

City Collaboration



The future for European urban competitiveness

Forget twinning, the newest fashion for city planners is 'collaboration' - in which urban spaces facing similar challenges act together to resolve their problems. Glasgow University's **Professor Stuart Gulliver** looks behind the buzzword to establish whether this trend has any value

City collaboration, along with 'city competitiveness' and the 'creative city', is one of the exciting big ideas to have emerged over the last few years about the future of places. It is still early days yet and the collaborative winners have not yet begun to emerge, but at some point, not too far off, who a city is collaborating with will be as important as who it is competing against.

the real advantages of collaboration will be realised only when something is achieved which could not have been produced by each city acting independently on its own.

In this context, I am taking city collaboration to refer to a proactive, formal relationship, invariably economic, between two or more nearby cities (say within 50 miles of each other) both, or all, within the same region. The primary aim of such collaboration is directed not only towards enhancing the competitiveness of each individual city but also, by acting together, the collaborative cities become a more effective driver for their region. Indeed we can go one stage further by aspiring to something called 'collaborative advantage' whereby the real advantages of collaboration will be realised only when something is achieved which could not have been produced by each city acting independently on its own. So the ultimate goal is to achieve

'collaborative advantage' between nearby cities.

What is clear is that city collaboration is not being pursued because it is a rather nice, cosy or particularly friendly thing to do but because there is a belief that collaboration has the potential to improve overall competitiveness. This is not 'town twinning' - it is more serious, it is 'collaborating to compete'.

Collaborative behaviour is not new in the commercial sector and private business. The growth of strategic alliances, joint ventures and supply-chain agreements has long coexisted alongside competitive behaviour. Some business analysts now argue that collaboration has become central to competitive strategy for many businesses and, as a result, has



Gallery of Modern Art, Glasgow



National Art Gallery, Edinburgh

Potential candidates in Britain for collaborative city ventures would include Glasgow-Edinburgh (pictured above)

become woven into the fabric of competition between firms. However, although such behaviour has become part of the conventional business wisdom, evidence of collaborative behaviour between cities is much thinner on the ground even though the main drivers of the growth in collaboration viz. market turbulence, uncertainty, globalisation; are just as evident in the public realm.

There are however some examples in Europe where collaboration between cities has started to yield an economic dividend. For example, the collaboration between Copenhagen and Malmö has led to the creation of a new cross-border region - the Oresund - which is now the largest urban region in Scandinavia. It was set up explicitly in 1991 to create an

urban region whereby the combination of the two cities would move it up the European cities hierarchy - from 35th to 11th in Europe they judge. As a result of the collaboration there has been an enormous investment in infrastructure - including an 8km fixed link road and rail bridge; a new Metro system for Copenhagen; major expansion and upgrade of Copenhagen Airport; new urban development schemes in both cities; a new joint university and Medicon Valley, the new biotech focus for Scandinavia.

In the Netherlands the 'Deltametropolis' has been set up to underpin and strengthen the international importance of the Randstad and its key constituent cities i.e. Amsterdam, Rotterdam, The Hague

and Utrecht. Although not as heavy in investment as the Oresund nevertheless the 'Delta Metropolis' organisation has aims which are very similar; i.e. to better integrate the 4 cities so that they can compete in combination more effectively in the international marketplace.

Hamburg and Berlin are also examining the economic potential for collaboration. Meanwhile, in Britain a collaborative venture between Liverpool and Manchester, initiated by the NorthWest Development Agency, has led to a Concordat between the two cities being signed in September 2001. Potential candidates in Britain for collaborative city ventures would include Glasgow-Edinburgh; Leeds-Bradford; Newcastle-Gateshead-Sunderland; Nottingham-Derby-



Above and far right: Copenhagen
Right: Malmo



Leicester and Portsmouth-Southampton. These city groupings almost certainly offer the prospect of enhanced regional competitiveness through collaboration.

The economic benefits from city collaboration

Britain's cities are its greatest fixed economic assets and many of them are currently performing better than they have done for more than 30 years. Yet despite this improvement most of our cities are being outperformed by more prosperous European regions. The fact is that Europe is becoming increasingly dominated by large metropolitan city-regions and the majority of our cities, outside London, have neither the scale

nor the critical mass to compete with them. This is because in city competition size really does matter. The bigger the place, the more diversified the economy and the more competitive it will be. The competitiveness of the bigger place is enhanced because the 'offer' it can make is considerably more attractive. Bigger cities will have a larger catchment population, better quality of labour market and a greater breadth and diversity of services and assets such as universities, cultural institutions, research centres etc. These are all key considerations in attracting both investment and people in a highly competitive international market place. How then might our cities start to address this scale-deficiency which will affect their future competitiveness in Europe? Is

there some way they can start to punch above their weight?

This is precisely where collaboration might offer some sort of solution. For example, if we could through collaboration seek to combine two or more adjacent cities in some way, then their combined 'weight' would make them much more attractive in terms of international competitiveness for investment than each city acting alone. Such collaboration would permit both cities to 'borrow', so to speak, a greater size and critical mass in order to compete at a higher level in the international urban hierarchy. In practical terms the better the communications infrastructure between the collaborating cities is the easier it is to conceive of the collaborative operating within a single economic space. There would



therefore be persistent pressure to 'shrink the distance' between the cities in order that they can be seen to be operating, as far as possible, as one city. By fusing them together in this way collaborative cities are seeking to achieve the 'big city' effect or the 'even bigger city effect'.

The 'core' project for collaborating cities then will be to seek improvements in the shrinkage of distance between the partners in all modes i.e. rail, road, bus, ICT infrastructure. This will allow the partner cities to be seen as operating, as much as possible, within a single urban marketplace in terms of labour markets, housing markets and tourism markets. A second area for collaboration would be 'strategic projects' and new product development. These would most

likely be in sectors where the partner cities already had a joint strength and might include universities and knowledge hub development; urban tourism; cultural developments and financial services.

City collaboration as a means of improving city and regional competitiveness will not be a short-term project. To succeed it will require sustained commitment, innovative thinking, leadership and realistic expectations; but for committed partners it offers the genuine prospect of enhanced economic performance.

Stuart Gulliver is Professor of City Development at the University of Glasgow. For 10 years before that he was Chief Executive of Glasgow Development Agency - now Scottish Enterprise Glasgow.