

The “Mosaic” Approach

A new approach to destination development in towns and cities



David Geddes, Locum Principal Associate, advises towns and cities how they can be more effective in attracting visitors and managing their offer more effectively.

Working with planners and economic development officers in places as diverse as Liverpool and Southampton, David has evolved a new “Mosaic” approach to developing the visitor economy in town and city centres.

He has recently been working with the Northwest Regional Development Agency (NWDA) in refining the thinking and deploying it in towns and cities around the region.

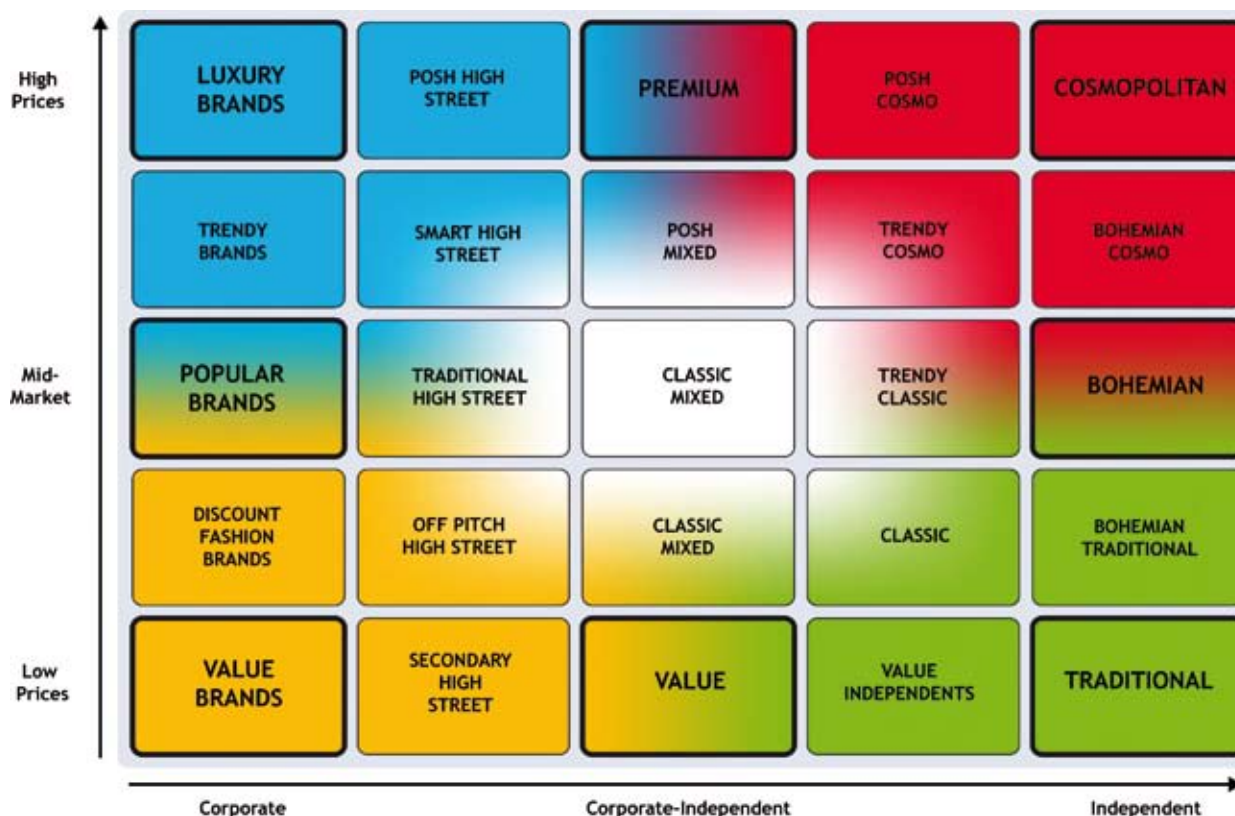
The NWDA has commissioned major research studies, using innovative on-line methods, to develop a richer picture about what motivates people to visit places. This research has provided an evidence base for the new model, as have special catchment area studies commissioned by Locum for Southampton, Bolton and Southport.

The basis for the approach is the reality that all towns and cities divide into sections where business of different types ‘cluster’. Businesses do this to benefit from critical mass; by locating in proximity to each other, they are able to attract like-minded customers.

Cities and towns that want to develop a truly distinctive and attractive sense of place need to nurture a “mosaic” of zones where attractive groups of like-minded businesses cluster. In some cases these zones may be relatively large areas (such as a shopping mall), but typically they are smaller – sometimes a single street or a block of a street or even part of a block.

David has developed a **framework** by which the experiences offered by different parts of a town or city can be plotted. It is then used to think about where there are strengths and weaknesses in the offer, what part of the framework different sections of the town/city have potential to thrive in, and what can be done to help that happen.

The framework identifies 25 different types of zone.



Towards the **left-hand side** of the model are parts of towns and cities that are **dominated by corporations**. In other words, the commercial offer – shops, restaurants etc – is dominated by branded chains and the property tends to be owned by larger property companies and financial institutions.

Towards the **right-hand side** of the model are parts of towns and cities that are **dominated by independents** – the commercial offer is dominated by locally owned businesses and property tends to be in multiple ownership by relatively small, local companies.

Towards the **top side** of the model are places **dominated by up-market businesses**. Businesses there do not normally compete on price. Rentals are high.

Towards the **bottom side** of the model are places **dominated by value-orientated businesses**. Price is a big factor in the way that they position themselves.

Non-commercial attractions like museums and galleries are an important part of the mix, typically located in zones that are on the right side of the model. A key use for the model is thinking about how publicly funded attractions can be used as anchors to nurture clusters of different types.

The potential experience that can be nurtured in any part of a town or city is determined by basic **characteristics**. They include the nature of the **built environment**, the nature of the **market**, and the nature of **competition**.

As an example, "Bohemian" zones – of which the North Laine in Brighton and Northern Quarter in Manchester are examples – can normally only thrive in areas where there is property in multiple ownership, with small units that are difficult to enlarge (often because they are in a conservation area), and there are lots of students around. There is no point in trying to nurture that type of zone where those conditions do not exist.



If a part of town has characteristics that fit a certain piece of the mosaic, there are certain basic principles to follow in making it emerge:

- **Establish an appropriate partnership vehicle** – this might be a single developer, a development partnership, a partnership of property owners-tenants, or a business improvement district for the zone.
- Be clear as to the **type of experience** that is being created and the type of customer that is the primary target.
- Give the zone a **name** and develop a **logo**.
- Develop one or more appropriate **anchors** that will attract the right type of person to the zone. This could be a destination shop, or an art gallery, or a landmark feature of some sort.
- Be **selective in accepting tenants**, aiming for only those who are "on message".
- Put **signals as to the type of area** that this is – this might be in the form of signage, gateways, public art – that give clues as to what type of offer the area provides.
- Encourage **animation activity** that is of a style and nature that fits the vision for the area.
- For areas dominated by independents, create a **village** ambience.

Because this approach focuses on local areas, it enthruses property owners and organisations who want to see their part of town thrive. It is not as much about centralised planning as it is about releasing the energy of the people who, ultimately, have to decide to invest if an area is to become an attractive destination.



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