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Master plans and urban change: the case of Sheffield city centre

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Abstract. This paper critically examines the character, development and implementation of master plans as vehicles of urban change. The case of Sheffield's city centre master planning is used to analyse how the city was reimagined from the early 1990s to the mid-2010s, and how the economic, cultural, social and political dimensions of urban regeneration were addressed. The paper argues that, in comparison to the postwar, welfare-state master plans, the master plans of the neoliberal period had a narrower spatial and thematic focus, linking place qualities to economic considerations, to be delivered through real estate investment. As such, social considerations were marginalized and, when a major economic crisis occurred, the new generation master plans' lack of flexibility and vulnerability to economic fluctuations became apparent, much the same as their predecessors. This shows how master plans can be effective instruments for mobilizing investment and coordinating development around a selective spatial vision in periods of economic growth, but their utility is severely curtailed in economic downturns, when their coordinative potential is much diminished. They run the risk of becoming top-down technical devices to coordinate speculative real estate investment, without durable connections to the local economic and social capacities and needs.

Around the turn of the century, British cities went through a period of intense transformation, which was branded an urban renaissance (Urban Task Force, 1999). One of the key instruments of this transformation was the master plan, aimed at steering the large-scale and complex processes of change (Bell, 2005). While some master plans were linked to the aftermath of a catastrophic event, such as the bombing of central Manchester, most were parts of fundamental shifts in the national urban economic and social trajectories. Although widely used in British urban regeneration, master plans were not limited to any particular type of function or place, as evidenced by many examples from around the world (Falk, 2011; Ganis et al, 2014; Firley and Grön, 2013; Williams,2000; Science Museum, 2016; Oxford University, 2008; City of Baltimore, 2006). Despite their differences, they all shared the feature of being an instrument of coordinating various development activities towards a spatial vision for an area. They reflected a new approach to the management of urban change, in line with the circumstances of the neoliberal age.

In this paper, the authors analyse a major British city centre, as a basis for a critical examination of the idea of master planning and its role in urban transformation. The paper is organized in three parts. The first part analyses the changing concept and character of master plans, in their political and economic contexts, and in their similarities with, and differences from, the previous wave of master planning in the welfare state period. The second part analyses the case of master plans in Sheffield city centre, the context of their production, and their changing character in five phases over a period of over two decades. The final part examines the impact of these master planning efforts on Sheffield, as a platform for the evaluation of master plans as a whole. The paper is based on the authors' involvement in a major international research project into design, planning, innovation and spatial quality (Segers et al, 2016).

1. The changing nature of master planning
Since the mid-twentieth century, two major waves of master planning can be identified, both as instruments of managing growth. The first wave, immediately after the Second World War, saw the master plan as a comprehensive effort to envisage and control the future shape of a city (Ward, 2002). The nineteenth century ideas of the good city had given way to two influential spatial visions: the modernist radical vision, with its trust in transport and construction technologies and its belief in

functionalist reorganization of the city (Le Corbusier, 1929), and the reformist vision of small towns as an alternative to the large city (Howard, 1902). The drive for reconstruction after the war, and the emergence of the welfare state as a new political economic framework, provided the opportunity for the implementation of these visions, deploying the master plan for opening up the urban space to the cars and reorganizing its land use on a functionalist basis.

The postwar plans reflected a spirit of optimism, which lasted for a generation, confident in its ability to eradicate the urban problems through functionality and creativity, combining 'beauty and utility', as expressed in the Manchester Plan of 1945 (Nicholas, 1945:7). Major cities were to be decentralized and transformed, as exemplified in the London plans of 1943 and 1944 (Forshaw and Abercrombie, 1943; Abercrombie, 1945), and a series of master plans were developing for satellite new towns (Osborn and Whittick, 1963). Master plans were instruments of radical spatial transformation, thought to address longstanding social and economic problems.

Within three decades, however, the postwar period of prosperity and its building boom ended, the welfare state started to decline, and the first wave of master planning came to a halt. Rather than long-term plans, it was argued that city planning and design should take place in adjustable increments (Lindblom, 1959; Alexander et al, 1987), ending the idea of making a comprehensive effort to shape the future through physical transformation (Friedmann, 1987). The plans were also critiqued for their design-based character, their production of maps and drawings, which made them 'inflexible and basically inapplicable', static and unable to cope with the rapid pace of urban change (Perloff, 1956: 199-200). The process of master planning, typically undertaken by private consultants, was criticized for being outside of mainstream political process and administration and with little citizen participation. Even after their integration into the work of municipalities for linking them more flexibly to the city councils' political strategies and administrative procedures, the plans remained technocratic. They were accused of reflecting the values and preferences of the elite, over-confident in its own logic, and therefore adopting a condescending attitude towards the others and towards the past (Gans, 1968; Jacobs, 1961).

The first wave of master plans, therefore, coincided with the rise of the welfare state, which used them as technical instruments to address social and economic problems through top-down spatial transformation. These instruments, however, were growth-oriented and unable to cope with the radical changes that unfolded from the mid-1960s onwards.

The second wave of master planning started with the neoliberal phase in the 1980s, with a drive for the regeneration of deindustrialized urban economies, which triggered a new rise in city building activities, now requiring coordination and creative skills (Madanipour,2006). The emergence of urban design coincided and overlapped with the reintroduction of spatial and strategic concerns in planning as the primary form of urban regeneration (Lynch, 1981; Jacobs and Appleyard, 1987). In this context, master plans returned, not as a blueprint for the entire city and its range of social and economic problems, as comprehensive planning had previously claimed, but as a tool for managing strategic urban projects with a primarily economic rationale (Oosterlynck et al, 2011; Albrechts, 2017).

The resurgence of the master plan in its new form happened alongside neoliberal deregulation, reduction in the size and scope of the state, and the shift of emphasis from government to governance (Williams, 2000). Around the turn of the century, a long period of technology-enabled and debt-fuelled economic growth facilitated high levels of public investment in the built environment. Privatization and globalization had multiplied and diversified the non-state actors in urban development, and now there was a need for the coordination of these diverse actors through place-based visions and governance. This is why the term master plan has been interchangeably used with development framework, regeneration strategy, urban design framework, or vision (CABE, 2004: 13), providing a platform around

which the stakeholders could collaborate. In the new market-driven paradigm, it was a tool with which to manage risk and uncertainty, even if it obscured the lines of democratic accountability (Wright, 2003).

Set up by the government to facilitate the renaissance of British cities, and led by the architect Richard Rogers, the Urban Task Force advocated the use of spatial master plans for a design-led regeneration. As 'a synthesis of the design-led approach to urban development', the spatial master plan was 'a vital framework for development', and as such 'a fundamental ingredient in achieving an urban renaissance in English towns and cities' (Urban Task Force, 1999: 73). Where it had been implemented, as in Barcelona, Rotterdam and Greenwich, it had 'driven the development process and secured a high quality design product' (ibid). Rather than two-dimensional zoning plans, it was a three-dimensional framework that offered 'a more sophisticated "visual" model' (ibid). It suggested the shape and quality of the outcome, around a selected set of considerations, within fairly clear temporal and spatial boundaries, and coordinated by the master planner (Urban Task Force, 1999: 76).

A series of checklists and good practice advice accompanied this campaign for master plans, defining their contents (Llewelyn Davies Yeang, 2000) and processes (CABE, 2004: 13). The Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE), however, warned that a master plan is not a blueprint for design and development but a device for setting the context within which individual projects come forward (CABE, 2004: 9). The new generation master plans, therefore, were a framework for promoting development, which included marketing a place and creating certainty for the developers to invest. Master plans were no longer a vehicle of the welfare state for managing a calculated distribution of resources in response to social and economic needs, but a tool for attracting and coordinating economic investment, from which other benefits might trickle down. They reflected the re-emerging need for coordination and risk management within a radical paradigm shift from social to economic considerations.

The regeneration drive which peaked at around the turn of the century, however, did not merely suffer from vulnerability to economic fluctuations, but also from overemphasis on selective sectors and locations. The market-driven nature of these development projects meant that they would target either stronger property markets such as central London, where the reward is high, or where government support and subsidy was available, as provided by the urban regeneration and renaissance agenda. Globalization fuelled urban vibrancy, but it also led to a growth in social inequality (OECD,2008). Concentrating investment in city centres drove the gentrification of these areas, displacing some people and activities, and denying funds to those in other locations who were waiting for their turn (Atkinson and Bridge,2005; Lees et al,2008). This was a period in which it was naively thought that market fluctuations, in the shape of booms and busts, were a thing of the past. However, with the global financial crisis of 2007, the building boom ended and master plans were once again seen as inflexible tools unfit for a period of economic stagnation and uncertainty. The economic crisis left a large number of empty shops, flats and offices, while serious housing shortages were not addressed (Gallagher, 2016; Ruddick, 2008).

The aesthetic character of these development projects, meanwhile, often drew on international, corporate aesthetics with little connection to the locality's character and context. As the master plans were produced by a relatively small number of international consultants, they tended to use a fairly limited range of ideas (Rapoport, 2015). As the city centres were dominated by large corporations in an economy founded on debt-fuelled consumption in retail and entertainment, their diversity of character suffered, to the extent that some are called 'clone towns' (NEF, 2010).

The two waves of master planning, therefore, are characterized by a number of similarities and differences. Their similarities include their technical character, their alignment with the period of economic growth and building intensity, and their limited flexibility to deal with rapid change. The technical character, which had previously been critiqued for its lack of democratic responsiveness, once

again tended to depoliticize urban development processes. As the cycle of building boom came to an end with a major economic crisis in 2007, the master plan once again showed its rigidity, unable to adjust to major economic fluctuations. In both periods, economic downturns bring social concerns into sharper focus, which may be partially reflected in the revised master plans, but not necessarily supported by the dwindling financial resources.

The differences between the two periods, however, are evident in the structural character of each period and the way master plans have been used. In the move from the welfare state to neoliberalism, from the state-led to the market-dominated urban development, from comprehensive planning to strategic planning, and from the urban plan to the urban project, the character of the master plan changed. From being an instrument of addressing a wide range of social and economic considerations, it became a vehicle of selective economic considerations and a tool for marketing. The problem was not in attempting to develop a vision for the future, nor in the deployment of design, but whom it served and what it was for. The results of these shifts of emphasis and character have been evident in the nature and outcome of the master plans, as exemplified in Sheffield.

2. Reinventing the city of steel: Sheffield city centre master planning
In comparison to the 1945 Sheffield master plan, which aimed at comprehensive reconstruction after the war (Lewis,2013), the new master plans of Sheffield focused strategically on economic recovery after deindustrialization. Sheffield had faced a decline in manufacturing employment and to a lesser extent population. From the mid-1970s Sheffield lost more than 70,000 (incl. 60,000 in the metal industries alone) out of 120,000 manufacturing jobs and its population shrank from 570,000 to 520,000. Sheffield's retail suffered from the national recession of the early 1990s and following the opening of Meadowhall, a large suburban shopping mall, in 1990. The overall negative external perception of Sheffield was exacerbated by the decline in the aesthetic appeal of the postwar modernist design. The City Council made several attempts to change the city's image, through the construction of a new tram system, which opened in 1992, and through investment in sports facilities in part to host the World Student Games of 1991, although both left it indebted. These were then challenging conditions in which to seek to change the fortunes of the city.

The paper is based on conducting a qualitative case study during the period 2010-2015, which deployed an interpretive analysis of primary and secondary data derived from three principal methods. First, it involved undertaking a close reading of key documentation, principally the Sheffield City Centre Master Plans of 2000, 2008 and 2013, alongside other relevant planning documents and policy and practice reviews available in the public domain such as the Sheffield Development Framework of 2009. Second, 15 expert interviews were conducted with council officers, councillors and strategic stakeholders in the process of urban regeneration in the period 2011-12. Additional 5 follow-up interviews were then carried out with the key actors in the master planning process in the period 2013-14 after the publication of the Sheffield City Centre Master Plan 2013. Third, it involved direct observation of both physical changes to the urban fabric, and the use of established and reconfigured public spaces, through regular walks around the city centre. Such walks also included ad hoc conversations with citizens; in a few instances they were accompanied by the key informants. This multi-method approach allowed the authors to examine: planning policies and practices; physical, economic and social outcomes of these practices; and the ways in which the processes and outcomes of Sheffield master planning were perceived by the key actors and stakeholders.

2.1. City Centre Strategy 1994: A new vision
One response to the long-lasting economic and physical decline was 'design-led', implemented through a vision for a comprehensive redevelopment of the city centre in '*A new city: Sheffield's City Centre Strategy*' of 1994 (SCC, 1994). The Strategy marked three strategic shifts in thinking about Sheffield's recovery: (i) consideration of a successful city centre as the key to economic development; (ii) reinstatement of the local state as the main enabler of urban redevelopment, and (iii) the development

of a new generation of contemporary master plans. Thus from 1994 onwards the City Council focused on the delivery of non-statutory master plans and the elaboration of new visions for the city centre, alongside city branding, building investor confidence and real estate management. *City Centre Strategy 1994* set out a broad vision for the regeneration of the city centre focusing on the quality of physical environment, multi-modal transport accessibility and improvement of the austere image of the city centre through the creation of distinctive urban core quarters and gateways, including a 'gold route' linking the railway station to the central retail core. The development strategy also helped secure a successful bid to the Millennium Commission entitled *Remaking the Heart of the City* (SCC, 1995) comprising £23m funding for an exhibition space on the Gold Route, the Millennium Galleries, alongside public realm improvements to the Peace Gardens and Hallam Square (Booth, 2009) (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Peace Gardens, which was given its name after the Second World War, forms an important node at the heart of the city.

The vision set out in the *City Centre Strategy 1994* was taken up in consecutive planning documents, including the *City Centre Business Strategy 1996* (Sheffield City Liaison Group, 1996), which defined timescales for specific actions and projects at the 'Heart of the City'. Alongside the successful Millennium bid, it helped crystalize certain qualities of space that Sheffield City Council was to pursue in the following decades. The *Strategy* considered the public realm as key both to physical regeneration and economic competitiveness, and recognized public arts as a driver for enhancing the qualities of public spaces. This built on a focus on creative industries in its economic development strategy. From the very beginning the re-invention of the city centre was motivated by a desire to develop an inner-city experience economy that would be capable of competing with Meadowhall, the suburban shopping mall. In the Town Hall, the design-led regeneration was seen first and foremost as a window of opportunity to build a new inner city shopping centre:

> 'There was a genuine fear in the city at that time that we might become the first city in the UK turned into the American model where – as we have seen in places like Cleveland and Detroit - centre just dies and everyone shops in the suburbs. This all started from that real fear of losing shops in the city centre. We started to draw up plans to turn that situation around. Initially, we couldn't really compete with the mall purely in terms of retail. We had to look at all the other things that make a city centre different from anywhere else in city, the civic function, the cultural function, the social function and education, and we identified pedestrian access as a key organizing feature. This is how it all started, really." (Senior regeneration manager)

Sheffield was being re-imagined as a 'welcoming city', whose revamped townscape and new experience economy were to act as a magnet for tourists, students, graduates and business people, attracting them to settle, invest and drive technological innovation.

Benefiting from a national policy movement to regenerate the English 'core cities' as a driver for the economic growth of less affluent regions, and from the Objective 1 European Structural Funds, a pioneering regeneration company named Sheffield One was set up in February 2000 to coordinate and deliver regeneration. Unlike the Sheffield Development Corporation (SDC), that had operated from 1988 to 1995, Sheffield One had neither substantial budget of its own nor extensive planning powers. It was an 'arm's-length' body of the Council, and its objective was to exploit synergies by coordinating between public and private sector actors and to address opportunities through elaborating strategic master plans.

2.2. City Centre Master Plan 2000: Platform for investment
Commissioned by Sheffield One, the *Sheffield City Centre Master Plan 2000* (Koetter, Kim & Associates 2000) drew upon earlier strategies, updated their key objectives and set out a time framework for the delivery of £1 billion investment in the city centre over the next 15 years. Its vision included four key objectives: (i) building a new high technology-based economy; (ii) creating a vibrant city as a centre for learning, culture, retail, business, leisure and living; (iii) improving accessibility to the city centre by all modes of transport; and (iv) celebrating the public realm.

Master Plan 2000 saw physical regeneration of the city centre as a milestone to the transformation of Sheffield into a regional retail hub and one of Europe's high-tech centres. City centre master planning extended to other quarters to accommodate continued investment. The Plan envisaged delivery of so-called 'Magnificent Seven' projects that, apart from the 'Heart of the City', included further three schemes focusing on remodelling of the public realm for future mixed use development – 'Station Gateway', 'City Hall/Barkers Pool' and 'West Bar' – a proposal for a new historic and recreational quarter in Castlegate, 'E-Campus' for small and middle-sized digital and tech companies, and a 'New Retail Quarter'. The new public realm schemes were imagined as vehicles of economic growth and social inclusion (Koetter, Kim & Associates 2000; Jones et al, 2003).

The *Master Plan 2000* followed the burgeoning policy and practice of 'Urban Renaissance' guides (e.g. Urban Task Force, 1999; DETR, 2000a and 2000b; English Partnerships, 2000) and successful examples of design-led regeneration from Manchester, Birmingham, Glasgow and cities across Europe of the previous two decades (e.g., Tibbalds, et al. 1990). As such the City Council championed the pivotal role that the public realm could play in the reinvention of a city, principally through attention to the central core. The *Master Plan 2000* concluded that the successful delivery of the network of quality public spaces would cause a multiplier effect that would encompass inward investment, buoyant retail, inner city housing, and a diverse and inclusive labour market. Issues of justice and equality were conceived as an outcome of future economic success: 'Once the momentum is created, the challenge is to ensure that the benefits of this vision reach right out into the most deprived communities within the city and beyond to the sub-region' (Koetter, Kim & Associates 2000: 3). While a booming global economy led to a high volume of housing investment, an Urban Design Compendium was commissioned to secure the quality of new schemes.

2.3. City Centre Urban Design Compendium 2004: Quality improvement
The *Sheffield City Centre Urban Design Compendium* (Gillespies, 2004) was meant to champion design-led regeneration and safeguard quality and coherence of urban design in the city centre and beyond. It sought to bring together planning and design by translating economic, cultural and social goals embedded in strategic frameworks goals into physical transformation. First, the *Compendium* offered a description of the existing and desired character of a particular area and topographical, natural, and built environment qualities that were expected to be taken into consideration. Second, it crystalized a vision of desired futures for the character areas which championed a sense of place, vibrancy and human movement. Third, it put forward design principles and guidelines that comprised degrees of integration (recovery / reinvention / reconfiguration of an area), desired architectural styles, key natural and industrial heritage themes (water and steel), and a 2-tier palette of colours and materials (incl. Bronze, Granite, Stone Mastic Asphalt, etc.) to be used. In order to put these principles into motion

an Urban Design Review Panel was set up in 2006.

Although the design guidance of the *Compendium* was both comprehensive and detailed, the document offered somewhat narrow interpretations of urban design:

> '**I** think Birmingham was the first city to actually develop such a coherent approach in early 1990s, we liked it, and we followed that sort of technique, especially where we had residential coming. That was to some extent welcomed, I think, by developers and particularly by our colleagues from the maintenance side of the Council. Rather than having each urban designer to come out with a new form of street furniture, new materials or a different distinctive approach, what we said was: 'we want to keep it all quite simple, so we can look after it – the stone paving, the benches, bins, etc. - long term'. The *Urban Design Compendium* was rather a consequence of this approach than some revolutionary design statement. We wanted to keep the public realm consistent, so the whole city centre reads as something that has some coherence and it is possible to keep spare parts if it requires repairs.' (design manager)

This approach, which seems to undermine the embedded aesthetic diversity of a historic city in favour of technical considerations, was seen to have been efficient and was consistently used in a number of development projects. The Millennium celebratory schemes, favourable Urban Renaissance policies in Europe and the UK, and Objective 1 funding from the ERDF provided a financial backbone for getting the physical regeneration off the ground and for reimagining the city through the public realm. However, by 2006-07 grant funding was running out and the next obvious challenge was to mobilize design to knit together places, people and the economy. This required building a bridge between publicly funded physical regeneration, on the one hand, and business value and job creation, on the other.

2.4. Master Plan 2008: Beyond physical transformation
The ultimate objective of the master planning process from 2006 onwards shifted towards broadening the focus of *Master Plan 2000* both to other parts of the city centre and beyond, and more toward economic development:

> 'The Master Plan [2000] was wholly absorbed by physical regeneration. The economic bits to it, such as development opportunities, investment, building of skills and all the other more inclusive holistic approaches were missing. It wasn't an economic master plan. It was the built environment where all priorities went. If you were a part of the Glorious Seven or the Magnificent Seven, the priority focus for seven years was with you, but otherwise your route was not gold at all.' (LEP representative)

In the same vein, the *Mid-Term Evaluation Report of South Yorkshire Objective 1 Programme* (Wells, 2003) argued that supply-side interventions of the public sector had not been sufficiently met by a transformational change in the demand-side. New development policies, therefore, were to shift towards securing major private sector investments that would create jobs and reduce the numbers of economically inactive and under-employed groups. This policy turn was also reflected in institutional design. In 2007 the Urban Regeneration Company 'Sheffield One' was merged into a newly created City Economic Development Company 'Creative Sheffield' whose main objective was to sustain economic growth in the time of reductions in public expenditure.

A new master plan, *Sheffield City Centre Masterplan 2008* (EDAW, 2008) reviewed and refreshed the objectives of *Master Plan 2000* drawing upon the *Economic Master Plan* (Creative Sheffield, 2008) and the *City Strategy 2006-2010* (Sheffield First, 2007). While earlier planning documents - *Strategy 1994*, *Business Plan 1996*, and *Master Plan 2000* - focused on physical qualities of spaces, *Masterplan 2008* was more concerned with non-physical initiatives in the knowledge economy. The Master Plan claimed:

'The focus on physical development must now shift to development of the city economy and the role of the city centre in its structural transformation.' (EDAW, 2008: 2)

The *Master Plan 2008* aimed at enabling major private investment and opening opportunities for economic growth and job creation through the development of office accommodation, a Retail Quarter branded as 'Sevenstone' and a diversified housing stock. It viewed residential and commercial space development and further improvement of the public realm as part of a bigger whole, focused on the maximization of synergies between development projects, and was underpinned by an ambition to create physical and economic connections within and beyond the city centre. As opposed to its predecessor, *the Master Plan 2008* offered an overall vision for physical, economic, social and cultural development. The biggest challenge, however, rested in the consequences of the economic crisis. While the bold economic ambitions of the Master Plan had been elaborated predominantly in 2006-07, by the time the Plan was published in 2008 the economic landscape had much altered and they already seemed out of reach.

2.5. Master Plan 2013: towards a new managerialism?

The economic downturn, and the fiscal austerity that followed, hit Sheffield and other catching-up core cities in the North of England much harder than the South East and the northern front runners of Manchester and Leeds. Private investment had come almost to a complete halt. Much fewer development projects were proceeding and some schemes - such as the controversial Urban Splash revamp of the Park Hill estate – were suspended or abandoned mid-way (Figure 2). Vacancy rates in existing residential and commercial units had significantly risen and there was little evidence for stronger demand in the future. Out of the two flagships of the *Master Plans 2000* and 2008 'Digital Campus' looked stagnant and negotiations between the Council and the developers over the 'Sevenstone' retail quarter were coming to a dead end. The ambitions of EDAW's Master Plan relating to office provision were halved and job creation targets reduced fourfold (SCC, 2013).

Figure 2. Park Hill, a housing estate built by the council in the 1950s and now listed as a historical monument, has been partly refurbished as private flats and offices.

The lack of private investment resulted in passing control back to the City Council in many distinct ways. The Council decided to review EDAW's *Master Plan 2008* and produce a new refreshed *Master Plan 2013* (SCC, 2013) in house. Creative Sheffield was reintegrated into the economic and marketing directorate of the Council. But public regeneration funding further declined and Yorkshire Forward was dismantled alongside all other regional development agencies (RDAs):

'The kind of level of public resource is much reduced, the funding regimes that we have worked with the European programme we worked with ended, and also Yorkshire Forward was abolished by the Government. So one of our main partners just disappeared and hasn't really been replaced.' (senior regeneration manager)

At the same time a few positive factors came together that helped to innovate the master planning process in the absence of private investment. New sources of funding were becoming available that started shaping new planning practices. Heritage Lottery and Grant in Aid shifted thinking towards new forms of local authority-community partnerships. The rising consensus across the scales of government to work towards new climate change mitigation and adaptation strategies meant that new environmental sustainability-focused funding pots became available, and recurrent floods in the city centre helped advance a sustainable city agenda. But foremost, new non-fundamental forms of lending to finance local authority investment, unrolled by the central government's New Development Deal and European Commission's JESSICA, enabled Sheffield City Council to increase their borrowing capacity against future income. Paradoxically, the US-imported tax incentive financing, which helps local authorities to gamble on future tax income and in most places is used to lend on to or de-risk private investment, was seen in traditionally managerialist Sheffield as a window of opportunity to invest in public infrastructure, public realm and public services.

The new *Master Plan 2013* rebalanced priorities between catering for the needs of the private sector, local communities and public service. With all opportunities and pitfalls involved, the Council planned for re-establishing its role as the key land owner, investor and service provider. The new Master Plan saw instilling some forms of bottom-up - but council enabled and managed - creativity of local communities. This included enabling temporary uses of vacant spaces, supporting creative start-ups and independents, and development of local energy. The Council started negotiating more strategically the needs of economic growth with social inclusion and the duty of care for the natural environment, all in the context of diminishing funds.

3. A master planned Sheffield?
The five phases of master planning in Sheffield city centre demonstrate two decades of attempts at overcoming economic decline through a strategic focus on the city centre and coordinating the available resources of the public and private sector investors. The early phases emphasized the enhancement of the city centre's infrastructure and image, in a design-led process of public realm improvement and property development. The later phases displayed a desire to expand these improvements both geographically and into a wider range of economic considerations. But this process came to an abrupt halt by the economic crisis, hence falling back on the public management of dwindling resources.

The remarkable improvements in Sheffield centre's visual appeal in the 1990s and 2000s are widely acknowledged (Booth, 2009). The consistency of work on the public realm in consecutive city centre master plans and detailed design principles helped coordinate the development of a network of distinctive public spaces. However, while the Council intended to use design as a holistic 'tool for reinvention of the city, economy and society' (council officer), the conception of spatial quality laid out in *the Compendium* was heavily grounded in a particular approach to urban aesthetics. This approach, which aimed at improving the image of the city centre, was rooted in the long British tradition of picturesque, and its more recent manifestation in the Townscape Movement of the 1960s (Cullen 1971), which focused on the urban scene as a visual experience (Vescovi, 2013: 158). Rather than linking urban spaces to creative industries and high-tech manufacturers (Bell and Jayne, 2003), developing a critical approach to the Europeanization of urban living (Vickery, 2007), encouraging participatory approaches to design-related decision-making (Punter, 2007) or community development approaches addressed in the *White Paper* (ODPM, 1999), the emphasis was much narrower here.

The question is not about the presence or absence of design in the master plans, but about the roles which designs and master plans were expected to play, and whether the intended spatial qualities were organically linked with the local economic and social needs and capacities. While the public realm-led regeneration attracted real estate investment into the city, it is less clear how it helped to support the city's economy. For example, design-led master planning practices could have done more to connect with the local creative industries and their production of symbolic goods and services (Bell and Jayne, 2003). Some opportunities to link the design-led reinvention of the city centre with the design skills agenda were lost, and not enough designers, craftspeople and entrepreneurs got a chance to build their portfolios and businesses, although a few local creative industries benefitted from public contracts for the design and development of public spaces. The process shows a disconnection between the design and development of the public realm, cultural policy and creative economy, which prevented the germination of longer term possibilities for high value jobs in creative and digital industries. A high volume of speculatively produced spaces and a vibrant inner city experience economy could not be translated into the durable economic growth of an urban area. Furthermore, the concerted attempts for the regeneration of the city centre would not be enough to be a catalyst for the changing fortunes of the urban region as a whole. The gap between the patterns of spatial design and property investment on the one hand, and the social and economic dynamics of a locality on the other hand would undermine the possibility of mutual and sustained linkages between them.

The economic evaluation of the legacy of urban design-led regeneration in Sheffield brings a mixed picture. When hard economic indicators are taken into account, there is a strong case for arguing in favour of the success of Sheffield's design- and public realm-led strategies in pursuing economic competitiveness in the phase preceding 2008. The city's economy performed very well in the period of 1999-2004 with strong, higher than the national average, levels of GVA per capita growth. Sheffield was creating 2,000 new jobs a year through inward investment and unemployment fell to approximately 5% in 2004, just above the national average (GENECON, 2011). New physical and economic policies in conjunction with very favourable macroeconomic conditions lifted Sheffield from the depths of deindustrialization, brought it back on the growth track, and enabled the modernization of the city's economy (Dabinett, 2005). But Sheffield's real estate market and the broader city's economy proved to be highly vulnerable to the cycle of economic growth and decline. The failure of Sevenstone following 2007 was symbolic of this feeling of a 'bubble' in the city. The overheated city centre housing development industry took a strong hit with the vacancy rates in new units remaining high, while the city lacked family housing on the edges. Overall, although 'Sheffield's dip was shallower than in some other places in the North' (LEP representative) and earlier physical, symbolic and reputational gains of master planning might have helped to decrease the shockwave, the city's economy significantly underperformed in terms of GVA recorded in comparison to the national average between 2008 and 2013 (SCC, 2013).

The social justice and equality agenda of the design-led regeneration of Sheffield's city centre comprised a set of objectives that were mostly residual to the economic ambitions. This represented a major shift for cities such as Sheffield which had previously used public sector investment more directly to address social inequality. The social agenda has also proven to be less successful than the economic one. Post code-based user surveys show that the new spaces such as Peace Gardens and Winter Gardens were unanimously appreciated, and strengthened civic pride and personal identification of Sheffielders with the place (Holmes and Beebeejaun, 2007) (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Winter Gardens, which houses more than 2,500 plants from around the world, was completed in 2003.

But Sheffield remains one of the most divided cities, with almost a quarter of households living in poverty that is heavily clustered in northern and eastern wards (IMD, 2007). The master planning promise to mitigate poverty through the labour market remains largely unfulfilled. In contrast, the rebranded city centre quarters with their unique identities bring together homogenous middle class communities of students and young professionals (MacLeod, 2002). Moreover, the speculative residential development, which contributed to driving housing prices up and thus exacerbating affordability problems, has left the (post-)crisis city with high numbers of empty middle-class homes in the city centre and unsolved housing problems elsewhere. The planned replacement of the Castle Markets with a tourist attraction and a major revamp of the Park Hill estate, which with unprecedented public subsidy is being gentrified, shows the widening social, cultural and symbolic gap, and the lack of attention it has received in these master plans.

Critical reflection on the development visions for the city and the engagement of local communities in such a reflection constitute the weakest points of the master planning process. Although community participation was mobilized in urban design strategies and public consultations, it happened in a limited way, without stressing them as *condicio sine qua non* for planning applications. The City Council in any case found itself operating a planning system prescribed by central government in which it had much reduced powers to refuse planning applications. As a result, while the master planning and design processes have been marked with a great deal of consensus among Sheffield's elites and planning professionals, the views of Sheffielders have been to a large extent absent from the debate both in relation to the plans and also with regard to development proposals. In this respect Sheffield shared many flaws of design-led regeneration with other cities. Its master planning has focused on the product rather than on the process and has lacked extensive public input in the early stages of the plan-making process, serving as a vehicle of delivering property development within a context of an expert-driven corporate aesthetics of what constituted 'good' development without critical reflection on urban citizenship (Julier, 2005). One of the problems of such an approach rests in the fact that Sheffield's master planning was, as that of many other UK cities, outsourced to a transnational class of mobile urban regeneration professionals who, by nature, have weaker insights into local contexts and needs. Their commissioned labour time on master planning projects is usually very limited, which makes them more likely to turn to off-the-shelf solutions. However, their work on Sheffield's MP2000 and MP2008 was moderated by an in-house urban design team - that had become increasingly rare in the UK – who did address some of public concerns expressed in the consultation process. The master planning has also become far more sensitive to local needs and contexts since Sheffield's in-house team reclaimed the visioning role from the consultants, although a post-crisis, weakened urban economy and dwindling public finances have undermined their ability further to develop and implement such visions.

Conclusion

Judging by the evidence from the past century, the rise and fall of master planning has paralleled the periods of boom and bust in urban development, and the changing relationship between the state and the economy. Master plans have been employed when the economy has boomed, the state has been involved in steering it, development projects have proliferated and the need for coordination has been felt. In the periods of decline in development activity, however, the central motive for such engagement fades away, and the master plan loses its rationale, becoming a rigid obstacle or an irrelevant document on the shelf.

Analytically, it is possible to separate the master plan as a tool from the quality and character of its outcome, as different master planning processes may generate completely different outcomes in different cities. Nevertheless, some of the intrinsic qualities of the master plan may be responsible for the resulting shortcomings. Master plans have been used as a tool of coordinating property development and managing uncertainty in a market-dominated context; as such, they have played a strategic organizing role. However, their development-oriented nature and their fixed spatial and temporal focus make them vulnerable to the fluctuations of the market. Their strategic nature has meant giving priority to some groups, activities and places at the expense of the others; subsequently, their relatively narrow focus in cities with wide-ranging problems would make them ineffective in addressing these problems.

Master planning has remained a useful tool in the armoury of urban planners and designers, and has undoubtedly helped in positively transforming the city centre of Sheffield. Compared with previous eras, however, local governments find themselves with fewer tools, of finance and regulatory power in particular, with which to enact their visions. Master plans can also help in realizing the economic potential of the urban environments, both positively to affect the image of a city with regard to public investment and as a stimulus for private sector investment in real estate within the transformed spaces, although not necessarily much beyond. However, the dynamics of property development may not always be intertwined with other economic sectors; and the top-down nature of 'master' planning could remain at odds with the democratic imperatives of public engagement and the social needs of the urban society.

Acknowledgement

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