

# **Re-inventing Cardiff through Cultural Distinctiveness and Consumption**

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EURODIV PAPER 73.2010

**JANUARY 2010**

**GLOBAL CHALLENGES Series**

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The special issue on *Cultural Diversity* collects a selection of papers presented at the multidisciplinary and multinational Marie Curie project on “Cultural diversity in Europe: A series of Conferences” (EURODIV).

**EURODIV** focuses on cultural diversity in Europe and aims to understand the ways of dealing with diversity and its dynamics in the globalisation era. Its primary objective is to provide top-level training opportunities to researchers in the first years of their research career. EURODIV is a four-year project (2006-2009) co-ordinated by Fondazione Eni Enrico Mattei (FEEM) and supported by the European Commission, Sixth Framework Programme, Marie Curie Conferences and Training Courses (contract no. MSCF-CT-2004-516670).

Schedule of Conferences:

- **First Conference “Understanding diversity: Mapping and measuring”**, 26-27 January 2006, FEEM, Milano, Italy. Contact person: Valeria Papponetti, [valeria.papponetti@feem.it](mailto:valeria.papponetti@feem.it)
- **Second Conference “Qualitative diversity research: Looking ahead”**, 19-20 September 2006, K.U.Leuven, Leuven, Belgium. Contact person: Maddy Janssens, [maddy.janssens@econ.kuleuven.ac.be](mailto:maddy.janssens@econ.kuleuven.ac.be), and Patrizia Zanoni, [patrizia.zanoni@kuleuven.ac.be](mailto:patrizia.zanoni@kuleuven.ac.be)
- **Third Conference “Diversity in cities: Visible and invisible walls”**, 11-12 September 2007, UCL, London, UK. Contact person: Valeria Papponetti, [valeria.papponetti@feem.it](mailto:valeria.papponetti@feem.it)
- **Fourth Conference “Diversity in cities: New models of governance”**, 16-17 September 2008, IPRS, Rome, Italy. Contact person: Raffaele Bracalenti, [iprs.it@iprs.it](mailto:iprs.it@iprs.it)
- **Fifth Conference “Dynamics of diversity in the globalisation era”**, 22 - 23 October 2009, FEEM, Milan, Italy. Contact person: Valeria Papponetti, [valeria.papponetti@feem.it](mailto:valeria.papponetti@feem.it)

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This batch of papers has been presented at the Fifth Conference “Dynamics of diversity in the globalisation era”.

# **Re-inventing Cardiff through Cultural Distinctiveness and Consumption**

## **Summary**

Following some theoretical considerations on the articulation between culture and the economy, and their relationship with contemporary city spaces, this paper aims at analysing how Cardiff, the capital of Wales, has been re-positioning itself internationally as a renewed city, where cultural and creative industries and new cultural products play a significant role in the city's cultural and economic performance. The city's waterfront and centre have been enduring intensive urban transformation and have been at the origin of new meanings and uses assigned to Cardiff's spaces and buildings and of the formation of a new social and economic class with characteristic lifestyles. Besides, the city's distinctive characteristics have also been particularly important in the re-invention of Cardiff as a culturally and ethnically diverse city. Its bilingualism, cultural diversity, Welsh heritage, and maritime legacy, have also been used in the city's image campaign to differentiate the Welsh capital from other cities worldwide.

**Keywords:** Cardiff, Urban Regeneration, Culture, Creativity, Consumption

**JEL Classification:** E21, L8, N34, N94, O18, P25, R23, Z1

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## **EURODIV 5<sup>th</sup> Conference**

### **“Dynamics of Diversity in the Globalisation Era”**

22-23 October 2009

Fondazione Eni Enrico Mattei (FEEM), Milan, Italy

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## **Introduction**

In contemporary cities culture is, more than ever before, a resource used to foster economic growth. Through creative and cultural activities, events and venues, cities aim at attracting new visitors, residents and companies. Therefore, city promotional campaigns have been increasingly focusing on distinctive cultural, leisure, entertainment, and shopping possibilities made available to nowadays' 'society of consumers' (Bauman, 2007).

This article's theoretical framework reflects on the articulation between culture, creativity and consumption in contemporary cities, followed by an examination of this relationship in the repositioning of Cardiff, the capital city of Wales, in the UK, as a European city of excellence. The cultural panorama in Cardiff and fast growing cultural and creative industries, backed up by the city's intensive urban regeneration and waterfront revitalisation in the past few decades, have been witnessing thorough transformation and have been yielding new changes in the city's cultural and social milieu and leading to new ways of understanding the city, its spaces and its people.

Cardiff is today one of the ten short-break cultural, sports and events destinations and one of the five main retail cities in the UK. Events and festivals, many of them closely associated with the Welsh culture, are held in the city's modern and attractive venues and outdoor areas, and represent a key driving force to re-imag(in)e the city and to shape a completely new cultural identity for Cardiff, together with the promotion of particularly distinctive characteristics such as the country's bilingualism, the city's cultural and ethnic diversity, cultural heritage, and maritime legacy, that aim at turning Cardiff into a leading European destination and into an internationally competitive capital.

## **Culture, Creativity and Consumption in Contemporary Cities**

For cities to develop (...) on the national and international scale, they need to become culturally vibrant.

(Kelly, 2001:16)

Culture, whether understood as the arts or as a way of life, constitutes and produces the urban space, being an important resource that allows us to perceive the city. It is, according to Malcolm Miles, "one of a number of ways in which meanings are produced and the world made intelligible" (Miles, 2007: 139). Through the city's *lived*

*spaces*, that is, our appropriation of urban areas and our participation in the multiple activities that the city offers us, we imprint our everyday life rhythms on the space and build our understanding of the city, of its cultural identity, and of what it means to us, what Kavatzis (2004) names as the ‘internal city’, a subjective amalgam of feelings and perceptions that is shaped from the individual and collective experiences and priorities that each person possesses of a city and that allows him or her to interpret it in a very personal and particular way.

In post-industrial contemporary cities, which are increasingly characterised by their business-like management and spectacular visual consumption, culture is manipulated as a strategic and competitive factor in place promotional campaigns that mould the image and identity of a city to please and allure new visitors, residents and investors, precisely by influencing positively on the perception that these people have of the city. As Peter Hall has pointed out,

[c]ulture is now seen as the magic substitute for all the lost factories and warehouses, and as a device that will create a new urban image, making the city more attractive to mobile capital and mobile professional workers. (Hall, 2000:640)

Culture is today considerably more imbricated in the economy as it constitutes a resource that enables visitors and residents to consume the city, its spaces and its activities. As Malcolm Miles highlights, culture and the economy meet whenever “the presentation of consumption is cultivated” (Miles, 2007: 108). Rob Shields, in “Culture and the Economy of Cities”, also emphasises this connection, mentioning that it is when these two spheres come together that we get a lived experience of a place.

The dualism of cultural and economic comes together in the lived experience of place. The sense of sedimented identity rooted in the routines and trajectories of locales is not just a personal memory or sense of meaningful relationship with a geographical topography or temporal routine. ‘Place’ amounts to a coordinated time–space synthesis of the symbolic, gendered, ethnic, kinship, as well as the labour and material conditions of existence. (Shields, 1999: 308)

The relationship between culture and the economy is indeed so intense that Malcolm Miles ponders “whether the rise of the culture industries represents a culturization of the economy (Warde, 2002) or an economization of culture” (Miles, 2007: 99). Indeed,

while culture has taken the initiative to promote change, the economy has been geared to meeting those wants (...) (in Florida, 2005: 115). “Culture re-presents and reconstructs the economy while the economy reconstructs and represents culture dialectically (...)” (Miles, 2007: 111).

The possibility of new leisure and entertainment experiences in the form of cultural events have been contributing greatly to shape this relationship of dependency, as both culture and the economy have been framed within cities’ marketing and promotional strategies and have been determinant for their economic success. As Greg Richards and Julie Wilson refer, “[c]ities are increasingly using cultural events to improve their image, stimulate urban development and attract visitors and investment” (Richards and Wilson, 2004: 1931).

Cultural events and the image-building process they entail, reinforce the visual as the predominant sense in today’s culture. Indeed, nowadays’ culture is visually-drawn and closely associated with the consumption of goods and leisure products. These are revealed to their possible consumers precisely through the spectacularisation of visibility. According to Edward Glaeser et al., the city is actually “becoming defined more and more as a city of consumption, experiences, and entertainment”, and those who live and work in a given city are “increasingly act[ing] like tourists in their own city” (in Florida, 2005: 167), in the sense that they are constantly consuming and experiencing what the city has to offer them. As such, culture and the city have themselves become aesthetic products available to (visual) consumption.

Thus, cultural events, festivals and shows of all sorts are one way of consuming the city and frequently constitute the main reason for people to visit a given destination. They also allow the economic revitalisation of a place through the creation of jobs, the growth of tourism and the demand of specific products and services, as well as the improvement of infrastructures and facilities, and the overall image of the destination. Nevertheless, the way in which city image changes before, during and after the event is materialised not only in the above-mentioned economic advantages or in the promotional campaigns to promote the event and the hosting city, but also in a subjective way of difficult assessment that corresponds to the perception that people have of a given city and how they feel (in/about) it.

However, due to the fierce competition between different cities worldwide to host events and to attract new people, cultural events usually face a paradox between homogeneity and diversity, which is difficult to overcome. If, on one hand, cities

should present an image of themselves that is powerful enough to compete with other cities that host similar events, and therefore tend to reproduce the same urban and cultural landscapes in these areas; on the other hand these events have to be distinctive and particularly characteristic of the destination that is promoting and hosting them.

Despite the close connection between culture and economy, one of the main criticisms addressed to events' management entities is that they adopt a predominantly economic approach to events, which aims at obtaining short-term profit, more often than not neglecting the medium and long-term social and cultural benefits that these events may bring to the local communities. As Quinn points out,

(...) city authorities tend to disregard the social value of festivals and to construe them simply as vehicles of economic generation or as 'quick fix' solutions to city image problems. (Quinn, 2005: 927)

According to Quinn, festivals should, instead, have the (main) goal to entertain communities, celebrate diversity and improve the life quality of the local population, and to do so urban managers should understand festivals under a more holistic approach (Quinn, 2005: 927). Festivals should therefore be understood as

(...) occasions for expressing collective belonging to a group or a place. In creating opportunities for drawing on shared histories, shared cultural practices and ideals, as well as creating settings for social interactions, festivals engender local continuity. They constitute arenas where local knowledge is produced and reproduced, where the history, cultural inheritance and social structures, which distinguish one place from another, are revised, rejected or recreated. (Quinn, 2005: 928)

It is equally important that the local populations are involved in the organisation and management of events and are aware of the benefits that these can bring them, and that everyone can share the same objectives and work for the common purpose of providing a welcoming environment to the visitors of the event and the city.

Therefore, nowadays' culture should be understood as a creative resource that is at the service of an increasingly demanding society that requires new, innovative and distinctive ways of consuming and understanding the city and its past.

Culture and creativity are intertwined. Culture is the panoply of resources that show that a place is unique and distinctive. The resources of the past can help to

inspire and give confidence for the future. Even cultural heritage is reinvented daily whether this be a refurbished building or an adaptation of an old skill for modern times: today's classic was yesterday's innovation. Creativity is not only about a continuous invention of the new, but also how to deal appropriately with the old. (Landry, 2000: 7)

According to Richards and Wilson, creative people are part of a group unsatisfied with traditional visions of the world and that tends to focus on activities that can allow them a high level of creativity (2006: 1213). For Landry and Bianchini, being creative is “getting rid of rigid preconceptions and of opening ourselves up to complex phenomena which cannot always be dealt with in a strictly logical manner” (Landry and Bianchini, 1995: 10). These people are characterised not only by the activities they engage in, but also by the different city spaces they choose to occupy and appropriate. Florida argues that this group of people, that he considers to form a new class, looks for outdoor leisure and entertainment amenities, which are within easy access, either on foot or by bicycle and public transports, at lunch time or at the end of a working day. These spaces should have an attractive musical environment and a great diversity of nightlife spots, a young and diverse environment, in all the different understandings of diversity, without neglecting, however, the preservation of the existing natural resources (Florida, 2005).

Hence, creativity has become one of the main factors of economic growth. The ability to compete at a global scale is increasingly related to the capacity to attract, maintain and focus on the development of creative people (Florida, 2002). Besides, “[p]laces that attract people attract companies and generate new innovations, and this leads to a virtuous circle of economic growth” (Florida, 2005: 138).

Today's ‘society of consumers’ is characterised by interpellating its members in their capacity of consumers (Bauman, 2007: 52). Consumers are led to believe that they have the free will to choose the objects of consumption as they please, to consume or to stop consuming whenever they want to. However, as consumerism “associates happiness not so much with the *gratification* of needs (...), as with an *ever rising volume and intensity* of desires, which imply in turn prompt use and speedy replacement of the objects intended and hoped to gratify them” (Bauman, 2007: 31), consumers are caught in a vicious circle of desire, consumption, and discarding, only to consume once again.

One should question then, how are individual and collective identities formed in this society in which “the constant pressure is to be *someone else*” (Bauman, 2007: 100), at a time when identities seem to be forged by the pressing need to correspond to society's

drives, to other people's expectations, and to compete with other people's possessions. Individual and collective identities are shaped in cities and determined by people's "experience of consumption in the city" (Miles and Miles, 2004: 3). Cities are themselves intensively competing with each other to present visitors and residents with more and more varied possibilities of consumption in their urban spaces. This will not only attract more people to the city, but will also represent more investment and more money spent. Nowadays, if cities do not offer these possibilities, it means that they do not have the power to attract people and money and, therefore, that they will not be successful.

### **Cardiff: Re-inventing a Post-Industrial City Through Culture and Consumption**

Small and compact in design, Cardiff gives the impression of modernity and progressiveness, of spacious streets and parks, of a waterfront spectacle and thriving commercial activity. It is a visibly 'green' city that balances the ancient with the modern, the Celtic with the cosmopolitan.

In this sense, Cardiff is a unique European capital offering excellent opportunities for its people and its businesses.

(Cardiff Council, 2007: 8)

Twenty-first century Cardiff resembles very little to the small port it was in early nineteenth century. Through the construction of different docks, financed by John Crichton Stuart, the second marquis of Bute, Cardiff developed into "the coal metropolis of the world" during the nineteenth century. The docks allowed the traffic of many ships that came to Cardiff to take cargoes of coal to different parts of the world and contributed to the city's reputation as a port, especially between 1850 and 1914.

The availability of jobs in the mining and shipping industries and in other docks-related activities attracted foreign labour into Cardiff. Many were seamen from different countries who settled in the docklands' area and mingled with the resident population, marrying local Welsh women and shaping a working-class community of unique multicultural and multiethnic characteristics in Butetown neighbourhood. Initially built with the financial support of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Marquis of Bute to house middle-class professionals, it was later occupied by working-class members, whose jobs were closely associated with the docks. However, it was as 'Tiger Bay' that this community came to

be known worldwide, the name most commonly used in mainstream media, often in a pejorative way, to refer to the diverse community that lived in the area. Moreover, Tiger Bay was also the name often associated with the crime, vice and prostitution that was said to exist in the area, as well as to the poor housing, health and education conditions that characterised the neighbourhood and its residents.

It was estimated that by 1950 Butetown hosted around 6,000 people from fifty-seven different nationalities (Lloyd, 1950), who lived in an area of about a mile in extent, and who organised themselves in different national quarters. Due to the ethnic, cultural and labour bonds that united them, these people came to share everyday life practices of identification (Mulhern, 1998) and did their best to live peacefully together, creating a harmonious atmosphere of mutual help and understanding, despite the ethnic and cultural differences that characterise this community.

With the beginning of the twentieth century coal was progressively being replaced by oil as a form of fuel and Cardiff was starting to suffer competition from neighbouring docks at Penarth and Barry, which instigated the decay of the city's docklands and of its role as a leading port. The docks were gradually abandoned, conducing to waterfront dereliction and increasing unemployment within the docks' neighbourhoods. Notwithstanding, the hardship of the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> World Wars intensified the depriving conditions under which the members of this working-class community lived and the process of deindustrialisation that affected the docks. Cardiff docklands lost the liveliness and prosperity of the past and became a wasteland with under-used docks and harbours and abandoned warehouses.

The process of deindustrialisation that Cardiff docks faced was at the origin of the Cardiff Council's decision to outline the first regeneration strategies to revitalise the city's waterfront in late 1950s. The first urban changes took place in Loudoun Square, the 'coloured heart' of Butetown's neighbourhood, cleansing the area through the bulldozing of the community square and the two-storey houses that surrounded it and replacing them by high-tower buildings, which torn Butetown's community apart. Former residents were then rehoused at the edge of the city or in the city suburbs.

Nevertheless, it was not until 1987 that the whole regeneration strategy was outlined for the city's waterfront, with the creation of the Cardiff Bay Development Corporation (CBDC). The CBDC became responsible for urban policy and regeneration in Cardiff and its main objective was to "establish Cardiff internationally as a superlative maritime city", which would "stand comparison with any similar city in the world, enhancing the

image and economic well being in Cardiff” (Rowley, 1994: 269). In order to attain this main objective, the CBDC created a completely new economic landscape on Cardiff’s waterfront, one that boasted “a dramatic and varied setting of the highest landscape and waterscape quality for new development” (CBDC, 1988: 3). The achievement of this goal was only possible through the construction of the Cardiff Bay Barrage, completed in 1999 and impounded in 2001, and which created a freshwater lake that came to replace the mudflats that characterised the bay. However, this was the most polemical development in the history of Cardiff due to the great amount of investment involved, to the alleged environmental impact of the development on the bird species that fed on the estuary’s mudflats, and to the risk of rising groundwater that would flood the Bay. Besides, Sian Best, one of the leaders of the Cardiff campaign against the Barrage, contends that,

(...) the Barrage drowned our wilderness, and has brought nothing to the city, except water pumps and anxiety. (...) The great tragedy is not just the destruction of an SSSI, or the threat of rising groundwater, but the loss of possibilities, of what might have been, that lively, prosperous city with an intriguing wilderness at its heart. (Best, 2004: 240)

On the other hand, ten years after the construction of the Barrage, Sir Geoffrey Inkin, the chairman of the CBDC, considers that “[t]he Bay is an improvement to the environment in every respect”, that it is “remarkable”, and that “[i]t has vindicated the decision to set up the development corporation”. He recognises that “[t]here are things that are not right”, but the most important aspect is that “it’s a sight better than it was” (in Collins and James, 2009).

Despite the contradictory opinions regarding the construction of the Barrage, the truth is that it has given the Bay a completely renewed image, by producing new urban spaces and investing them with different social, cultural and symbolic values, meanings and uses, subjected to the drives of the present consumerist society. The Bay is now re-visited as a consumer-drawn meeting place of visual and recreational appeal, with “new way[s] of visualizing the city” and “new distributions of power” (Short et al, 1993: 209).

Culture and consumption have been playing a key role in the new visual consumption of Cardiff, especially in the Bay. The understanding of culture in Cardiff is in accordance with the Welsh Assembly’s *A Culture Strategy for Wales*, in which

culture is viewed as “the aggregate of our actions and aspirations, interests and passions, values and beliefs” (2002: 3). This strategy has set that, by 2010, culture in Wales (and, of course in its capital city) will be “indivisible from the rest of its living”, “rich, distinctive, and creative”, and “both diverse and shared”. It will at the same time “treasure its bilingualism as a growing reality”, “nurture and cherish imagination, innovation and excellence”, “nurture imaginatively the talents of the young”, “enable the arts, sport and creative industries to thrive at every level”, “support a creative approach to the promotion and public understanding of science”, “ensure a ready outlet for the creativity of us all, individuals and communities”, “ensure the quality of access for all to participate” and be “the springboard for both individual fulfilment and collective prosperity” (Welsh Assembly Government, 2002: 5).

Culture is understood as a creative resource that is materialised in the different activities, shows and events hosted by the different venues and attractions that we come across in the city. These have been employed in the Cardiff’s image reconstruction as promoters of the urban regeneration that the city has been experiencing for the past decades and in the creative and distinctive features that portray and differentiate the city. The Cardiff’s Indian Food Festival, the Urdd Eisteddfod, the Cardiff International Food and Drink Festival, or even the Best of Wales Craft Markets, for instance, are some of the events held in Cardiff that boast the city’s Welsh heritage and cultural diversity. Other events rely on the city’s unique waterfront characteristics for the practice of sports, such as the Wales National Rowing Championships and the European Waterski Championships, and the Classic Motor Boat Rally. Nevertheless, the city exhibits a vibrant and thriving atmosphere for other cultural events related to the performing arts. Different performing arts venues across the city, the St. David’s Hall and the Wales Millenium Centre, which opened its doors in the Bay in 2006, prove to be some of the most attractive venues to enjoy theatre plays and listen to concerts, such as the renowned BBC Cardiff Singer of the World. Besides, we cannot neglect the importance that Cardiff has been achieving as a host of sports international competitions, especially of rugby, whose games are held at the Wales Millenium Stadium, or as a host of national and international conferences in many different venues throughout the city. According to Matt Bolton, from Lonely Planet Magazine, which has recently ranked Cardiff as “one of the top short-break destinations in Europe”,

Cardiff has plenty to offer. It has a really good music scene and food festivals. Going down to the Bay on a weekend can be quite a classy experience. People are starting to become more aware of that side of the city. (...) The great thing about Cardiff is that it truly is a place for all seasons, with the events in the city but also the cultural and tourism-related activities we have to offer. (...) I think Cardiff has made its own luck in many respects because of the major events that bring new people to the city. More often than not they have such a positive experience they tell other people about it. So for anyone who has any doubt, our message is to come and see it for yourself. (Matt Bolton in Clare Hutchinson, 2009)

In fact, what seems to distinguish Cardiff as a short-break destination is that it has been relying on specific and distinctive characteristics, but also that the city's cultural, leisure and entertainment panorama is all year round. Moreover, it is also particularly eclectic, offering different possibilities to all ages, groups and personal preferences.

Nevertheless, Cardiff's cultural ambiance has also been capitalising on the development of the cultural and creative industries, "an extensive grouping of elite and mass cultural production and distribution" (Miles, 2007: 100), which have played a relevant role in the post-industrial economy of Cardiff. According to John Myerscough's (1988), the creative and cultural industries include the visual and performing arts and museum sectors, while Evans (2001) also includes the print and broadcast media, music, design, art markets and digital media, together with cultural tourism and their cultural venues, heritage sites, events and festivals and arts amenities. Allen Scott, on the other hand, goes further to suggest that in these group we should also include fashion, furniture, jewellery, musical instruments, toys and sporting goods, handbags, hats, perfume manufacture, among others (Scott, 2000). It is important to refer that these different definitions are associated to a more narrow or broad designation that each author adopts, referring either to the culture industries, the cultural industries or the cultural and creative industries.

The cultural and creative industries have had a striking growth of 53,7%, between 1991 and 2005, employing more than 6750 people in 2005, and placing Cardiff in 9<sup>th</sup> out of a list of 20 British cities (Cardiff Council, 2003). Besides, the Welsh capital is the second biggest TV production centre in the UK, following London. BBC Wales, S4C and HTV, as well as the science-fiction series *Doctor Who* and *Torchwood*, filmed in the city have largely contributed to this position. Furthermore, tourism, which is also regarded as one of the sectors within the cultural and creative industries, has also been

registering important growth, with a 15,3% growth only between 2000 and 2004, and expected to increase 1% a year until 2016.

The profound transformation in the economic activities in the city, now strongly service-based and particularly concerned with the provision of new consumption possibilities and experiences to a wide range of people, have led to important social and cultural changes in the city. In some areas of Cardiff, especially in the Bay, a new social and economic class, in many ways similar to Richard Florida's 'creative class', has progressively replaced the working-class that used to inhabit the area. This new group is composed of people from the middle and high-middle class, who live in luxury apartments and gated communities close to the areas where they work and to areas that provide them cultural, leisure, entertainment, consumption, and sports attractions activities, where they can apply their purchasing power and develop their consumerist lifestyles. According to Hooper and Punter,

[t]here is circumstantial evidence that what is emerging in the Bay are distinctive lifestyles, whether they be empty nesters, weekend country homeowners or young careerists and long-hours workers. Such lifestyles involve minimal neighbourhood social commitments and property maintenance but are potentially very environmentally demanding (through heavy car use, eating and drinking out and high per capita energy use)... (Hooper and Punter, 2006: 170)

Cardiff is indeed ranked 10<sup>th</sup> in the list of UK's most important retail cities and is expected "to rise as high as eighth or even seventh once St David's opens" (Abby Alford, 2009a). According to Henry Enos, a senior lecturer in consumer behaviour at the University of Glamorgan, the St. David's 2 (a city centre shopping centre which will open on 22<sup>nd</sup> October) "will be a success" and that "solid high street sales that signal shoppers believe the end of the recession is in sight, combined with Cardiff's new position as an important UK destination, are making St David's (...) an increasingly attractive place to open a store" (in Alby Alford, 2009b).

In brief, cultural, entertainment, sports and consumption attractions and activities, as well as the recognition of the city as a leading modern capital city in Europe and throughout the world, contribute to place Cardiff in the cultural map worldwide. Cardiff attracts middle and high-middle class professionals who enjoy living in an area that can also provide them cultural and sports activities and free-time entertainment; national and foreign visitors and tourists who have been influenced by the city's brand new

promotional image; and by national and foreign private investors that regard Cardiff as a creative and talented destination to locate their companies.

### ***Whose Culture? Whose City? and Whose Memory? in Cardiff's Consumed Past***

“[d]oes consumption offer our cities and the citizens of our cities a future  
or does it simply serve to rob them of their past?”

(Miles and Miles, 2004: 1)

In *The Cultures of Cities*, Sharon Zukin advanced two pertinent questions to reflect on the formation of contemporary cities and to those who belong to and constitute its spaces - *Whose Culture? Whose City?*. To add to these, I would like to advance another question to address the reinvention of post-industrial cities, and in particular, Cardiff, the case study of this paper – *Whose Memory?*. How can the memory of a city's past and heritage be preserved in the re-imagi(n)ing of a city and of its urban spaces, subjected to contemporary conspicuous consumption, and how can all the actors in the reconstruction of the city be given a voice in its everyday spaces and practices?

In Cardiff, the city's authorities have been reproducing a partial memory of the city's history, that has been commodified for leisure consumption. Cardiff's past as a busy maritime port specialised in coal has been reconstructed to market the city and serve the desires and expectations of today's consumer-driven society, by marketing its past according to the rules of capitalism and by turning it visually accessible and enticing to everyone. It is controversial whether this is actually the best way to preserve and perpetuate a city's past, but the truth is that many cities worldwide have been marketing its past according to capitalist drives.

Cardiff's past and history is, then, biased and restricted to the aspects or historical moments that are unproblematic and that can be shared by everyone in the creation of a unifying urban cultural identity. Nevertheless, this unifying urban cultural identity is anything but democratic, as the city's less positive and inconvenient historical episodes have been silenced and brought to oblivion. Urban spaces and practices in Cardiff are, indeed, articulated within a mainstream consensual discourse, subjected to the post-modern ideology of visual consumption, where public art “adorns” leisure, entertainment and shopping areas and shapes the city's new image and identity to the

world as an attractive capital. “The deindustrialized and deterritorialized, displaces and disadvantaged, have no seat in this constructed array” (Boyer, 1996: 2).

For instance, in 1990 the CBDC published the *Strategy of Public Art in Cardiff Bay*. According to the CBDC, public art in Cardiff Bay, which has only been made possible through the construction of the Barrage, should “[i]mprove and enhance all visual aspects of the environment of the Bay for the benefit of those who live, work and play there” (CBDC, 1990: 22). However, Miles, without neglecting the Strategy’s professionalism, is highly critical about it, stating that it represents “an elision of moral and social issues in favour of optimistic art futures, thus denying a reading of art as liberating through a capacity to imagine alternative futures” and “keeping with the dominant ethos of short-term gain in Thatcher’s Britain” (Miles, 1997: 114). One should ask, for instance, where is in Cardiff Bay the representation of the working-class, multiethnic and multicultural residents of Cardiff who turned the city into a coal metropolis? Is it in Mermaid Quay, where we have John Clinch’s sculpture *People Like Us*, a tribute to its former multiethnic and working-class community, or at the Barrage and at the Visitor’s Centre where we have posters briefly explaining the historical and social development of the city, and particularly of its waterfront? But whose memory is this? It is the biased memory represented by the city’s mainstream discourse, not the history and memory of people told in the first person. One of the few places where we can actually find these people’s (hi)story told in the first person is at the Butetown History and Arts Centre, whose concern is precisely to perpetuate the memory and legacy of the multiethnic Butetown community that used to exist in Cardiff docklands, as well as develop relevant projects that contribute to “multi-cultural and multi-racial awareness” in the city (in [www.bhac.org](http://www.bhac.org)).

However, urban spaces and public art should be more democratic in contemporary cities and they should actually involve those who have and do constitute/d and appropriate/d the city’s spaces in their everyday wanderings and activities, so that people do not feel as ‘synchronic humans’ in the urban spaces they appropriate everyday, that is, as people “who live solely in the present and who do not care about past experiences and do not bother with the future consequences of their actions” (Elzbieta Tarkowska in Bauman, 2007: 106).

## **Conclusion: Re-inventing/ed Cardiff**

Following the example of many other deindustrialised port cities with derelict and underutilised areas in Europe and North America, Cardiff's local authorities have developed a new social, cultural and environmental scenery in the city (Cowell and Thomas, 2002), which has relied on civic boosterism, cultural renewal and consumption upheaval to re-frame the perception of people about the city, using the negative images of industrial Cardiff to justify the overall urban regeneration and waterfront revitalisation that has been transforming the city and placing it in the world stage competition of cities to attract more visitors, residents and investors.

To face the increasing global competition among cities to become important tourism destinations, Cardiff has been inscribing new cultural and social values in the urban fabric and turning into a visually alluring city. The city has been adopting creative practices to drive its re-inventive impetus, adapting itself to the global directives that characterise today's world, by turning its singular characteristics, which could, at first glance, be viewed as limitations to a prosperous future, into attractive and competitive advantages.

First of all, the fact that Cardiff is a rather small and compact city, comparatively to other European capitals and cities, with only 6,652 km<sup>2</sup>, is used as an advantage in the promotion of the city. According to Mark Stephens, smaller cities have many different advantages,

(...) [they] are not only more accessible, but also offer pragmatic benefits; they are more sustainable and will perform where bigger, and less personal, cities may not. For these cities, quality of life and the ability to express individuality provide significant selling points and gives Cardiff an opportunity to distinguish itself at the international level. (Cardiff Council, 2007: 1)

Furthermore, the coexistence of both the English and the Welsh languages in all the official and non-official areas of everyday life, and the city's effort and pride to preserve and promote the Welsh memory and the maritime identity of the city are other reasons that make the experience of visiting, living and/or working in Cardiff unique. These characteristics are also the cornerstones of the different events, festivals and conferences that take place in the city throughout the year and that contribute to tourism growth and to consolidate Cardiff's position in the list of the ten main British short-term destinations.

Cardiff is nowadays a city in permanent change, whose urban, social and cultural development deserves to be studied and analysed. The city's authorities aim at turning Cardiff into a 'UK Premiership City' until 2012. As such, the main efforts will be centred on the creation of the International Sports Village, which will support the 2012 Olympic Games in London, on an International Congress Centre, on an International Business Park, on the conclusion of the St. David's 2 Shopping Centre, on the development of a creative and financial industries hub, on the promotion of cultural and sports events, and also on the creation of The Cardiff Story Museum. Until 2020, the city should achieve the status of an 'Internationally Competitive Capital' and for that will contribute the improvement of the city's airport, linking Cardiff to other European and international airports, the establishment of different headquarters of international companies in Cardiff and the goal of becoming a carbon-lit city (Cardiff Council, 2007).

However, within these main future objectives, it is important that Cardiff tries to find solutions for some of the problems that still subsist in the city, such as the poverty, unemployment and poor housing, health and education conditions in deprived neighbourhoods such as Butetown, Riverside, Grangetown, Plasnewydd, Adamsdown and Cathays. Although the economic success of contemporary cities is dependent on consumption, consumption "*divides as much as it provides*" (Miles and Miles, 2004: 2), contributing to intensify the gap between the most privileged and the most disadvantaged, those who can afford what city spaces have to offer them, and those who cannot. Today's social classes are defined not by the economic and cultural capital that people may possess, but by their ability to show that capital through consumption. What is important is not that you have enough money to buy a brand-new Aston Martin, is that you buy it and display it to other people's visual consumption.

Notwithstanding, diversity in all its forms (cultural, ethnic, religious, sexual, etc) should not only serve as a flagship buzzword in the tourism promotional campaigns of cities, but it should be understood, respected, supported and considered as the most important advantage of any city. A truly creative and successful city should be inclusive at all levels - urban, economical, environmental, cultural and social - and should be able to integrate all its residents, and provide to the most disadvantaged possibilities that allow them to contribute to the development of the city. According to Miles, [t]he nurturing of collective creativity also means finding ways of helping people to create new and better ways of living and working together (Miles, 2007: 138), and this is the true 'right to the city'.

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