do justice, as well" (Forester 1995: 73).

At this point two other views emerge that, in their different ways, provide the scope for seeing possibilities and potentials instead of focusing upon the predicaments associated with the abandonment of the invisible cities view. In the visible cities view we see a style of relations that is characterised by partial engagement between centre and cities. Two forms, in particular, are worthy of consideration in terms of the potential for urban futures. First, the centre attempts to undertake some sort of translation of the results of national policies and futures exercises for cities. In this context cities' own futures exercises are developed in a semi-detached way with a high degree of autonomy from the centre, although the outputs of national activities may

be used as a resource by cities in the production of their own exercises. Here, however, there is an evident tendency for this process to become one of pursuing a narrow form of accountability at the centre in the absence of a recognition of heterogeneity.

Second and at a more dialogic level, the centre could seek substantial contributions from cities that provide different sets of standards with the objective of bringing out the urban dimensions of the centre's work. In this context, the national view of urban futures may even be based upon a synthesis of exercises that are ultimately urban in character. This has the benefit of providing more cross-departmental views at the centre thus overcoming the tendency towards the myopia that has been identified as problematic – in terms of both a systematic approach to understanding urban issues and developments, as well as more effective use of resources.

A clear spur to this potential exists within the Urban White Paper. This has given a renewed focus on urban issues at the centre with the potential to place urban futures on a national policy agenda. This, for example, is exemplified in the recognition that development of strategic visions need “local choices, influenced by local people with modernised local authorities in the lead” (para. 7.17), whilst the creation for an overall framework in relation to the New Commitment to Regeneration “illustrates how the linkages between issues can be clarified and proposals developed in a practical way” (para. 7.18). However, we meet the issues concerned with the relationship between knowledge and context and a willingness to allow cities to pursue particular strategies within more broadly defined agendas.

What is required here is an understanding of the relationship between actual and potential developments that exists outside of London. Whilst the visible

cities view has clear potential over the invisible cities view, there is a clear problem in moving from knowledge by a narrow range of descriptions via indicators in the former, to a more sensitive knowledge by acquaintance but one based upon the city with which those in the centre are most familiar.

Here we saw a difference between the perspectives of those who had experience in other cities and those at the centre whose experiences lay within particular career structures as constituted within Whitehall.

Inevitably, there is a limitation within the sort of proceduralism that comes with a limited understanding of different contexts.

The view that contains the most well developed set of centre-periphery relations is the idea of active cities. This relationship has the potential to work in terms of overcoming the limitations of the invisible cities view and the tensions that exists within the visible cities view. Orchestration by the centre for the purpose of creating dialogue would be required in a process that attempts to mutually examine assumptions and potentials. At this point a national assessment of the potential of different cities would be required that recognises difference and diversity and yet sees that not as an impediment to effective policy, but a necessary condition for its formulation. This implies a significant change in relations between cities and the centre. We move from a command and control model to one in which the centre provides a framework for the formulation and implementation of policy with a key role provided in relation to fairness via redistribution.

A movement is required away from the politics of symptoms which soon turns into a concern with administration and narrowly defined forms of accountability, as is evident in the first view, to a more dialogic approach that is informed by causes that take account of complex environments.

Needless to say, this requires a radical re-thinking of current assumptions

and policies. It would, however, open up potentials instead of being overly concerned with the predicaments that are assumed to accompany anything other than the dominance of current centre-peripheral relations. It would provide for connection, not disengagement. When cities have a stake in the future, they also have a stake in the success of policies that take account of the locality and its relations with wider social forces in the age of globalisation. Affinities and differences may then be apparent and imaginative and feasible futures are more likely to emerge.

The policy process would need to be changed as a result of this last view. Co-responsibility and the devolvement of power is taking place in the English context, but in highly limited ways in which the promise of 'influence' through Elected Regional Assemblies takes precedence. We are talking about a style of policy formulation and research – for academics have always been ambivalent about engagement and governments have expected quick and ultimately poor solution to social problems – that is socially robust. It is part of what Michael Storper (1997: 279) calls the 'heterodox policy framework' which favours context sensitive policies interested in the embeddedness and of practices in cities and regions and so exhibit a more 'bottom-up' approach that has been hitherto characteristic of English urban policy.

This is challenging to academic sites of production (mostly universities) because it is not constituted as reliable in the sense of being bounded by a particular group of scholars. It is challenging to government because it means letting go of those elements which are part of the command and control model. It is within such a changing context that we see an increased emphasis upon Mode II knowledge production in the face of the apparent unsustainability of Mode 1 which is characterised by homogeneity, hierarchy

and narrowly constituted professional boundaries (Gibbons et al 1994; Nowotny et al 2001).

Those factors we have described are precisely those that lead to the need for a new mode of knowledge production (Mode 11) to be taken into consideration in Mode II. Here we find a greater emphasis upon the context of knowledge production and reception in terms of the play of different interests; a trans-disciplinary formation as a result of drawing upon different disciplines and in the process of their configuration a moving beyond their particular boundaries; a heterogeneity of skills; a flatter hierarchy and less durable organisational structure; more concern with social accountability and greater reflexivity and finally, a wider process of quality control as a result of a concern with application and the involvement of actors outside of the normal boundaries of any one discipline.

What is advocated here is, at one level, an absence of distinct domains of activity which creates a fuzziness. This recognises that whilst reliable knowledge was once produced by relatively cohesive communities according to restricted codes of practice, it is no longer robust. In the face of such circumstances, the more contextualized a field of scientific activity becomes, the more 'socially robust' is the knowledge that it produces according to several factors. First, it is a relational concept such that it can only be judged according to particular contexts. Expressed in this way the physical can only be understood in relation to the social and vice versa. Second, it is a dynamic process that could, in time, reach a point of greater stability, as opposed to being constituted in times of constant flux. Third, robustness is not the same as acceptability. Whilst the two are connected, the former is argued to be able to deal with the unknown and unforeseeable. Fourth, it is produced in circumstances "when research has been infiltrated and

improved by social knowledge”. Finally, there is a strong empirical, open-ended component involving continual feedback and so testing and improvement (Nowotny, Scott and Gibbons 2001: 167). The bounded nature of professional knowledge production, in other words, is no longer a sustainable practice because it seeks to place limits on that which is now open to contestation and negotiation. A recognition of this state of affairs and a willingness to move beyond it, creates a more sustainable practice for the development of urban research.

Summary

The analysis suggests that policy makers at central and urban and regional levels are actively looking for a process that takes a national and a devolved process of urban and regional foresight forward in parallel. An attempt at classifying the range of interrelationships that might exist between national and regional foresight activities is outlined below.

We have described a number of possibilities ranging from passivity through to a dynamic idealisation (as a spur to change that may not be either desired or feasible, but against which practice is measured) embodied in autonomy. First, in situations of passivity we would expect to find little activity in the city - region that can be called foresight and where national activities make little effort to enlist local participation. Standardisation of knowledge which is, in fact, nothing more than information gathering, is typical in this scenario. Second, in contexts of translation, where there is an effort to identify the city-regional implications of the results derived from a mainly national exercise, we would expect to find discussions about more local implications with greater degrees of pro-activity. Third, in terms of thinking through contribution, we would find the national exercise enlisting

substantial regional inputs with the objective of bringing out the city-regional dimensions in its work. Here we would expect to find more developed city-urban research interactions around particular issues, but not more strategically oriented directions which evaluate such contributions. Here there is a mix of the operation and reactive, with the strategic and proactive.

We then move on to orchestration in which regional exercises are established around a national exercise, to which they feed in, in a relatively elaborate structure of co-ordination as informed by more systematic programmes of urban research. More strategic and proactive thinking is evident and there is correspondingly less fear to think differently. Fifth, we would find urban research programmes and urban policy exhibiting a more forward-looking, rather than reactive strategy in which, for example, a national exercise would be more of a synthesis of exercises that are ultimately city-regional. Sixth, we move on to semi-detachment. Here, city-regional exercises are developed with a degree of autonomy, although the activities and/or outputs of a national exercise may be used as a resource. Urban research would be engaged in a process of both informing and being informed by city-region development on a systematic basis in which discrete elements of work would have the potential to be mapped onto each other according to clear and well communicated ways in which a judgement of epistemic gain in urban intelligence is possible. Finally, there is autonomy in which city-regional exercises exhibit a model of social robustness in dialogue and cooperation between institutions around clearly agreed and democratically arrived at criteria. Socially, politically and economically, there is a recognition of difference and diversity as a result of such manifestations being positively valued as contributions to a dynamic and vibrant environment.

The potential is there to develop these ideas. Institutions, however, need a different set of incentives and rewards to promote cross-institutional thinking for the purposes of enhancing the urban environments for all. A recognition of this need, also means a re-distribution and re-formulation not only of policy, but also sites and forms of knowledge production. This is not to suggest there should be wholesale changes, but simply a greater understanding of their role and value at different levels of scale. At present there is an enormous investment of energy in the maintenance of the status quo. Taking that energy into more positive direction for re-thinking the city, policy and urban research is a challenge. It is one, however, which can be met with the right resources in place accompanied by a willingness to enter into a terrain. This terrain does not exhibit the supposed certainties associated with past practices. Yet it is these that are no longer applicable to contemporary times or for contributing to urban futures.

References

6. Conclusions

New Requirements

There are six requirements that would improve the quality and effectiveness of city-regional rethinking:

Develop incentives to support and reward cross boundary collaboration at the city-regional level.

Create new indicators and better ways of using and analysing data to build a deeper understanding of current, possible and desirable changes, dynamics and trends.

Build an understanding of the practices, strategies, perspectives of other organisations, in organisations and sectors with similar territorial interests, perspectives and addressing similar future problems.

Provide data, analysis, studies, research, forecasts and scenarios specifically developed for city-regions.

Undertake analyses of the implications of national, international and even global futures studies for city-regions.

Improve the capacity for using futures and foresight methods and techniques and develop new visualisation methodologies with computer mapping and modelling.

No urban, regional or national organisation currently deals with these identified needs. If this gap were to be filled, a key role for a city-regional foresight capacity would be to develop new services and extend foresight

capacity. This would require a significant investment in new research and organisational capacity to develop a network that can link currently fragmented islands of expertise and knowledge together. Respondents identified three sets of linkages that required development:

Building a bridge between the academic research and the policy environments to produce new policy relevant research and develop more practice-oriented approaches to city-regional futures.

Forging integration and cooperation among different sectors in terms of information, knowledge and expertise sharing at the city-regional level.

Developing an interface between city-regional foresight and national programmes and futures exercises.

There is a demand to link together foresight expertise at an urban and regional level and also with national programmes and exercises. These demands would suggest that city-regional foresight capacity needs to be developed in a coordinated way to ensure that interlinkages are made between the national, regional and urban scales.