The Role of Universities in City Foresight

Final report of the Future of Cities Research Network

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This report is intended for:

Policy makers and a wide range of professionals and researchers whose interests relate to all aspects of the future of cities and the role of higher education institutions. The report summaries work funded by the Government Office for Science Foresight Future of Cities project and is based on the ongoing activities of the research network partners: Newcastle University, Cardiff University, University of Liverpool, University of Manchester, and University College London. The network lead academics comprised of:

Dr Paul Cowie, Professor John Goddard and Professor Mark Tewdwr-Jones, Newcastle.

Professor Kevin Morgan and Dr David Waite, Cardiff.

Professor Alan Harding and Dr Nicola Headlam, Liverpool.

Dr Joe Ravetz and Professor Ian Miles, Manchester.

Dr Michele Acuto and Dr Elizabeth Rapoport, UCL.

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1. Introduction

1.1 As the UK Government Office for Science national Foresight Future of Cities project (2013-15) developed and progressed, it became increasingly apparent that a growing number of cities around the UK saw an opportunity to initiate their own Foresight project at a local scale. In several instances, this resulted in the local university or universities playing a key role in mobilising academic and other local sources of knowledge and expertise to build capacity to undertake an ongoing and sustainable city futures process. More specifically in the Foresight process, the universities are demonstrating that by working in partnership with others, they can play a leadership role as an 'anchor institution', linking the city to global bodies of knowledge.

1.2 The range of city events hosted by national Foresight have revealed a wide range of methods that can be used to build this local capacity, including local variants of national Foresight structures and processes (such as Lead Expert Group, Stakeholder Group, state of knowledge reviews, scenarios and systems mapping). In addition, other methods continue to be deployed such as public exhibitions, Delphi surveys, competitions, various social media and civic leadership development programmes with the aim of facilitating the participation of civil society more widely in debate about the future of the city.

1.3 The Foresight Future of Cities Research Network, funded by the Government Office for Science, was established in January 2015. This network has been able to engage four cities where the link between a university and city in the Foresight process is taking shape. These are Newcastle University in Newcastle, University of Liverpool in Liverpool, Cardiff University in Cardiff and University of Manchester in Manchester. In addition, UCL has been linked to the Foresight Future of Cities Research Network to build on international work on city leadership that is relevant to UCL's mission to be 'London's Global University'.

1.4 This report outlines what the network has achieved so far. The next section gives an overview of the networking activity undertaken since the inception of the network in 2015. The report then goes on to give a more detailed review of each of the network meetings before highlighting some of the initial outcomes and findings generated by the network. Finally, in true foresighting tradition, it looks to the future of the network and outlines opportunities to take the network forward.

2. Research Network events

2.1 The Foresight Future of Cities Research Network comprises of a core of 5 cities: Newcastle (network coordinators), Manchester, Liverpool, Cardiff and London. Each city within the network has a partnership between a university and at least one civic institution from that city region. Table 2.1 sets out each of the cities and the partnerships involved in the Foresight Future of Cities Research Network.

Table 1: Future of Cities - network cities and their partnerships

City Region	Partnerships
Newcastle	Newcastle University, Northumbria University, Newcastle City Council & NE LEP
Greater Manchester	Manchester University, GM LEP
Liverpool	Liverpool University, LCR LEP, North Housing
Cardiff	Cardiff University, Cardiff City Council, Welsh Assembly
London UCL	N/A

2.2 It should be noted that in London, UCL were members of the network but were not involved in undertaking a Foresight-funded local case study for the Government Office for Science.

2.3 The Network met 4 times during 2015-16 and table 2.2 outlines each of the meetings and the participants at those meetings.

Meeting Venue	Attendees
Newcastle 16th Jan 2015	Prof. Mark Tewdwr-Jones, Newcastle University Prof. John Goddard, Newcastle University Dr Paul Cowie, Newcastle University Pat Richie, CEX Newcastle City Council Prof. Alan Harding, Heseltine Institute, Liverpool University Dr Nicola Headlam, Heseltine Institute, Liverpool University Prof. Ian Miles, Manchester University Prof. Kevin Morgan, Cardiff University Dr Elizabeth Rapoport, UCL Dr James Paskins, UCL Prof. Sir Alan Wilson, Government Office for Science Eleri Jones, Government Office for Science
Liverpool 21st May 2015	Dr Joe Ravetz, Manchester University Prof. Mark Tewdwr-Jones, Newcastle University Prof. John Goddard, Newcastle University Prof. Alan Harding, Heseltine Institute, Liverpool University Dr Nicola Headlam, Heseltine Institute, Liverpool University

	Prof. Sir Alan Wilson, Government Office for Science Dr Michele Acuto, UCL
Manchester 24th June 2015	Dr Joe Ravetz, Manchester University Prof. Ian Miles, Manchester University Prof. Mark Tewdwr-Jones, Newcastle University Prof. John Goddard, Newcastle University Prof. Alan Harding, Heseltine Institute, Liverpool University Dr Nicola Headlam, Heseltine Institute, Liverpool University Dr David Waite, Cardiff University Prof. Sir Alan Wilson, Government Office for Science
Cardiff 7th July 2015	Prof. Kevin Morgan, Cardiff University Dr Simon Lannon, Cardiff University Dr Carla De Laurentis, Cardiff University Dr David Waite, Cardiff University Mark Barry, Advisor Welsh Government Paul Orders CEX, Cardiff CC Jane Forshaw, Director Environment, Cardiff CC Prof Jon Goddard, Newcastle University Dr Paul Cowie, Newcastle University Prof. Tim Dixon, Reading University Dr Joe Ravetz, Manchester University Dr Nicola Headlam, Heseltine Institute, Liverpool University
UCL 28th January 2016	Dr Michele Acuto, UCL Prof Brian Collins, UCL – UKCRIC Prof. Mark Tewdwr-Jones, Newcastle University Prof. John Goddard, Newcastle University Dr Paul Cowie, Newcastle University Andrew Lewis, Newcastle City Council Prof. Sir Alan Wilson, Government Office for Science Dr Joe Ravetz, Manchester University Ine Steenmans, Government Office for Science

3. The network's relationship to other Foresight Future of Cities initiatives

3.1 Figure 1 gives an overview of the various city futures initiatives centred around the national Foresight Future of Cities project and the relationship between these initiatives.

Figure 1: Future of Cities Network and its relationship to other projects
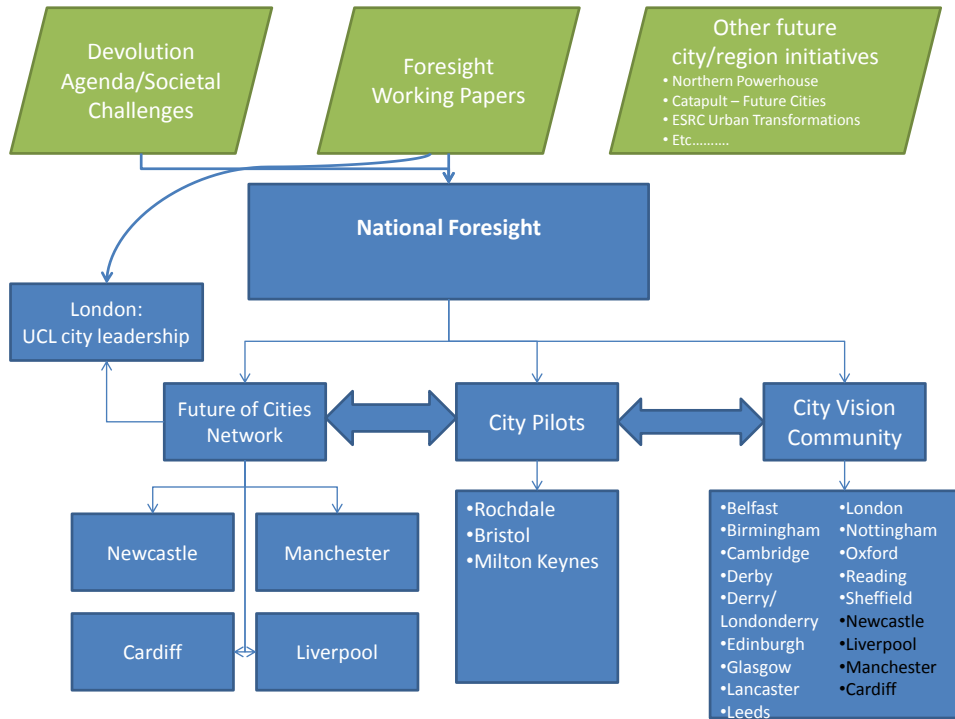
4. Lessons from the network

4.1 Each of the case study cities has highlighted how context and place specifically influenced the network's partners approaches to foresighting. Figure 2.2 gives an overview of the foresight methodology as adapted to the regional scale:

Figure 2: Overview of a Regional Foresight Methodology
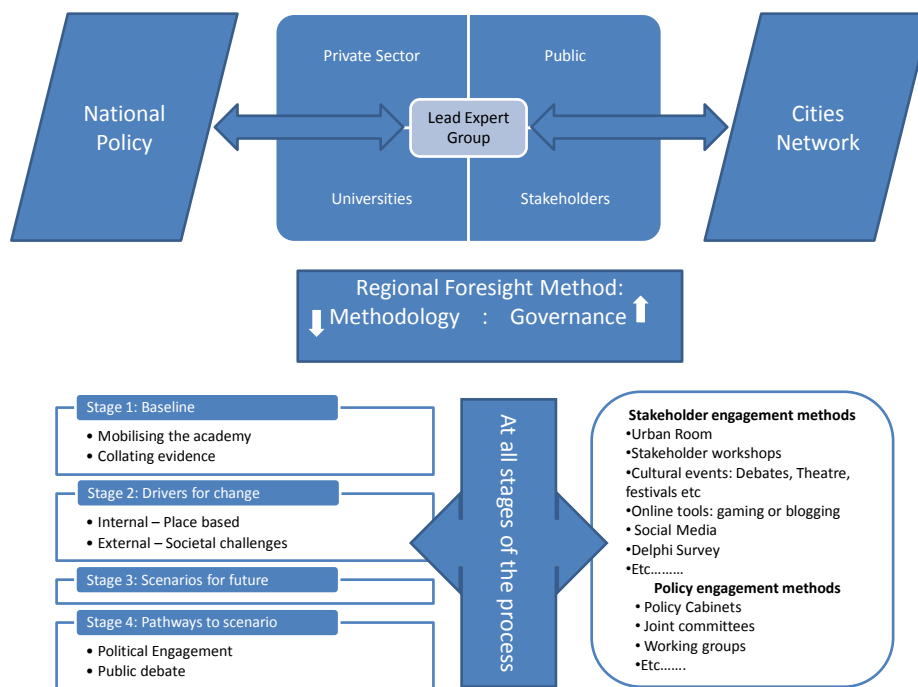
4.2 In the top half of the figure sits the governance arrangements. This relates to both the governance of the foresight process as well as the governance institutions and capacity of the region itself. The different case studies undertaken revealed a range of different approaches to this.

4.3 In Newcastle, the process was initiated by the university who then sought to draw in the other three elements of the region: private sector, public sector and civil society. As outlined in the "Newcastle City Futures 2065" report (Tewdwr-Jones et al, 2015; see www.newcastlecityufutures.org), this joining up of sectoral interests was done through a variety of stakeholder events. The joined-up approach to future planning has since been formalised through the City Futures Development Group (CFDG). CFDG is a collaborative arrangement between the two Newcastle universities, Newcastle City Council, the NELEP, and other policy organisations. This partnership is a first in Newcastle but also is innovative for northern core cities and intends to generate long term thinking for the city and its wider region, relate ongoing and new research to policy makers, and initiate collaborative and coproduction arrangements for future research grants and the delivery of demonstrator projects.

4.4 The purpose of the CFDG, therefore, is to provide a one-stop shop for the universities, Council, NELEP & industry to discuss emerging and new areas of research that could be of benefit to the city, to identify ongoing research being undertaken at the universities and colleges that could be disseminated to a policy audience, and to hear of city intelligence needs to inform future research project bids.

4.5 In contrast, Cardiff is approaching the issue from a different direction. There are a number of policy sector specific initiatives looking to the future but the initiatives in the region lack coordination. Cardiff University is now seeking to fulfil this role and bring together the complimentary future plans.

4.6 The experience of two other cities in the network highlight the challenges involved in this type of collaborative project. In both Liverpool and Manchester, it has been difficult for the university to develop a working relationship with the city institution(s). In both cases, attempts were made to bring the city into the project with little success other than the receipt of funding in the case of Liverpool. This may be due to serendipity or a lack of it. In the case of both Newcastle and Cardiff, the cities were at an early stage of initiating future thinking and were just beginning to get to grips with the implications of devolved governance. In the case of Manchester and to a slightly lesser extent Liverpool, the city regions had already been through a cycle of futures thinking albeit over a shorter time period as the 50 years tackled in the Foresight Future of Cities project. A good deal of political and institutional capital has been committed to the 'Manchester Model' and so to introduce a new element to this existing process has proved to be difficult.

5. Going Forward

5.1 There are undoubted challenges in bringing two diverse institutions, such as universities and city councils, together to develop long term thinking capacity in the partnership around city futures. The various cities in the network had tackled this in different ways: Newcastle was able to use the Foresight project as a catalyst to build and strengthen nascent connections between the university and the city. This was perhaps in spite of, rather because of, the ongoing devolution agenda. In contrast, Cardiff has been using opportunities around devolution to create a more strategic approach to future planning. In the cases of Liverpool and Manchester, there has been a lack of connectivity between the city authorities and agencies and university foresight project that prevented any long term capacity to be developed.

5.2 Future research is needed to understand the issues underpinning these failures as well as research into what works. This experience was summed up well by the question around the terms of civic engagement of universities: "Should cities be anchored in universities as well as (or in place of) universities being anchored in cities?"

5.3 This leads on to the issue of capacity and leadership in the process of city futures. One of the lessons to come out of the city futures Research Network was the need for capacity and resources in both sets of institutions. Foresight (long term) thinking is low on the list of priorities for local government. In the current age of austerity, local authorities are working flat out with less staff to manage the current situation. In this context, taking a strategic long term approach to shaping their futures is perhaps seen as an unnecessary burden or even luxury while they are preoccupied with more immediate service delivery concerns.

5.4 There are also constraints to this type of long term capacity building within universities. Notwithstanding the greater profile 'impact' is getting within frameworks such as the Research Excellence Framework (REF), the challenges presented of engaging in foresight thinking with outside institutions becomes notable. Long term collaboration and co-production has to overcome a whole range of internal institutional barriers within universities. First and foremost of these barriers is the commitment of resources to a non-academic endeavour. Cities and futures thinking is often inter-disciplinary; as such it tends to fall between the natural and social sciences. This can lead to competition for leadership of cities initiatives or else a benign neglect by both, each expecting the other to take the lead. The second issue is that of academic attainment. One of the main goals of academics is to publish international-respected research in their disciplinary field. Part of the foresight method relies on research of this type to inform decision making processes, but a greater part of the story is about the translation to applied working. This does not necessarily tick enough boxes in the metric-driven world universities are increasingly becoming.

5.5 Within Whitehall, policy intervention is limited to perceived market failure. In all other instances, barriers to the free operation of the market must be removed. This poses something of a dilemma for the Foresight Method founded as it is on the idea of long term planning and strategic decision making between the four elements of civic society: private sector; public sector; the academy and civic society. That it not to say the market is absent from futures planning, but that it arguably does not hold the dominant position it does within day to day policy agendas. For example, futures thinking around what are often referred to as the grand societal challenges (eg health, demography, sustainability, democracy) requires strategies which may not be considered to be entirely market friendly. It may be that future work on city foresight methodology needs to bridge the gap between a market and planned solution to the societal challenges facing cities.

6. The Civic University and City Foresight through Anchoring

6.1 Going forward, the Foresight Future of Cities Research Network has demonstrated through evidence that there is a strong argument for universities to play a pivotal role as a coordinating and facilitating mechanism at the city scale. Through Foresight place-based mechanisms, universities can enhance their role as urban 'anchor institutions', with the academic community assisting in urban knowledge creation and sharing to inform policy and practice that has a bearing on the future of the city.

6.2 In the past few years, the concept of local 'anchor institutions' has grown beyond its origin in U.S. urban policy and started to gain a wider currency. The concept of anchoring lacks a precise or consistent definition but generally refers to large locally-embedded institutions, typically non-governmental public sector, cultural or other civic organisations, that are of significant importance to the economy and wider community life of the cities in which they are based. The presence of these institutions is understood to generate positive externalities and relationships that can support or 'anchor' wider economic activity within the locality.

6.3 According to the Work Foundation:

> "anchor institutions do not have a democratic mandate and their primary missions do not involve regeneration or local economic development. Nonetheless their scale, local rootedness and community links are such that they are acknowledged to play a key role in local development and economic growth, representing the 'sticky capital' around which economic growth strategies can be built." (The Work Foundation, 2010, p.3).

6.4 In the Foresight process, universities and cities can identify assets and opportunities through: the dissemination of existing data and intelligence to varied audiences; the provision of new data and intelligence; developing systems thinking across fragmented governance and delivery bodies; promoting new networking relationships between actors and agencies; and undertaking futures work that relates more readily to circumstances in each city than thematic exercises relating to a single knowledge domain.

6.5 Such activities accord with a growing recognition of the civic role of public universities as they seek to respond to major long term societal challenges such climate and demographic change that have local as well as global manifestations. This can be illustrated by the structures and internal institutions created by the universities in this network: UCL - Sustainable Cities Grand Challenge; Manchester - Cities@Manchester; Liverpool - Heseltine Institute; and Newcastle - Societal Challenge themes. These internal structures are attempts to marshal their research that transcend individual school and faculty disciplines to address the innovative spaces between them as a response to grand societal challenges.

7. A proof of concept

7.1 This network and the activities of its members has delivered a 'proof of concept' model for a regionally based foresight method. In two out of the four city cases, stable and ongoing institutional relationships have been developed between the four sectors: university, public sector, private sector and civil society. More work needs to be undertaken to understand the barriers that prevent similar capacity building to occur in other cities. However, pursuing foresight long term thinking in cities is not straightforward in objective or practice. Constant management of relationships and partnerships, together with a requirement to raise thinking and expectations beyond narrow agendas and political short termism, is part of the process; and for every success in this regard there will also be setbacks. These setbacks are only to be expected when seeking to attempt a proof of concept; indeed the experience from setbacks is often more valuable than the experience of success. What is important, however, is that a working and replicable model of regional foresight can be pursued, developed and adopted by others.