



Winter Gardens, Sheffield - Andy Barker, Sheffield City Council

Creative Communities

Destination creation through intelligent Mixed-use Development

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Any discussion of the content of mixed-use projects inevitably leads one to re-examine the notion of what mixed-use really is. Although one of the most over-used terms in the property industry in recent years, one needs to go no further than analyse the essence of the very best European cities to savour the benefits of an evolving mixed-use cocktail. Cities rely on a sustainable mix of uses which service the various demands of the people who live, work and play in those cities.

One rather wordy definition of mixed-use might be 'the evolution of a timeless, fully integrated, vibrant, sustainable new neighbourhood, district or quarter'. A few fashionable 'buzz words' here perhaps, but look beyond the surface and mixed-use means better places for people, better connected, probably with creative public transport, leading to more quality space for citizens. Urban design has a major part to play in these philosophies with great attention to integrated functioning spaces, enclosed by development of appropriate high density, cleverly organised, and an active street frontage colonised by a vibrant mix of uses.

Mixed-use, as an adjective, is actually rather deficient, and the concept should also encompass 'Mixed Activity', 'Mixed Tenure', 'Mixed Density', 'Mixed Typologies', 'Mixed Scale' and 'Mixed Public Realm'. Variety is the key and is what the best integrated cities are all about. Mixed-use is not, however,

simply trying to enliven the ground floor of the ubiquitous residential block with a few bars or local shops, that in the real world are little more than decoration, and indeed may fail to provide long-term sustainable activity and commerce. Uses must be fully integrated but also complementary to the prevailing social and commercial scene, and when done properly mixed-use is common sense and makes great places.

The real 'engine' of mixed-use is inevitably a strong housing component in order to deliver a 24 hour concentration of population, with extended periods of activity and the positive side effect of passive policing of the spaces concerned. Mixed employment provides the opportunity for elements of that population to live and work in close proximity with all the lifestyle spin-offs which that may bring. Add to the mix civic and community components with health, child care, education and worship facilities and you might create a bedrock of authentic neighbourhood living.

A suitable blend of restaurants, cafés or bars can in part service the recreational needs of the area, or create a destination for visitors and, if carefully handled, add an attractive layer of activity to street level uses. The mix and disposition of these offers must be carefully considered – endless F and B units in the wrong location are just not sustainable and may be difficult to let and maintain. There is also the tendency to overplay the 'Cappuccino Culture' and assume that 'gentrification' is

the panacea for urban problems. Housing and noisy bars do not sit comfortably and it has been claimed that relaxed licensing laws, together with continental street café themes, are fuelling the fire of binge drinking. There are, however, plenty of examples

No-one pretends that real integrated mixed-use is easy – it requires strong leadership, commitment and an open mind. The team should be prepared to examine new building typologies and unique planning solutions. There may be a requirement for creative funding

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of appealing food offers, combined with good architecture to create some memorable set-piece buildings.

Whilst bars and restaurants are fairly standard fare, a mixed-use concept really gets interesting with the introduction of locally or nationally inspired cultural components: creative industries mixed with a blend of art, theatre and dance perhaps, all with the ability to energise indoor and outdoor space.

In the same way, the opportunity to introduce sport and fitness through the concept of interactive landscape all serve to promote a unique and healthy neighbourhood. Destination creation and a tourism industry flow from this and promote good plans with 'lots to do'. One could cite many examples of cultural or sporting elements energising 'places' from a new Winter Garden and Art Gallery in Sheffield, to a destination Waterfront in Cape Town or a fully functioning mixed-use quarter in Oslo harbour.

solutions and more complexity in construction phasing. Nevertheless, research is beginning to show that where conceived with a total commitment, values are intrinsically higher than more conventional mono-use solutions. The completed cocktail then is hard work, but ultimately worthwhile and should create better places. The best examples are few and far between. How far do you want to push the boundaries of mixed-use? What do you aspire to and how brave are you?

So what makes one mixed-use plan different from the next? What is it that releases local uniqueness and the 'spirit of the place'? Clearly a combination of issues comes into play but the concept of locally inspired leisure and culture offers can create a substantial presence. No two theatre companies or art galleries are the same. The idea of living near to, say, a well-known dance school or community theatre gives meaning and depth to an address and a

Sheffield 'Heart of the City'

Heart of the City is a £120 million project launched in 1995. The public component of the project is largely complete and has been well received. It comprises three principle projects, all linked:

- 1 **The Winter Garden:** With Michael Palin as its patron, the project was completed in December 2002 on the site of the old town hall for £5.5 million. At 22 metres wide and 21 metres high, it is the largest temperate greenhouse in any European city centre.
- 2 **The Millennium Galleries:** Opened in April 2001, costing £12.45 million. They cover 5,000 square metres and comprise four separate galleries of permanent and temporary displays. They are run in partnership with the Victoria and Albert Museum and Tate Gallery. The galleries attracted 236,348 visitors in 2004.
- 3 **The Peace Gardens:** Officially opened in 1998 as a series of water features, lawns and seating areas. Artists Tracey Hayes, Richard Asquith and Richard Perry were the key consultants. The regeneration has been funded by the Millennium Commission, the European Community, the UK government and Hallam University.

Commercial development is also planned as part of the strategy, though is in the preliminary stages. Two new areas – Millennium Square and St Paul's Place, adjoined to the Peace Gardens will form the focus and comprise the following:

- Macdonald St Paul's Hotel, a £20m luxury hotel with 161 rooms and direct access to Millennium Square and the Winter Gardens. Conference facilities include nine meeting rooms and 450-capacity banqueting suite and a conference centre for up to 650 guests.
- 200,000 square feet of grade A office space.
- 135,000 square feet of restaurants/bars/retail
- 300 luxury apartments
- 550 space multi story car park

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good level of local support leads to a general feel of 'belonging'. This feeling of involvement in your neighbourhood is surely life-enhancing. We might even suggest that good leisure and cultural provision leads to a greater spirit of community, more inclusivity, pride and neighbourhoods that are truly respected, safe and secure.

Urban Designers can and should create the strong working framework within which all these diverse uses can be exhibited. Take, for instance, one of the simplest but most memorable and powerful of urban components – the square. A well-designed public open space cannot truly sustain itself without an appropriate mix of enclosing uses which effectively define its function. Squares are clearly not all the same and can successfully exploit varying levels of activity, but what is it that makes people choose to visit and why would they linger a while?

Historically squares were the busy trading and communication hubs of our cities and the population had little choice but to engage with them. Today the essence of a good square has to be a totally compelling concept providing access to new people-experiences, recreation and mixed uses. An attractive mix integrated with intelligent design ideas can deliver a philosophy for public spaces which are busy, well used, safe and high quality, (which is an attractor in its own right). Returning to our theme of leisure and culture we can analyse how components within these spaces can be seen as delightful attractions in themselves – art in the landscape or landscape as art, and shelter and street furniture as art. Interactive landscape solutions particularly with creative use of water

and light are energising modern squares, encouraging repeat visits particularly by parents with young children. Why would you not wish to regularly visit an exciting space which has the ability to vary its environmental quality just by you being there? The right approach to delivering these themes is critical however, with a wholehearted commitment to high quality and careful selection of appropriately skilled artists and contractors.

The best spaces can then create the framework to reinforce existing civic events, host concerts, sporting activities and create new festivals, and it is always a bonus to have an established programme of attractions for the masterplanning team to respond to and build upon. At Stockton-on-Tees the Benoy team working with Tees Valley Regeneration had the advantage of one of the best and well used watersports destinations in the country – a huge compounded and clean body of water, which even now hosts major cultural and sporting events throughout the year, enthusiastically supported by the British Waterways personnel who manage the waterspace day to day. Similarly, for our projects in Belfast, Nottingham and West Bromwich, it is the ability to build on the cultural and sporting activity which already exists, combined with the passions of local people, which make large-scale regeneration such an exciting proposition. If we acknowledge this latent energy, build on the passions with some new and unique typological and landscape solutions, we can look forward to many richer mixed-use solutions which are naturally civilised, friendly, humane and inclusive.

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