



RSA

21st century enlightenment

Journal Issue 3 2015

The fabric of place

Susan Silberberg explores how placemaking can put heritage in the hands of the community

Peter Saville discusses the importance of intangible heritage

Gillian Tett reflects on the growing presence of online silos

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“MAKING REQUIRES A HIGHER LEVEL OF HUMAN CONTACT, OF INTENT, COMMUNITY AWARENESS AND CONNECTEDNESS”

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*RSA (The Royal Society for
the encouragement of Arts,
Manufactures & Commerce),
8 John Adam Street,
London WC2N 6EZ*

Tel +44 (0)20 7930 5115

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Editor

Jane Duru

Creative director

Ben Barrett

Designer

Dean Buckley

Publisher

Emma Fisher

Production director

John Faulkner

Production artworker

Jack Morgan

Managing director, Wardour

Claire Oldfield

CEO, Wardour

Martin MacConnol

Commissioning editor

Rachel O'Brien

Distribution

Ann Gutowski

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“HERITAGE SHOULD BE SEEN AS A RICH, MULTIFACETED AND STRATEGIC ASSET”



MATTHEW TAYLOR

The RSA's recent project on heritage, identity and place provided an excellent opportunity to make optimal use of all of the Society's resources

A few months ago I wrote in the *Journal* about my gradual disillusionment with aspects of the traditional Whitehall model of social change. The key question in this model is 'what policy should we implement?' An alternative question, in which I have become more and more interested, is 'how do we engage and mobilise citizens themselves as agents of change?' After years in politics, government and thinktanks, the potential I saw in the RSA was to harness the Society's resources to help answer this question.

I say 'potential', because there were some very big barriers. Lowering these has meant changing our methods of Fellow recruitment (to put more emphasis on values and purpose), enabling changes in the culture of Fellowship, opening up our ideas platform to the world, developing a more impactful and diverse set of projects, and being clearer about our mission and focus.

Now, at last, that vision is taking practical form. Last month, with the support of the Heritage Lottery Fund, we published our Heritage Index, the impact of which Jonathan Schifferes explains in greater detail. It's a clever and provocative data mash-up that enables anyone to see how their locality rates in terms of heritage assets and participation. But it's the wider setting of the project that excites me.

The project's starting point was the question 'how can heritage play a more central role in thinking about the future of places?' This led to an initial piece of cheap and cheerful research work in which we explored heritage and place shaping in Manchester, Stoke and Plymouth. The importance of placemaking, and the need for equal emphasis on the 'making' as well as the 'place' is an issue expertly highlighted by MIT professor Susan Silberberg in this issue.

This research revealed an 'identity gap'; a reason heritage wasn't

considered a strategic asset was partly due to an ambivalence or confusion about the very idea of local identity. As Peter Saville, former creative director of Manchester, acknowledges in our conversation, sometimes ideas about what constitutes 'legitimate' heritage can be painfully myopic.

The Heritage Index is an engaging tool but its aim is to act as a catalyst for a richer local conversation about heritage and its role, including the way incomers both relish and add to local identity. Which takes us back to the RSA and models of change.

Ahead of the launch, we identified a group of RSA Fellows as heritage champions who will use the data to spark local debate, the kind of conversation that Helen Graham writes about. Then, in turn, we will learn from these local debates as the project moves to its next stage, exploring what kind of institution or resource is needed to bring heritage ideas and people together and promote identity as a key issue in local economic development, policymaking and civic engagement. We will be looking at these issues in particular depth – with local leaders – at special events in Dundee, Oldham and Bristol.

As well as this combination of data analysis, desk-based and field research and Fellowship engagement, we have also used our website, this *RSA Journal* and a livecast event. We even created an interactive map in the entrance of John Adam Street, which our much-loved receptionist, Babs, says has had more use than any previous display.

It is far too soon to know whether we will achieve our ultimate goal, which is for heritage in all its forms to be seen as a rich, multifaceted and strategic asset in shaping the future of places. But this project shows how the RSA can develop an innovative model of change, combining primary research, data analysis, mass communication, network building and Fellowship mobilisation.

This is the way I hope more and more RSA projects will develop: a model of change that draws upon all of our assets and that enriches society. ■



EDUCATION

LEARNING THROUGH INNOVATION

RSA: Innovative Education is a connected community with a cause. By working directly with school governors, leaders, trustees and parents, the RSA seeks to transform the educational landscape, school by school. We believe in an education system where innovation is led by educators, learners can develop their creative capacities and everyone has the chance to turn their ideas into action.

At its heart is our 50-strong faculty of experts who generate new and creative ideas to be prototyped in schools and colleges. The faculty feeds into the Innovative Education network, an international movement that recognises the value of creativity and innovation for education. This movement is all about empowering those at the chalk-face of education, not telling them what to do. We work with our Fellows to promote and test their ideas, using them to influence school practice on the ground. We don't know exactly what the outcomes of this work will be, but that's the exciting part.

Find out more about RSA: Innovative Education and how to get involved by visiting www.thersa.org.uk/IE



EDUCATION

CREATIVITY GOES GLOBAL

The RSA's Creative Learning and Development team have been busy working with international partners to explore global issues.

This year we published a policy memo for the New York-based Roosevelt Institute to contribute to its Next American Economy project. The policy memo explores how school systems could be designed to maximise students' creative capacities, enabling them to flourish in a 21st-century economy. It presents the trends, challenges and potential solutions to the problems faced by our current education system, arguing that there is an increasingly strong economic rationale for schools to prioritise the development of creative capacities to ensure the future of a creative workforce.

We also published a new report, *Third Culture Schools*, working with ECIS (a network of international schools) to create a vision of how international schools can be a movement for positive change within education. International education as a sector is in the midst of massive growth, with student numbers projected to grow to more than 9 million over the next 10 years. The report sets out a powerful case for international education to adopt a new social mission, one that places the sector at the heart of a transformation in learning.

Lastly, we are also working with the Innovation Unit, supported by WISE (World Innovation Summit for Education), on an investigation into how education systems across the globe can create the conditions for successful innovation. Look out for the results of this work, which should be published in January 2016.

"The global nature of education means that we are increasingly committed to exploring international trends as they apply to learners, educators and institutions," says Natalie Nicholles, Director, RSA Global. "We believe that closing the creativity gap will be achieved by fostering exchange between, and challenging, the different models of education that exist around the world. We hope Fellows will join us, use the insights from our research and feed back their experiences."



DESIGN

A STORY OF RECOVERY

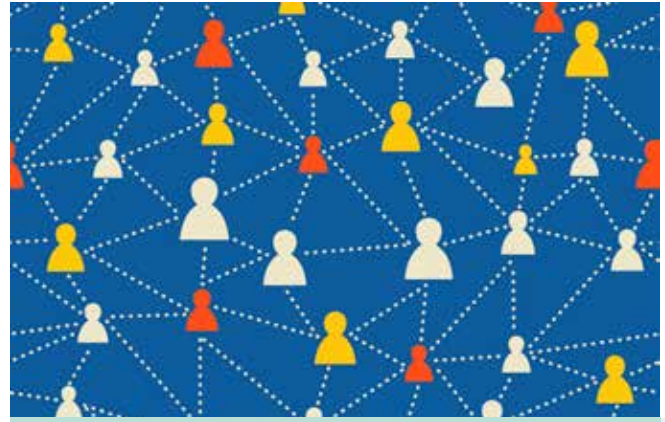
The past three years have been an exciting journey of discovery into the world of design for a circular economy, from a disused tin mine to the heart of the City, via mountains of waste and enormous train sets.

As our second phase of investigation with Innovate UK draws to a conclusion, we are gathering insights and reflections, and invite you to contribute.

Did you come to one of our events or watch one of our films? Did it change the way you thought about things, or even the way in which you did things? Did you have your own 'aha' moment, or did it spark a further conversation or activity? We are gathering insights and reflections from across our network of thinkers, makers, sharers and doers and will collate these into our next publication for release in early 2016. If you have been part of our journey so far, do get in touch, we'd love to hear from you.

Get in touch with Lucy Chamberlin at lucy.chamberlin@thegreatrecovery.org.uk

IMAGES: ISTOCK



HEALTH

THE SOCIAL DIVIDEND

In October, the RSA published its final report on the Connected Communities for Mental Well-being and Social Inclusion programme. The programme involved conducting a social network analysis of 2,800 people in seven locations around England to determine local patterns of social isolation and its relationship to well-being and quality of life, and working with communities to co-produce projects that build social connections within local areas.

Drawing on evidence from the research programme and an economic evaluation of the local projects' impacts by LSE, the report, *Community Capital: The value of connected communities*, argues that investing in building relationships within communities can generate four 'social dividends': greater well-being, economic gains, enhanced citizen empowerment and improved public service capacity through networked impact.

Funded by the Big Lottery, the five-year action and research programme was led by the RSA in partnership with the University of Central Lancashire and LSE.

"The Connected Communities programme has given the RSA invaluable insight into the benefits derived from relationships between people, and how communities might be nurtured to maximise the value of these benefits," says Matthew Parsfield, a researcher in the RSA's Public Services and Communities team. "Over the coming months we will be looking to continue to develop and apply these insights in particular circumstances, including how a better understanding of communities can help to improve the quality of life for people living with cancer, and how 'community capital' might be a resource that helps us to close the health inequalities that still exist in this country."

The programme's themes will be explored in a public event chaired by Matthew Taylor in the Great Room of the RSA at 6.30pm on 30 November.

Read the report at www.thersa.org/action-and-research/rsa-projects/public-services-and-communities-folder/connected-communities-social-inclusion-and-mental-wellbeing



CRIME

SHARED GOALS

The RSA was asked by the Metropolitan Police to look – on an independent basis – at the future of policing and public safety in London. The resulting report, *Safer Together*, makes a simple case: London needs a ‘shared mission’ to ensure the safety of its citizens and those who visit or work there. The findings have application across the country as budgets are cut and crime changes its form.

This shared mission challenges the Met, its partners and the public in a number of ways. The Met should adopt a radically different organisational approach to enable it to collaborate most effectively. It needs to adopt a more open voice that is always willing to engage with Londoners, especially on the topic of policing priorities.

For the Met’s partners such as the boroughs, and other public agencies including the NHS, the report argues that there are stronger and deeper long-term relationships with the police.

Anthony Painter, RSA director of policy and strategy and an author of the report, said: “We have put together a challenging agenda for the police, its partners and London. It now requires a lot of work to implement amid a context of high resource and demand pressure. If it is implemented well, it will change the nature of policing in London in a very positive way.”

Safer Together encourages the public to have high expectations of the police but these expectations should be well informed. The police need to engage with the public more closely, whether we are in the unfortunate position of victims or witnesses, to keep us informed about community and personal safety, and to listen to the public’s concerns. There will be tough decisions to make but it is better they are made together.

Read the report at www.thersa.org/discover/publications-and-articles/reports/safer-together-policing-a-global-city-in-2020



OBITUARY

NAAZ COKER (1948 – 2015)

It is with great sadness that we announce the death in October of Naaz Coker. Naaz served for six years on the Board of Trustees; in her second term she served as deputy to the Chairman at the time, Luke Johnson, who said: “It was my privilege to have had Naaz Coker serving as my deputy during my tenure as RSA Chairman. Indeed, I once referred to Naaz publicly as a model Trustee, which she clearly was. The RSA was only one of many organisations to have benefited from her wisdom, conscientiousness and humour. She will be sadly missed.” Chief executive Matthew Taylor paid tribute to Naaz at the recent AGM and her huge contribution to the RSA was warmly applauded by Fellows and staff alike.

PREVIEW



HOW DO WE TACKLE THE TEACHER RECRUITMENT CRISIS?

Why are teachers leaving the profession in droves, and what can we do about it? Editor of *Schools Week* Laura McNerney joins a panel of experts to discuss the looming crisis at the very heart of our education system.

Where: RSA

When: Thursday
26 November at 1pm



CRAFT AND TECHNOLOGY

The incoming Master of the Faculty for the RDI, Betty Jackson, internationally acclaimed fashion designer and educationalist, argues that we have neglected two of the most important factors driving worthwhile, valuable innovation in design.

Where: RSA

When: Thursday
26 November at 6pm



RSA MAKERS' SUMMIT

The number of one-person manufacturing businesses has grown by nearly 30% since 2000. What has fuelled the growth of making, and can it last? The RSA brings together members of the maker community, policymakers and commentators, including Bethany Koby, CEO of Technology Will Save Us, for a day of discussion and making demos.

Where: RSA

When: Wednesday
2 December at 9.30am



IS THERE HOPE ON CLIMATE?

Acclaimed scientist, explorer and conservationist Tim Flannery drops in on his way to climate talks in Paris to give us an overview of 10 years of progress in climate change technologies.

Where: RSA

When: Thursday
3 December at 1pm

Events and RSA Animate producer Abi Stephenson has selected the highlights above from a large number of public events in the RSA's programme. For full event listings and free audio and video downloads, please visit www.thersa.org/events

FOR HIGHLIGHTS OF RECENT EVENTS, SEE PAGE 49

MAPPING HERITAGE

The RSA's Heritage Index is provoking new conversations on heritage

by Jonathan Schifferes

One of the most powerful benefits of data analysis is that it is able to bring to the surface deeply held values and assumptions that we may not even be aware that we hold. When it comes to heritage – local, national and indeed global – this is clearly the case.

Collaborating with Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF), the RSA has set out to foster a richer understanding of how heritage relates to local identity. Our Action and Research Centre has broken new ground with an ambitious exercise to collate more than 100 datasets relating to heritage into a Heritage Index, having started with a deceptively simple question about which local areas in Britain have the most heritage.

Answering this question is difficult. But it is the subsequent questions it raises that show the value of provoking a richer public debate at a local level: How do you measure heritage? What counts as heritage? How do you judge the value of different types of heritage?

We started with a definition of heritage that includes anything that is inherited from the past, which helps us interpret the present and plan for the future. In keeping with this, the data we have brought together goes beyond the conventional castles, palaces and tourist landmarks to include historic parks and open spaces, measures of landscape value and natural heritage. We also looked at industrial history and social history; the cultures and memories that places carry forward.

Heritage provides one of the foundations on which people construct their identity and it shapes the distinctive character of a place.

JONATHAN SCHIFFERES IS ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR FOR PUBLIC SERVICES AND COMMUNITIES AT THE RSA, AND LEADS WORK ON HERITAGE AND THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

Indeed, evaluation of historical significance is defined (in statutory terms) through uniqueness and scarcity. More importantly, strong local identity is crucial in revitalising civic and democratic engagement. Many of the most salient political issues of this decade concern questions of how we come to feel we belong, and how we understand the relationship between our place and other parts of the world.

Think of debates about Britain's participation in shared European projects, the integration of new migrants and refugees into local communities, and the fragility of local economies feeling the echoes of shocks in volatile financial markets across the globe. In talking to progressive innovators such as the UK's Happy Museum Project – which explores how museums can play a more active role in creating a more sustainable future – one is inspired to think that connecting people with local heritage can help to address the sense of displacement, disillusionment and alienation that underpins so many contemporary challenges. An emboldened and empowered local heritage is a remedy for clone towns, and perhaps reduces anxiety in those who feel vulnerable to change.

To realise this potential, citizens and decision-makers need tools that help them interpret their assets, strengths and opportunities in context; in other words, relative to other places. The trickiest element of the Heritage Index comes down to how to fairly compare between places. How to weigh up a World Heritage Site revered by historians of ancient civilisation against an old cinema, cherished by local people? The Heritage Index includes data on both assets (such as buildings, museums, archives, and historic and protected landscapes) and activities (participation, >>>



“MANY OF THE MOST SALIENT POLITICAL ISSUES OF THIS DECADE CONCERN HOW WE COME TO FEEL WE BELONG”

tourism, volunteering, investment and local action). We include unconventional indicators such as the number of foods that have protected European legal status, heritage open day events, and data from the online digital archive Historypin.

The beauty of data visualisation is that it uses our latent visual literacy to add to the cause of intellectual enquiry. We can spot patterns on shaded maps and charts much more easily than in tables of numbers. We interrogate the data to tease out what we have learned, and present these findings in a series of maps online (www.thersa.org/heritage). But our analysis will only be the tip of the iceberg. Importantly, and in the spirit of open policymaking discussed in previous issues of the *RSA Journal*, it is by making the data transparent and easily accessible that we can encourage others to provide additional analysis.

First, taking a broad definition of heritage, it is clear that there are some surprising star performers. Chocolate-box towns such as York and Bath, which fit the traditional definition of history and heritage, are outscored by coastal areas such as Scarborough and cities such as Portsmouth. Dundee tops the Scottish list.

Second, some common myths are busted. Fears of yet another North South divide are misplaced. Rural and urban areas each have areas of strong, deep and broad heritage. When it comes to heritage, Liverpool is the highest performing large city outside London. A region like the north-west also contains incredible landscape and natural heritage, in the Lakes and on the coast. Strong local heritage can exist in some of the most deprived parts of the country, such as Barrow-in-Furness and Blackpool, while some of the most prosperous parts of the country do not necessarily have a rich density of local heritage.

Third, looking at our heritage data alongside other datasets at the local scale, there is a clear link between well-being and heritage but this is driven by heritage activities rather than an area simply possessing assets. This suggests walking through a beautiful conservation area every day will not improve the well-being of residents, but being part of a youth archaeology club or volunteering at a nature reserve might. There are places that the data shows have high levels of activity, already making the most of their assets (such as Cornwall). Equally, there are places of unrealised potential such as Southend, where heritage assets could be harnessed to drive higher levels of activity, and, potentially, improve well-being.

By provoking conversations about local heritage, it is clear that everyone has a stake; everyone can take a role authoring

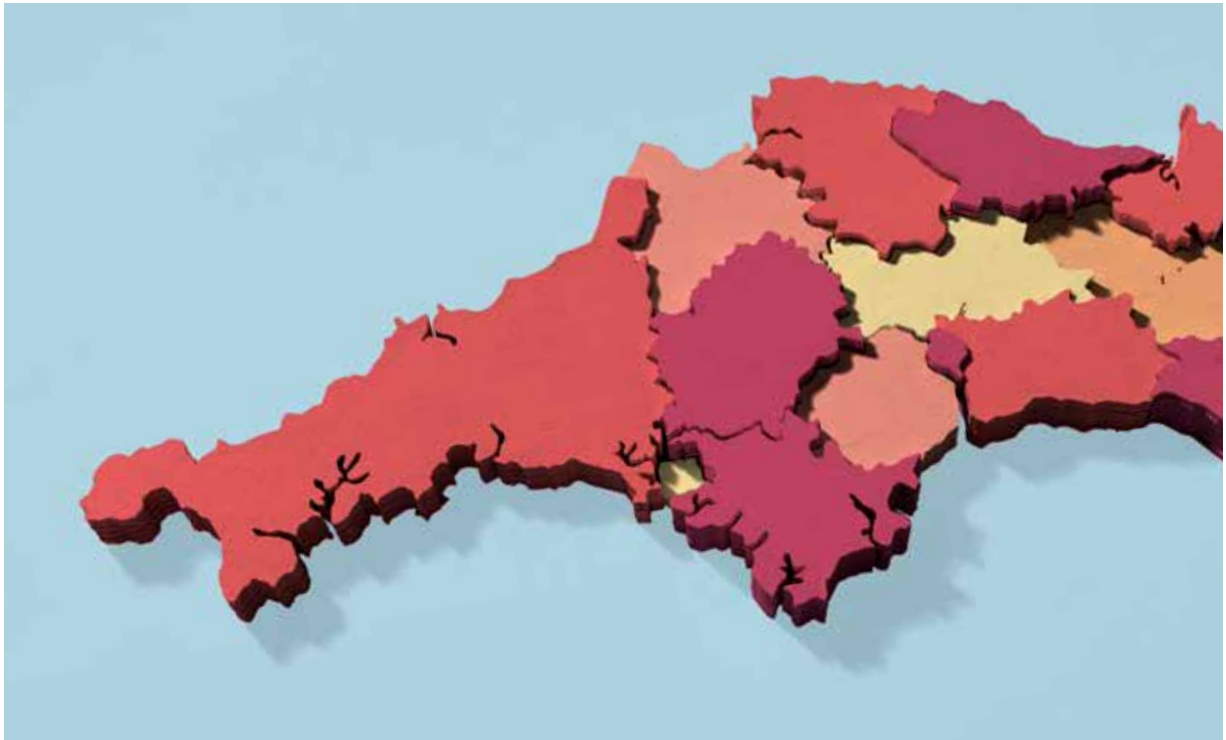
the history of where they live. Like starting with food (as the Incredible Edible urban gardening project advocates), heritage offers a ‘way in’ to encourage people to consider how their area functions and who influences that functioning.

What we have sought to do with the Heritage Index is to encourage a stronger culture of open data. Providing a single point of public access to data can promote both shared and discordant interpretations of where the strengths or weaknesses in local heritage might lie. The question then becomes what steps should be taken to support local heritage so that it is recorded and conserved for the future. Should a place focus on addressing its weaknesses (for example, celebrating the history of parks through an oral history project) or consolidating its relative strengths (for example, broadening the activities around a cluster of industrial heritage assets)?

If knowledge is power, this is perhaps rarely more explicit than in the bureaucratic and technocratic process of planning to accommodate new housing and commercial development. The Localism Act 2011 created community-led neighbourhood planning. Other government initiatives such as Town Teams and those working to deliver projects under the Coastal Communities Fund also involve bringing in non-professionals to help shape the future of a place. The professionalisation of regeneration has become a frequent and legitimate complaint, but to genuinely empower citizens to play a stronger role means making information accessible and valuing community-generated knowledge.

We have taken newly published open data, such as the Companies House register, and used it to identify continuously trading businesses over 75 years old, as an example of how economic history is stewarded by private enterprise as much as by public agencies. Controversy over the direction of new development around Brick Lane and Spitalfields in London encapsulates this debate. Previous research found that 200 members of the recently formed East End Trades Guild (led by FRSA Krissie Nicholson) represented over 7,000 years of trading history and each knew 80 customers by name. In their own words: “We carry the history of the East End in our businesses. We are caretakers of historic buildings and we add a narrative to the memory of the place we’re in.”

In coming years, across Britain, vast postwar housing estates, which present opportunities to increase density, draw the attention of developers and local councils. Engaging residents has never been more needed; as research from Create Streets highlights, people often oppose new development because they



do not like how it looks. At worst, people feel new development blights the historic environment we have inherited. This will be an interesting battleground on which to assess heritage values. Will commercial pressure to rebuild be less opposed when the buildings are modernist and the inhabitants poorer and less powerful? How do we reconstruct or even account for the strong social fabric among a stable resident community, evident on estates like the one I live in?

Since launching the project, we have been reminded that there are some things a national endeavour such as the Heritage Index will never be able to reach. The pivotal day for Emily Davison and the suffragette cause at Epsom Downs in 1913 cannot be reduced to chalking up a statue in a data table. The (historical) success of Liverpool Football Club exceeds other businesses that we have recorded as having heritage value. And while places may be able to protect their food products, we cannot account for the extent to which a distinct local accent is cherished, or the value of playing in an old music venue to new performing artists today.

What we have done is set up a network of RSA Fellows who have agreed to be a local point of contact, in order to channel feedback and ideas into an informal but transparent and structured conversation. The objective is to get consensus about priorities for action: our website starts by suggesting a range of activities from the simple to the ambitious, which would serve to bring local history to life by the time HLF recommissions the Heritage Index next year.

In an era when the UK government is engaging in efforts to localise, devolve and decentralise, heritage should have heightened importance in providing the context for local place-based strategies to develop socially, culturally and

economically. Devolution will only deliver different results if local places act in a different way, breaking the inherited models of centralised governance and command and control.

To develop effective plans, strategies, projects and investments, leading local institutions – including local government but also anchor institutions such as universities and major employers – will require a comprehensive engagement with citizens. This is a process, not simply a consultation period. Deep questions, which are often close to the surface in statutory exercises including the planning process, relate to what kind of future people want for their place, how they feel about their neighbourhood. What kind of values do people hold and how do they want local resources and services to reflect that? What do people value from the past and want to preserve, adapt or renew? What kind of assets do people want to take forward into the future? What will shape the perception of a place in the eyes of newcomers, visitors and investors?

As soon as we start making judgements about how to build for the future of a place, we are drawing on issues of place-based identity. And heritage – our understanding of the past today – is fundamental to our identity. Heritage provides the local USP for a place. It is one of the few things that globalisation cannot successfully outsource. And in a global context, the UK, as the first industrialised nation, has a bounty of heritage assets. There is no better place to articulate the value that our past offers our efforts to shape our future. The Heritage Index is the first in a series of resources that the RSA is developing to help places do that for themselves. ■

■ To join the network or find your local heritage ambassador, contact Joanna Massie at joanna.massie@rsa.org.uk

THE COMMON THREAD

*Placemaking has traditionally focused on 'place'.
It's time 'making' got a look in*

by Susan Silberberg

There is an Indian story about six blind men and an elephant that goes like this. When asked to describe what an elephant looks like, the men feel different parts of the elephant's body. The blind man who feels the ear says the elephant is like a fan. The man who feels the tail says the elephant is like a rope. Another man feels the trunk and says the elephant is like a tree branch, while a fourth, feeling the mid-section, says the elephant is like a wall. And so the story goes...

All of these men are right, and yet they only know the part of the elephant's physical features that each 'sees' through their own very immediate experience and perceptions. They represent our larger society, where we each tend to understand the world through our own particular set of experiences and belief systems.

The same is true of placemaking. This movement is having its shining moment in western cities. Look at the range of conferences, publications, planning initiatives and grant programmes from the last few years and it becomes clear that placemaking is espoused by diverse proponents with equally diverse definitions and understandings of its meaning.

Different groups, from community members and city officials to community development corporations and revitalisation specialists, look to placemaking as a strategy for regenerating residential neighbourhoods and commercial districts, and for attracting new private investment. Planning agencies in the US and UK use the term as a

SUSAN SILBERBERG IS LECTURER IN URBAN DESIGN AND PLANNING AT MIT. SHE IS A CITY PLANNER AND ARCHITECT, AND FOUNDER OF CIVICMOXIE, AN URBAN PLANNING AND STRATEGIC PLACEMAKING GROUP

catch-all to describe plan-making at a more detailed level than regional planning or to highlight the desire for elements that support more desirable 'people places'. The term 'placemaking' has worked its way into planning studies ranging from the Bath Placemaking Plan to the Boston Redevelopment Authority's I-90 Allston Interchange Placemaking study and is generally used to emphasise the desire for good design and development principles.

For proponents of economic development, placemaking is used to draw investment to cities and towns. In the US, the Michigan Public Policy Survey found a recent surge in the interest and use of placemaking as an economic development tool: "Overall 51% of Michigan local leaders say they believe placemaking can be effective in their jurisdictions as of 2013, compared to 39% who reported confidence in placemaking's effectiveness in 2009." The survey mentions "open space, trails, and bike paths" as elements that "attract and retain talented workers and the businesses that seek them". Placemaking, in this context, is a community and economic development strategy that attempts to provide assets and design elements that create appealing places where people want to work, live and visit.

For developers and property owners, it is also a marketing and value-adding tool. The British Property Federation hosted a July 2015 panel event that offered tips on "creating place, building communities and delivering value". Added value is also seen as the *raison d'être* for their US counterparts: placemaking is often talked about in relation to mixed-use projects that combine both commercial and residential usage of space. Both of these strategies are focused on the marketability and bottom line of real estate development projects. >>



REVISITING THE ROOTS

Placemaking in 2015 is like the different parts of the elephant, each 'seen' by different parties, organisations and interests who favour different purposes, definitions and goals: environmental planning, economic development, public health, tourism, safety and security, real estate value, and arts and cultural development, to name a few.

This expansion of the placemaking world is a sign of just how far the movement has come. In the US, placemaking stems from the seminal work of Jane Jacobs, Kevin Lynch, William Whyte and others; work that, beginning in the 1960s, pushed back on the technical/professional-driven and rapid-paced 'improvements' in cities that manifested as urban renewal, highway construction and support for suburban growth. These urban socialists and planners put communities and people ahead of sterile design aesthetics and the thirst for clean, orderly and chaos-free cities, advocating instead for the complexity and seeming disorder of multifaceted neighbourhoods, the layers of history and culture that make our cities the rich, interesting places they are. This pushback on top-down planning came to be known as placemaking,

FELLOWSHIP IN ACTION

POWER TO THE PEOPLE

The brainchild of Dr Mattia Fosci, Gada is an online platform where people can come together to discuss their ideas about society, and find the tools, momentum and confidence to act on them. The idea came to him after noticing the growth in anti-establishment sentiment, political dissatisfaction and people feeling their concerns were going unheard. "We have a network of specialist stakeholders – our staff, senior academics, political lobbyists and activists – that can help our users be effective in promoting change," says Fosci.

The platform allows users to raise concerns and brainstorm ideas with each other. Gada will then select the best ideas and help develop these into fully fledged policy proposals, eventually turning them into action strategies and identifying the authorities that would be best able to act on them. The idea is to enable ordinary members of the public to become empowered, and build a network of lobbyists. With funding from the RSA, the goal is to start a one-year testing period and build a base of early users, prioritising quality engagement over quantity. "Through our step-by-step method and expert supervision, we can help people turn their ideas into effective policy proposals and political campaigns," says Fosci.

■ [Find out more at www.gada.org.uk](http://www.gada.org.uk)

"IN THE END, PEOPLE KNOW BEST WHAT THEY NEED AND WANT IN A PLACE"

a movement that advocated for grassroots and bottom-up planning that considered a community's needs and desires in the design, planning and programming of public spaces to ensure those spaces reflect their context. My MIT White Paper, *Places in the Making*, defines placemaking as "the deliberate shaping of an environment to facilitate social interaction and improve a community's quality of life". This deliberate shaping is by the people and for the people, with the 'community' encompassing residents, business owners and local organisations.

At the core of the movement is the belief that people-centred planning deserves a resurgence because, in the end, people know best what they need and want in a place.

SEEING THE WHOLE ELEPHANT

The original placemaking philosophy of giving voice to existing communities and end-users has created a growing body of knowledge of the physical design elements that make good public places and successful development projects. More than 50 years into the movement, planners and designers have a pretty good idea of what people generally want in public places and the corresponding design strategies and physical elements that can help attain these goals. So much so, that for some projects, placemaking has become a kit of interchangeable parts. Public and private forces have so thoroughly studied, evaluated and calibrated for the design of good 'people places' that the specific identity and culture of a community may play second fiddle to universal or generic design elements that have proven successful at bringing public places to life. Add the different goals of the 'blind men', and placemaking has been generalised and standardised to a certain degree. A perusal of some of the hot placemaking projects today identifies a commonality of features and design elements that seem to indicate that humans everywhere want the same things, even though climates, cultures, traditions, geography and history may be very different. Movable chairs? Check. Summer 'beaches' on the Seine or in downtown Detroit? Got it. Food trucks, street vendors, cafes, public markets? Can do.

But do we really all want the same things? And if not, why do many of these spaces have similar elements? On the one hand, it is difficult to question pleasing urban design elements and programming choices that produce desirable spots to meet, read, play or contemplate the world. If public places are well-designed spaces for people to enjoy, what's the problem?



Isn't it nit-picking to ask about the role of the end user or the original community in the decision-making process if many of the public places created are alive with activity and people?

On the other hand, does this approach leave room for local heritage or past and present identity? The core early tenets of the placemaking movement focused on giving credence and voice to the needs and desires of existing populations and putting the end user and community in the driver's seat of planning and design. Proponents of placemaking today talk about mixed-use projects, adding new tenants for street-level retail and repositioning commercial markets, goals and outcomes that do not necessarily have the identity of local populations in mind, no matter how honourable the intentions or how good the physical place is. The result can be places that are more a manifestation of generalised planning and design principles than local cultures and communities.

This narrow focus on place without due consideration of local identity and history represents a missed opportunity to produce uniquely different places, each reflecting the context of culture, geography, history and identity of the specific place and its users. Today, the global village we call Earth offers a world of rapid-fire change that begs for an inclusion of more than just place: changing trends in living and working, immigrants and refugees searching for better lives, technology changing how we live, work, learn and play. Our places and communities have past stories to tell and to understand, even as new inhabitants have their own traditions and roles to play out and cultures to celebrate. Can placemaking be a bridge between past and present? Can the movement offer avenues to reconcile new communities and cultures with tradition and history? And in the process can there be a deeper understanding and potential to acknowledge and reconcile place with heritage, and past and future identity?

DON'T FORGET THE MAKING

We can find answers to these questions in a more robust definition of placemaking; one that is concerned with both place and making. Trends identified in *Places in the Making* point to efforts that push the 'making' part to the forefront and, in so doing, expand the universe of placemaking beyond a concern with the physical qualities of public spaces to incorporate issues of identity, heritage, tradition and the culture of specific communities. These projects illustrate the power of a deeply inclusive approach that emphasises process as much as product. From the Streets Alive initiatives across the US that seek to remake asphalt-covered, car-centric communities for the benefit of all, to government programmes that require communities to partner, maintain and partially fund open space initiatives; placemaking projects that involve a diversity of people, viewpoints, cultures and interests can help create places that reflect local identities, history and stories, past and present.

Examples include the ImagineSanturce initiative, situated in a district of 90,000 people and over 40 neighbourhoods in the City of San Juan, Puerto Rico, that is home to the wealthiest and poorest of islanders. The island's history of colonial occupation by the Spanish and then the US has created a culture of dependence, fostering problems as islanders have grappled with reduced government support. The Foundation for Puerto Rico believes that the best the island has to offer is its people, who must learn to act for themselves. In 2013 the Foundation launched ImagineSanturce, which serves as a convener of meetings, ideas and initiatives. Residents and business owners have formed working groups tackling economic development, transportation, arts and culture, and other issues to tackle the problems that plague this district, which once served as the thriving downtown for the entire island. These >>



groups, along with small grassroots initiatives and volunteer days, are trying to support the creation of social and political capital and build a culture of action.

ImagineSanjurjo exists outside the official framework of government and public policy, but it collaborates and coordinates with public officials as necessary. Other cases that emphasise the ‘making’ in placemaking have more government involvement and support. The New York City DOT Plaza Program is a blend of government resources and community partnerships, and includes temporary and long-term initiatives meant to transform unused asphalt transportation spaces in neighbourhoods lacking open space into vibrant public spaces that reflect the needs and cultures of local residents, many of whom are immigrants and low-income families. Communities apply for the programme and must demonstrate they have the programming and maintenance partnerships to sustain open space in their area. The use of temporary elements and grassroots outreach in the community is creating spaces that are flexible, reflective of the communities in which they sit and adaptable over time.

There are hundreds of placemaking projects like these with powerful stories to tell. Stories that are inspiring and replicable, and that offer tangible evidence of how citizens with no prior experience can effect positive change on our public space, health, transportation and economic opportunity. What is most remarkable is that the actions themselves, the making, have become just as important as the end product spaces and events they create. The process of making transcends mere community participation in the planning process to embrace much deeper community engagement and ‘ownership’ that involves initiating and carrying on an enterprise or activity over a period of time. It implies a holding of attention, a binding or meshing of people, ideas and goals.

When people come together to flex their civic muscles, to test their political voice, and to deliberate, disagree, decide

and act, they are imbuing their actions and the resulting product of public space with their identities, worldviews, cultures, and traditions. It is a process my MIT research team calls ‘the virtuous cycle of placemaking’, in which the iterative actions and collaborations inherent in the making of places empower people and nurture communities. It involves mutual stewardship of place and community, where communities transform places which, in turn, transform communities, and so on. It is a process that cannot be accomplished by experts or professionals alone.

THE VIRTUOUS CYCLE

This mutual stewardship of community and place accommodates a range of viewpoints and cultures and is particularly relevant in our age of rapidly changing cities and towns, where new faces co-exist with those of long-time residents and new stories take their place next to age-old tales. The virtuous cycle of placemaking requires a multitude of steps and a diverse range of skills, while providing varied entry points for making. When residents, business and property owners, public agencies and others have the opportunity to enter and engage at any point in the cycle, the places that result reflect the local community, culture and identity.

What does this look like? Any project concerned with physical place has many components: planning, designing, funding, partnering, building, evaluating, revising and so on. A streamlined version of placemaking that is focused solely on the physical design qualities of space consolidates these components and potential engagement/entry points. When the private or even public sector takes over most of these components, opportunities for rich expressions of culture and local identities past and present can be lost or are harder to come by. A private developer will often ‘curate’ privately owned public spaces, controlling planning and designing as well as construction and management. Communities typically

participate at arm's length, if there is any participation at all. The result can be a vibrant, beautiful space but one that does not correspond to local heritage, culture or identity.

Seen through a making lens, that same project not only provides for community engagement at any entry point, it requires community engagement to move forward. In New York, the community's identification of programming and maintenance partners is a requirement for acceptance into the Plaza Program. In San Juan, if the community does not continue to meet at the working tables to discuss key considerations and topics, work will not move forwards. The skills necessary to enter into the making process of our public realm, those of organising, deliberating, negotiating, funding, building and programming, are closely tied in with cultural practice and identity. In making, we learn, mentor, design, question, act. Making involves a community of individuals, spaces, organisations and institutions over a length of time; it requires a higher level of human contact, a higher level of intent, community awareness and connectedness. The result? A community that is nurtured, that builds social and political capital, through a process that engenders trust. Placemaking offers the promise of, in Jane Jacobs' words from *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, cities that "have the capability of providing something for everybody, only because, and only when, they are created by everybody".

The emphasis on making provides an opportunity to rebuild social and political capital after the 20th-century decline in an active and local political voice in communities. Top-down government policies and regulation stripped many communities of political power. The evolution of the reliance on experts, highlighted so starkly in the 1914 US Political Scientists Association edict that told us "citizens should show humility in the face of expertise", has left us with communities lacking in social and political capital. Whether it was Le Corbusier recommending a clean start for large swathes of Paris in Le Plan Voisin, or US government officials clearing working-class 'slums' to make way for the new, the clean and the orderly, our cities were often cleared of identity and history. Placemaking that balances places and making represents a comeback for both identity and culture.

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

We live in a world that expects instant gratification, short-term justifications for investment and expenditures, and quarterly performance reports. Focusing on the immediately tangible and measurable gets the attention of funders, investors and

“CAN PLACEMAKING BE A BRIDGE BETWEEN PAST AND PRESENT?”

public officials. Over more than half a century, the physical solutions for the design of people-friendly places have been tested, categorised, evaluated and valued. We can create good places that generally work for (almost) everyone and we can do it efficiently and economically. Rubrics for good design help us to judge, fund, build and evaluate.

Moving beyond the production of spaces and places that generally work well to the creation of public places that are reflective of local identities, cultures and stories requires a more expansive view of placemaking that focuses on the making. The incentives to expose such a process to messiness and unpredictability, however, are not compelling. Engaging diverse stakeholders in the virtuous cycle of placemaking can be time-consuming. Projects that rely heavily on diverse stakeholders and community-makers can defy neat categories, clearly defined end points or predictable outcomes.

These challenges are formidable. And yet, placemaking trends point towards an increasingly flexible, maker-driven project arena. Through my work, I have found that the projects that focus on the making have similar qualities; they are manageable, flexible and tactical. The most successful are the quick and 'easy win' projects, often initiated because of a community-perceived problem or frustration; they come together on shoestring budgets and are initially under the radar of government officials. Expectations are realistic and opportunities abound for early wins and measurable results, even if these are from temporary interventions and tactical moves. They offer low-risk opportunities for people to come together to talk and act.

The momentum is growing for a 'making-centric' world where the government structures and planning frameworks that shape our civic actions support a diversity of cultures and traditions. This is a world in which the whole elephant is seen in a light that gives place and making equal consideration; in which we recognise that place is intrinsically tied to culture. Can city and town governments and planning agencies embrace this change in placemaking and meet it head on? Or will planning pit heritage and tradition against new stories and residents? Ignoring the question leaves us with the very sameness of place and solutions that placemaking was originally intended to avoid. ■

TRAVELLING RIGHT

They say travel broadens the mind, but not all tourism promotes the best behaviour

by Ilan Stavans and Joshua Ellison

Tourism today is a multi-trillion dollar industry. We set out time in our calendars to rest, to break the routine. But escape has become routine: we go to places, look at packaged sites, take a photograph and return home to tell the story to bored acquaintances. Travel and tourism are different things: travellers are surprised by the unexpected whereas tourists only look for the expected. For both, home is always a breath away. Yet travellers know that home is an elusive place while tourists are anxious to go home from the moment they arrive. The former thrive on getting lost; the latter always want to be found.

Robert Louis Stevenson once said: “There is no foreign land; it is the traveller only who is foreign.” In a world like ours, increasingly small, where exoticism is constantly packaged through glowing ads, adventurous TV shows and extravagant rendezvous, the statement is stunningly prescient: we have lost the capacity to wonder.

To push the thrill to the next level, we pander to what the Germans call *schadenfreude*. An example: after Hurricane Katrina, all kinds of outsiders descended on New Orleans. A few came to help, others to document the disaster, make films, take pictures, write stories. In parts of town, these were the only people you were likely to meet out on the street. In the Lower Ninth Ward, which became a focus of international attention, a small but visible cottage industry sprouted selling ‘Katrina tours’, taking busloads of tourists to survey the wreckage. A lifelong resident told the *New York Times*, “I felt like an animal in a zoo. Videos of me are all over YouTube.”

Call it dark tourism. Death becomes the destination and tragedy is on display. What motivates these types of journeys? Why do we want to experience that physical proximity to places where human misery has unfolded? There are no easy answers. Sites of human

catastrophe inspire a special kind of awe; we call these places hallowed ground. Because some events are so terrible that they exceed our comprehension, we crave something tangible, a place with defined boundaries or a specific object, through which we can give ourselves safely over to emotion.

The tourist, on these occasions, masks his curiosity in the form of empathy. Mark Twain wrote about a visit he made to a Crimean War battlefield in 1867 where he witnessed people’s strange impulse to take souvenirs from the grisly site: “They have brought cannon balls, broken ramrods, fragments of shell, iron enough to freight a sloop. Some have even brought bones, brought them laboriously from great distances, and were grieved to hear the surgeon pronounce them only bones of mules and oxen.” With or without souvenirs, the phenomenon seems to be proliferating because of the explosion of tourism as a global industry as well as our general contentment with simulated experience.

Light or dark, tourism is about marketing, even while trumping the facts. Giving visitors emotional catharsis is more important than presenting authentic history or affecting real change. During the 2011 tsunami in Japan, a forest of 70,000 trees was washed away in Rikuzentakata, a beach town popular with tourists. Hundreds of years of growth were undone in a moment, except for one tree, which came to be called the ‘miracle pine’. Then, a year or so later, the tree died, its roots exposed to saltwater. Local authorities spent \$1.5m on reviving and reinforcing it, in an area where debris was still being cleared to make room for new accommodation, with thousands still living in temporary homes. The tree was finally sliced into segments, hollowed out and reconstituted around a carbon spine. Now tourists come to see the ‘tree’ that survived the tsunami. It will be the centrepiece of a new memory park, lit at night in commemoration.

Not all experiences in dark tourism are equal, or equally dark. It is important to distinguish between the legitimate commemoration of suffering and its shameless performance, between the uses and abuses of grief. Visitors to concentration camps and killing fields, from Poland to Cambodia, often

ILAN STAVANS IS LEWIS-SEBRING PROFESSOR IN LATIN AMERICAN AND LATINO CULTURE AT AMHERST COLLEGE

JOSHUA ELLISON IS EXECUTIVE EDITOR OF RESTLESS BOOKS

THEY ARE CO-AUTHORS OF RECLAIMING TRAVEL



come to connect with a personal or family experience. When President Obama made highly publicised visits to a slave fortress on Africa’s Gold Coast or to Robben Island in South Africa, where Nelson Mandela was imprisoned for 27 years, the poignant moments were presented as both roots tourism and redemption narrative. At its best, this kind of tourism is an opportunity to exercise our empathy. It can be educational, even inspirational. Even so, we are still risking a kind of moral self-pampering: we tell ourselves that to be present on the stage of atrocity is somehow to impede its repetition, thus appointing ourselves as witnesses to history and therefore its judges. As tourists we stand in the presence of terrible history and feel our own importance.

There is another brand of dark tourism that trades in kitsch (also a German word, meaning junk replicas and false emotions). Consider the Tourist Landmark of the Resistance, in Mleeta, a village in southern Lebanon, also known as the Hezbollah Resistance Museum. It was designed by Hezbollah, and opened in 2010, marking the 10th anniversary of the Israeli withdrawal from southern Lebanon. Costing millions, it attracted 300,000 visitors in its first three months, not only from Lebanon and neighbouring Arab states, but from all over the world.

Guides welcome visitors to “the land of resistance, purity and jihad”. Children show up at the park in miniature paramilitary costumes. They carry plastic AK-47s. They play inside decommissioned tanks, crawl along barbed wire and into replica bunkers. They can even aim weapons at Israeli-uniformed mannequins. This is only the most egregious

example of a kind of political manipulation that is routinely deployed by states and other groups to promote their preferred history, worldview or self-image. Political kitsch gives cover to all kinds of despotism and exploitation. It is not a world of human beings, in all their complexity, only heroes and villains, perpetrators and victims. The world of kitsch is a simpler world with very bad guys, very good guys, and causes so righteous that no blood or dirt can taint them.

This type of dark tourism engages in vicarious excitement at other people’s despair. A hotel chain in Bloemfontein, South Africa, called Emoya Hotel and Spa, invites tourists to stay a few days in a fake shantytown. The rooms are made of corrugated metal, cardboard and other trash. Outdoor light depends on fires. The location is ideal: in the middle of nowhere. There are rooms for 52 guests and the rooms are cheap. Needless to say, certain local features are absent: crime, hunger, congestion. In fact, guests spend their stay in rather comfortable surroundings, enjoying privacy and modern comforts such as running water and Wi-Fi.

This second type of dark tourism is odious. It devalues human suffering to the degree that it makes us look at the legitimate commemoration of tragedy as somewhat perverse. It is a mistake: to acknowledge human suffering, to make it relatable, to dream of controlling it, is a legitimate way of reacting to a world that is messy, ambiguous and indecent. But in the face of horror, we must pause. What we should not do is cheapen it, and tourism can do precisely that. Objecting to it – refusing to indulge – is a step towards reclaiming our humanity. ■



PHOTOGRAPHY: ADRIAN SKENDEROVIC

RAZED TO LIFE

Losing our heritage is never easy, but letting go can herald surprising new beginnings

by Julian Baggini

If cultural vandalism means the deliberate destruction or defacement of a valuable artefact, building or landscape, then there is no greater example of it than our great churches. Take Canterbury Cathedral. By the turn of the first millennium, the church on the site had been demolished and rebuilt at least once already. It was then destroyed by fire in 1067 and rebuilt three years later by the first Norman archbishop, Lanfranc. Priors Ernulf and Conrad refused to leave it alone however, the former pulling down the east end and replacing it, the latter making various additions. When the choir was damaged in 1174, it was not restored but completely remodelled in the new gothic style.

Over the centuries, numerous other changes were made both to the fabric and furnishing of the building. The last major structural alteration came in 1834 when the original Norman north-west tower was demolished and replaced by the Perpendicular-style Arundel Tower. And let us not forget that before there was any building at all, this was a pristine greenfield site.

Go into almost any old church and you will see the same pattern: palimpsests of previous structures embedded in the present one. To understand the architecture is to read the histories the buildings have lived through. Seeing that can help free us from the trap of thinking about the past as though it always existed or came into existence fully formed. We forget that everything old was once new

JULIAN BAGGINI IS
A PHILOSOPHER
AND THE AUTHOR OF
FREEDOM REGAINED

and that many of the things we don't want ever to change were themselves once ever-changing.

Thinking clearly about this helps us to understand some of the complexities of conservation and cultural identity. We often feel it is important to preserve what we have inherited, but unless we appreciate that we would not even have such an inheritance unless others had been willing to tamper with what they in turn were bequeathed, we cannot understand what is really at stake and what matters.

Few need any persuading that our cultural heritage really does matter. Images of the wanton destruction of old buildings and monuments can be almost as distressing as images of war and disease. When the Taliban blew up the Buddhas of Bamiyan in 2001 or when Isis destroyed the temple at Palmyra earlier this year, it made many of us flinch.

But why should we be so concerned at the passing of bricks and stones? After all, the Buddha himself would surely not have mourned the destruction of his own statue, since he taught non-attachment to all the things of the world. Buddhists or not, we should know that nothing lasts forever and that if it did, we would soon run out of habitable space. And aren't the values and ideas of the past more precious than its artefacts? Why mourn the passing of mere things when all things pass?

It is certainly true that we should avoid becoming the cultural equivalent of compulsive hoarders. Italy illustrates the problems such a fetish would create. Tourists often shake >>



their heads when they see so many old palazzos crumbling into ruin but the country simply has more historic buildings than it can conceivably maintain. In Rome alone there are columns decaying on roundabouts that would be visitor attractions anywhere else.

In Britain, we are haunted by the thoughtless demolitions of the past, such as the destruction of Euston station's Doric arches in 1961. But perhaps we now try too hard to hold on to our past in compensation, or perhaps penance. Up to half a million properties are listed in the UK. Can we really expect to preserve them all?

Whatever the value of conservation, it cannot be rooted in the principle that every good thing ought to be conserved. Preserving the past for its own sake is not a tenable ideal. So in order to decide what we should protect, we need a clearer idea of why we ought to protect it.

There are obviously some buildings that are so exceptional they deserve preservation on aesthetic grounds alone. But the issue of conservation extends far beyond ideas of artistic merit. We often protect ruins that have no intrinsic beauty, or even foundations that look to the casual observer to be just more or less random stones in the ground. Often, we want to preserve things simply because they are an important part of our past. Why?

I think that to truly understand what is at stake when we think of our heritage we have to think about what it means for our identity. 'Identity' is a tricky concept. It is often used for nefarious purposes by populist leaders who want to divide

the virtuous, homogeneous, indigenous 'us' from the depraved, diverse, foreign 'them'. Such identity is defined as much by what it excludes as what it includes.

This kind of reactionary identity is based on a false idea of pure, unchanging essence that is threatened by dilution. History is usually the best antidote to this. Anyone who thinks 'Britishness' is eternal, for example, obviously knows nothing of the Normans, Saxons, Vikings and so on who have made us who we are today. We should not, however, rely only on such truths of breeding if we want to challenge essentialist myths, since there are some populations who can claim a reasonably uninterrupted bloodline.

The challenge to the idea of essence comes not so much from blood as culture. Even when the DNA of a people has remained reasonably constant, its culture has not. The Basques, for example, can claim an unusually pure genetic stock, but it has not transmitted the pagan religion, which was superseded by Christianity in the Middle Ages, and neither are most Basques today the farmers and fishermen of yore. Identity is found not so much in the story of what has stayed the same as in the tale of what has changed.

Seeing identity as residing in the narratives we tell about ourselves provides a useful way of thinking about how past, present and future all need to be linked. A good narrative is always moving forwards and in a way that makes sense. Sometimes the tale takes a dramatic turn, sometimes it progresses gently, but it only ever works if it helps maintain the integrity of the whole. Cultural vandalism destroys this

“THE NARRATIVE WE PRESERVE IS ALWAYS ONE THE PRESENT GENERATION CHOOSES TO TELL”

integrity. By ripping out pages of the past, the present loses its sense. The previously logical development of character becomes mysterious; events lose their meaning.

Identity understood through narrative is not static but dynamic. The key to having a healthy sense of identity is therefore to strike the right balance between acceptance of change while not having so much of it that the narrative becomes broken. This is what should be informing decisions about what we should preserve and what we should let go. We neither want to try to pickle our inheritance nor cast it carelessly away. Either way we kill it.

But what we also need to remember is that the narrative we preserve is always one that the present generation chooses to tell, and it is always disputed. To let our Victorian mills decay while preserving our Victorian mansions, for example, is to choose to privilege the story of the upper classes over that of ordinary workers. Similarly, we should not celebrate the proud maritime history embodied in the *Cutty Sark* without also remembering its role in an exploitative colonial trade.

When groups like Isis and the Taliban destroy monuments, they are deliberately trying to erase aspects of their cultures' pasts, to tell a story in which nothing is worth telling other than that which supports their vision of how things should be now. The erasure of the past is thus a form of erasure of aspects of the current identity, an attempt to remove all its complexities and contradictions and to replace it with something clear, pure and unambiguous.

We don't need to look to the extremes of terrorist groups to see this dynamic at work. In Turkey there has been great controversy over the restoration of originally orthodox churches in the form they later took under Muslim use. At the centre of this storm is Hagia Sophia, which was first a church, then a mosque and is now a secular monument. At the moment it is a paradigm of the merits of appropriate conservation, revealing to its host nation and the world the complex and true history of the peoples who have lived there and who have formed the country that exists today. But many want it to revert to being a mosque. In a way this is no less 'authentic' than the form it takes today. This regressive change, however, would not so much vandalise the building as vandalise the

history it represents. It is a way of trying to forge a non-inclusive Turkish identity that conflicts with the more open, fluid and rooted reality.

There is a concern that an emphasis on retaining the past creates a non-inclusive identity, by excluding those whose roots do not go so deep into history, such as recent immigrants. This worry can be dealt with in two ways. First, a genuine history provides a sense of identity that is much greater than any present generation, wherever they were born. The British story, for example, is much bigger than that of any family, no matter how far back it can trace its genealogy. Your ancestor might have fought at Agincourt, for example, but the nation as it stands was built on many more lineages, not least the many waves of immigration that have occurred since that time. Any true sense of history will show that current immigrants are just the latest in a long tradition, each one enriching the national identity, always fluid, never static.

Second, it would be wrong for any sense of identity to be wholly backward-looking. To deny the past is to deny who you are, but so is to neglect the present or ignore what you have the potential to become. That is why new buildings can also quickly become part of the landscape, expressing how present generations see themselves, refreshing and reinventing our identities.

The north-east of England is a good example. The regeneration of the banks of the Tyne in Newcastle and Gateshead has helped forge the latest iteration of the towns' identities, literally building on their dockside history; while Antony Gormley's Angel of the North became an instant symbol of a region emerging proud from its fading industrial past.

Like any real human story, however, our identity narrative is not honest if it only includes what is unambiguously good. Perhaps that is why people sometimes want to preserve even long unloved buildings. Take Park Hill in Sheffield, a late-1950s council estate that became synonymous with poverty and decline. It could have been pulled down, but instead it was Grade II listed in 1998 and the city decided to bring in fashionable developer Urban Splash to give it a new lease of life. Now the huge complex provides a visible and meaningful link between past and present; one which allows the city to remember its troubles as well as its glories.

Destruction of the past is not always an act of cultural vandalism. But if our identities are a kind of narrative, then our buildings and landscapes provide the scenery, the visual backdrop for the stories we tell. The question we should ask is therefore whether by adding or taking away from them, we help to tell the story better or ruin it. ■

AN E-DUCATION

Technology has transformed many sectors and now it is education that's ripe for a digital revolution

by Rajay Naik

Technology has transformed the way we communicate and how we buy and sell just about everything. Entertainment, publishing and retail have evolved to give us greater efficiency, convenience and on-demand service. Every industry and section of our society appears to have changed, except higher education. But now, the evolution of education is set to accelerate at an extraordinary pace.

Newspapers migrated from print to online; telecoms adapted from landlines to smartphones; banking evolved from in branch to online. However, some in academia have insisted that things should remain as they always were; that the traditional educational model was tried and tested. They have now been exposed as missing the point. The argument for the use of technology in learning was never an affront to convention. It was not intended to fix something that was broken or halt centuries of outstanding teaching. It was, and remains, an effort to unleash the academic, empower the student, enhance the learner journey and extend access to those who would previously be denied. The argument is not about whether traditional modes of teaching are up to the job or otherwise. Instead, it is whether we are open or closed to the ways that technology can improve student outcomes.

A common criticism of digital learning is that it prohibits personal interaction, which is fundamental to learning. This contention is valid but incomplete. It would be foolish to say that the priceless alliances built in an Oxbridge college or the life skills acquired on campus can be replicated online. But nobody is suggesting that. Rather, we should open our eyes to what can be achieved via technology. As technology advances, so does the interactive content. Today's research feeds directly into tomorrow's lecture without needing to wait for the publication of next year's textbook. Imagine accessing a Skype-like screen with a handful of fellow students from across the world, your

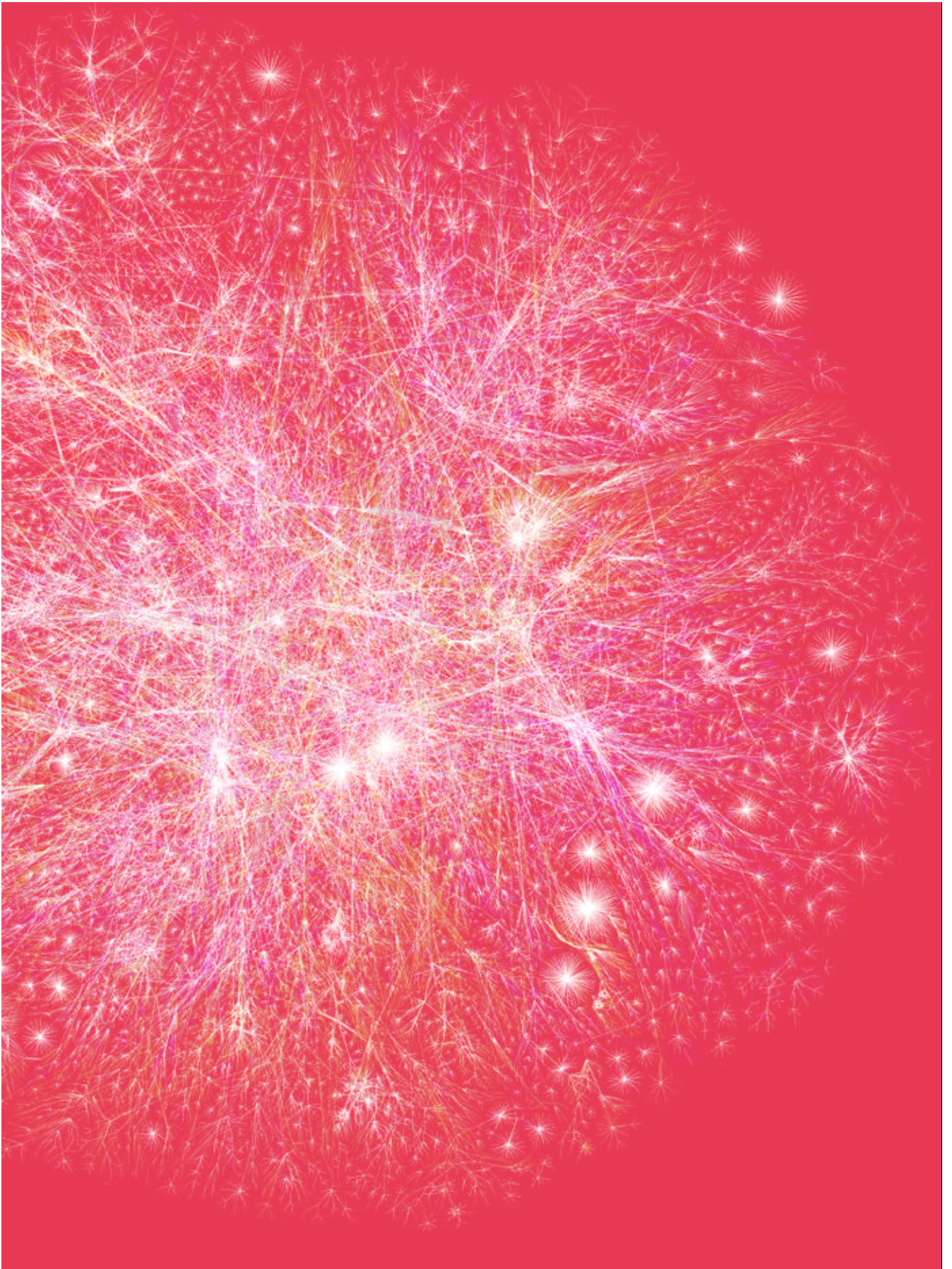
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CEO OF KEYPATH
EDUCATION, AN
ORGANISATION
THAT DESIGNS AND
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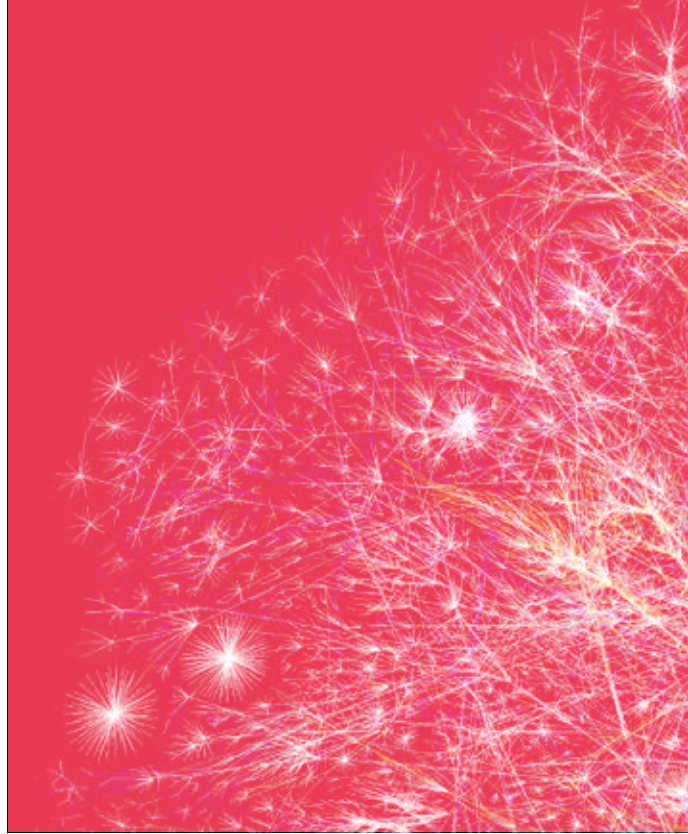
professor and a whiteboard for your weekly tutorials. Imagine exams that are marked in minutes and can be strictly verified according to your unique keystrokes or iris. Imagine having the content of your curriculum and the nature of student support personally adapting in real time based on detailed analytics of your learning to date. We no longer have to imagine. All of this, and much more, is commonplace in online higher education today.

Furthermore, the choice is not binary. Blended and flipped models, which combine face-to-face and online study, are popular and will increasingly become the norm. Today's campus lectures are enhanced via interactives and videos; virtual learning environments (VLEs) such as Blackboard, Moodle and Canvas allow students to learn from and engage with their professor outside the lecture theatre. Increasingly, online degrees are supplemented by summer schools. A plurality of supply is now beginning to emerge and should be pursued as part of a concerted effort to deliver greater choice for students.

A small proportion of universities have sought to disregard this changing landscape. But to ignore the fundamental shift that technology has wrought would be negligent. The video rental giant Blockbuster turned down an offer to acquire the streaming service Netflix for £30m in 2000. A decade later, the former filed for bankruptcy while the latter now has more than 65 million fee-paying subscribers. In 2008, Borders broke off its promising partnership with Jeff Bezos, the founder of Amazon, eventually filing for bankruptcy in 2011. Amazon is now valued at £164bn.

The pace and scale of change in entertainment and publishing have been heeded by some of the world's top universities, which have pioneered the creation of free courses in higher education. While humanity has always evolved and pioneered, the pace of change during the digital revolution – as the examples above illustrate – has been rapid. In education, too, the conventional model was largely static for centuries >>





until open educational resources, VLEs, iTunes University and other innovations started emerging over the past decade. Most recently, the Stanford-initiated massive open online courses (MOOC) platform Coursera, Harvard-born edX and other platforms have taught more than 25 million learners worldwide since 2012.

While I was a director at the Open University, a small group of us developed the FutureLearn platform: Europe's most successful MOOC website, which has registered more than 2 million learners since 2014. We learned lessons from our counterparts in the US, grasping the need for change while insisting that the quality of student experience and focus on retaining learners was superior. We are relearning a similar lesson now. Many US institutions have noticed that while MOOCs are useful for enhancing their brand externally and promoting innovation internally, more is required. Some vice-chancellors explain that while short, informal, free courses are beneficial, they now need degree-level online courses, formal students and actual revenue on their balance sheets.

Naturally, while embracing technology, universities must be cautious. Goliaths such as Google, Facebook and Twitter are less than two decades old; our leading universities have sustained themselves over centuries. Our education institutions must uphold their quality and retain control. For instance, while organisations like the one I run, Keypath Education, may bring the financial capital, technological savvy, marketing and recruitment prowess and student support expertise, it is the university that sets admissions requirements (typically the same as on-campus students), enrolls students, signs off on course design and grants the degree. Universities are rightly cautious but this should not inhibit change. Thus, over the coming years, the innovation in this area will be significant but strategic.

Significant because the pace of change is profound; strategic because we are dealing with the precious gift of education and quality is something that the UK is renowned for. As we embark on this shift in pedagogy, we must remember that in the same way that there is poor face-to-face teaching and poor online teaching, there is great face-to-face teaching and great online teaching. Our goal should simply be *great teaching*. Technology can facilitate this. However, it is people who should be our priority. And we should be focused on two groups of people specifically.

First, students are paramount. Many online courses demand a similar or – in some cases – the same fee level as is paid by on-the-ground students. Granted, they benefit from lack of accommodation costs and are able to continue with their careers while studying. Nonetheless, we must ensure that they receive excellent value for their investment and are treated on a par with campus-based students. Students on Keypath-enabled courses, for example, say that they value the personal relationship they

FELLOWSHIP IN ACTION HELP FOR HEALTH

As a medical student and scientist with experience working in East Africa and East Asia, Ashton Barnett-Vanes made a startling realisation: low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) bear over 80% of the global burden of disease, but only one in four of the World Health Organization's (WHO's) interns are from LMICs. Together with a group of former WHO interns, Barnett-Vanes helped set up the Equitable Access to Global Health Internships Project. "Internships are unpaid, which precludes many candidates in LMICs from participating," he explains. "Our aim is to financially support candidates accepted for a WHO internship who are from an LMIC, and to inspire future generations to participate through their written reports and intern experiences."

The RSA assisted the group in setting up a Kickstarter and encouraged other Fellows to donate. The initiative raised £8,000: enough to support two interns and make a documentary to highlight their cause. "In partnership with US-based NGO Child Health Family International, a global health scholarship administering organisation, we will support two people from an LMIC who are accepted to participate in a winter spring internship at WHO headquarters," says Barnett-Vanes. "Then, with the documentary, our aim is to move beyond statistics, looking at the impact before, during and after a candidate's internship, on the individual and their local health system, engaging stakeholders and policymakers that could balance such participation."

Find out more at www.internalumni.org



“TODAY’S RESEARCH FEEDS INTO TOMORROW’S LECTURE WITHOUT WAITING FOR NEXT YEAR’S TEXTBOOK”

but also the erosion of our ‘soft power’ given the goodwill these individuals tend to retain for the UK after they go on to enjoy fulfilling careers.

Online higher education can help correct this decline. Students in Singapore, Shanghai and São Paulo can now earn degrees with our world-leading universities without needing to leave their careers and families or having to acquire a visa. As cultural and regulatory concerns regarding online learning are confounded in the east and the supply of high-quality higher education increases in the west, we will witness a watershed in global access to education.

Perhaps most importantly, this shift could enable a democratisation of access as cost and geography become less of a barrier to the world’s poorest engaging with the world’s brightest minds. This is not only an inspiring prospect, it is a market imperative. Demand for higher education cannot be met by conventional supply alone. We cannot build enough bricks-and-mortar universities on this planet to meet demand so we must look to alternative avenues, too.

Furthermore, labour markets in both advanced and developing economies require retraining and reskilling of the workforce to an ever greater degree. The World Health Organization, for example, estimates that an additional 4.3 million health workers are required in healthcare alone. If our careers span more sectors than ever before, we require more opportunities to access the education system. Online learning provides the flexibility to work and support your family during the day before pursuing your studies in the evenings and during weekends. Online students create their own global communities, forging professional relationships and effective networks which will last long into the future. Such learners are a credit to our nation. Their study increases their own employability, inspires those around them, and strengthens our labour market, productivity and economic growth.

Online higher education will never replace the campus, but it can enrich the experience and create greater plurality of supply. There has never been a binary choice between online or face-to-face education. As with so many changes to our society and economy over the past two decades, the imperative is to create more choice and increase flexibility. As we do, we will strengthen our economy, boost productivity and ensure our world-leading higher education continues to fuel minds and transform lives around the world for years to come. ■

build with their dedicated student support adviser, who assists them throughout their studies. Furthermore, these students should also be able to access the student union, alumni community and personalised careers advice. Online learning should be flexible, but this should not be mistaken for remote, distant or inferior.

Second, our academics are vital and should never be an afterthought. They are already under immense pressure to deliver more in an environment where higher fees mean higher expectations, and public investment and research budgets are squeezed. Many will be concerned that online learning is simply another burden, a task to be completed. Instead we must train, guide and support them through this change, consistently demonstrating how innovation can strengthen one of their primary passions: personal, meaningful relationships with students that enrich learning and unleash minds.

Another key consideration for our institutions when considering online learning has been the demographic they are engaging with. Universities are recognised as a place where the ‘next generation’ is moulded, but online learning is typically a magnet for older learners. The marketing and student support for such learners is a sophisticated and resource intensive process and will require our institutions to adapt. The welcome awakening of these new audiences to higher education will unquestionably necessitate a broader mindset from governments, regulators, funders and administrators.

If we get this right, the consequences will not only benefit learners who seek more flexibility, but also our economy, which relies greatly on international students in particular. Between 2011 and 2013, Britain’s share of international students declined from 37% to 31%; the first time it has fallen in over 30 years. These individuals represent not only a loss in revenue

BEYOND THE BUBBLE

The increasing compartmentalisation of our online lives threatens to narrow, not expand, our horizons

by Gillian Tett

A decade ago, Biz Stone, then a young(ish) tech entrepreneur, enjoyed a life-changing revelation as he sat in a bar in Austin, Texas. The date was 2007 and the occasion was the South by South West conference, an event that attracts a flock of technology start-ups, innovators and entrepreneurs each year.

Stone had arrived hoping to promote a new creation: a mobile platform that let users dispatch brief messages, which he and his colleagues had called 'twtr'. And after the serious business of marketing was done, he retired to a Tex Mex bar on Austin's trendy Sixth Street, to meet some friends.

But when he arrived, he realised that the venue was too crowded. So he used his fledging messaging platform to send a message to change the venue, and promptly got a shock. No sooner had he dispatched his missive than dozens of people moved to the new bar. As if by magic, the cyber platform had summoned a crowd. And as Stone looked around at his friends drinking beer, he suddenly got an image of birds flying together, in a pack. "I realised that these platforms could make people flock," he later recalled. "This was all about flocking; getting people to move as a group."

It is an image that sounds distinctly reassuring. These days that vision of birds 'flocking' has become woven into modern culture, via that well-known symbol of the little blue bird that represents Twitter (Stone and his colleagues later renamed their message platform, after realising that twtr was too ugly to fly). And Stone's belief – or hope >>

GILLIAN TETT IS A COLUMNIST AND US MANAGING EDITOR FOR THE FT. SHE IS AUTHOR OF THE SILO EFFECT





– that social media platforms such as Twitter can help us all ‘flock’ as a group has entered the public discourse too. Today, most of us assume that the internet is a platform that has the power to link people together. It seems to straddle the globe, connecting its users. It gives everyone access to unimaginable quantities of data. It breaks down geographical barriers, and social segmentation too. It causes us to rally around ideas. After all, central to a platform such as Twitter is that anyone can ‘follow’ anyone else. We can all collide with each other in cyberspace, just as people collected in the bar that Stone observed all those years ago in Austin. Geography no longer seems to matter when people decide to connect online. Or so the assumption goes.

But there is a darker side to this pattern too, albeit one that Stone and his social media aficionados rarely admit in public (or even to themselves). For while the internet has the potential to connect humans and break down social boundaries, it will only do this if humans actively choose to exercise this power. If they do not, it can have precisely the

opposite effect. Just as beer drinkers in Austin could vote with their feet about which bar to follow, we can all decide in cyberspace whether we want to just huddle in a corner with friends, or collide with strangers instead. Instead of being bound by geography, or using physical realities to define our identity, we end up shaping our social realities online but in a way that can create as much tribalism as anything we might see in the ‘real’ world. To put it another way, the internet can enable us to flock together, as Stone hoped, but it can also leave us flying apart, leaving society more fragmented than before. It all depends on how we handle our social interactions and identity; and that is a distinctly double-edged thing.

In some respects, the fact that the internet can be a force for good and bad – or flocking and flying apart – should be no surprise. After all, identity and the concept of community are slippery and shifting concepts in the real, tangible world too. For modern-day nationalists, or indeed anyone who subscribes to the 19th-century ideal of the nation state,

identity is often something that is viewed in one-dimensional terms. Being part of an ethnic group or nationality is seen as a single allegiance. People are ‘English’, ‘French’, ‘Serbian’ or ‘Chinese’; or at least that is how they are described when it comes to their passport, and when they decide which soccer team to back. But anthropologists have long preferred to see identity as a subtler shifting pattern of hierarchies: in everyday life, people have a range of allegiances that they can invoke, and which identity they emphasise at any moment is a function of context. Sometimes we are primarily part of a family group; sometimes we identify with a company, a region, or a school, or religion or nation state. Identity is slippery.

On one level, this point sounds entirely obvious. But this shifting hierarchy makes the shift from ‘real’ life into cyberspace intriguing. In the real world, the way we construct our identity is something we have limited choice over. We are born into certain geographies, ethnic groups and religious affiliations, and until the advent of the 20th century, most people never expected to have any choice about how they would define their community at all. Insofar as social ghettos – or, to use my favoured word, ‘silos’ – existed in the world, these tended to be imposed on people, as much as actively chosen. Somebody born into the Tajik villages where I once did fieldwork as an anthropologist in the 1990s, say, was defined by the community as much as by themselves.

But today, in cyberspace, millions of individuals around the world are discovering the freedom to shape, and sometimes entirely recreate, their identity. Somebody may be born Tajik or Jewish in real life, say, but online they can define themselves as Lithuanian or Chinese. Instead of being limited to your physical neighbourhood, the entire world is theoretically open for selection and exploration. Or, at least it can be, if people choose to exercise this power. And therein lies the rub. For as the universe of cyber users has exploded exponentially, our choices have exploded too, and become overwhelming. Back in the early days of Twitter, there were so few users on the platform that it was easy for everyone to flock together. But today, there are so many million users that any individuals can only hope to see a tiny fragment of what is going on; they must choose

“GEOGRAPHY NO LONGER SEEMS TO MATTER WHEN PEOPLE CONNECT ONLINE, SO THE ASSUMPTION GOES”

a small, self-selecting group, or drown. So, do we just huddle with people we know? Or can we actually break those barriers down?

One of the first groups of academics to ask this question was a team of computer scientists at Georgia Tech. Back in 2009, Sarita Yardi, a researcher, decided to conduct an experiment to see whether Twitter was creating social polarisation. So she picked an event that she knew would spark polarised emotions: the murder of a Kansas physician called George Tiller, who was killed by pro-life campaigners for performing late-stage abortions. Her team analysed the related Twitter debate. In a 2010 paper entitled ‘Dynamic Debates: An analysis of group polarization over time on Twitter’ co-written with Danah Boyd, she asks: “Do like-minded people talk to one another or to people who they disagree with?” The analysis looked at how polarised groups interacted on the network. “Would Republicans or Democrats who followed only other Republicans or Democrats, respectively, be more likely to become more extreme? How do ingroups and outgroups form, and how do individual opinions grow and change?”

The Georgia Tech team painstakingly crunched through 11,000 tweets discussing Tiller’s death. This showed that in direct bilateral conversations between Twitter users – those people who had replied to a specific message – there was evidence of clustering: more than two-thirds of messages sent were between people who held the same views. But in the other third of cases, people engaged with somebody who held a different view. However, this did not seem to spread mutual respect; on the contrary, those exchanges suggested that people were becoming more, not less, polarised as time passed. “Replies between like-minded individuals strengthen group identity whereas replies between different-minded individuals reinforce ingroup and outgroup affiliation,” Yardi and Boyd observed. >>

“OUR NATURAL INSTINCT IS TO RETREAT INTO WHAT FEELS SAFE: NAMELY, OUR SOCIAL TRIBES”

However, there was a crucial caveat: when users retweeted messages or ‘mentioned’ other people, they often broadcast messages from the other camp. This suggested that while Twitter users tended to talk directly to people like themselves, in a ‘cyber community’ that shared similar ideas, they were still seeing the other side of the debate, even if they did not agree with it. And that reflected a crucial detail about the design of Twitter: when users exchanged messages, they used hashtag symbols to mark conversation topics, often using multiple hashtags (say #tiller, #prolife, #prochoice). This had an important implication: because different social and political groups tended to all use the same hashtags, the use of these symbols linked different conversations by default. “In this case study, we see both homophily and heterogeneity in conversations about abortion,” Yardi and Boyd concluded.

Computer scientists later repeated this research in numerous other fields. When the mid-term US congressional election campaigns took place in late 2010, for example, a team of data scientists at Indiana University’s computing science department crunched through 250,000 tweets that were sent by 45,000 people just before the vote. This showed that when people sent each other messages and retweeted information or news, they tended to remain stuck inside their political tribes, or comfort zone. “The retweet network exhibits a highly modular structure, segregating users into two homogenous communities corresponding to the political left and right,” the Indiana team observed. However, those different political tribes often ‘mentioned’ people from outside their group. And, as in the abortion debate, the use of common hashtags was a critical factor that forced people with different views to collide, giving them the chance to explore if they chose. “The ‘mention’ network does not exhibit this kind of political segregation, resulting in users being exposed to individuals and information they would not have been likely to choose in advance,” the Indiana computer scientists observed.

In early 2013, a group of computer scientists based at the Qatar Computer Research Institute in Doha did a similar experiment in Egypt in the aftermath of the Arab spring. They collected 17 million tweets sent between the summers of 2012 and 2013, assessing whether these tweets were Islamist or secular. Results showed that, in some respects, the Twitter community in Egypt seemed interlinked: the

different sides ‘mentioned’ each other and shared hashtags. But the different camps were polarised when people sent direct messages to each other, or retweeted data. And when people were fragmenting into polarised groups on Twitter, this often predated outbreaks of physical violence. “We found strong indications that a measure of global hashtag polarisation, related to the overlap between hashtags used by the two political sides, works as a ‘barometer for tension’,” the group observed.

Of course, Twitter is not the only medium where cyber identities are forged; numerous other platforms such as Facebook, Instagram or LinkedIn are crucial too. And in recent years, social and computer scientists have tried to do similar experiments with other types of internet traffic. This has been harder to execute, since companies such as Facebook have hitherto been very reluctant to let outside academics crawl over their data (in sharp contrast to Twitter, that made its data widely available in the early years of its existence). However, insofar as public studies of other social media platforms exist, these seem to back up the Twitter research. In 2012, for example, Facebook let former employee and academic Eytan Bakshy (who was then doing a PhD from the University of Michigan) conduct an extensive study of Facebook users to see how they disseminated news to each other. This showed social groups often huddled together in discreet tribes of Facebook friends, sticking with people they knew well for everyday interactions. But the research also showed that if a novel piece of news entered the network, people would share it with a very wide circle of contacts, including those outside their immediate self-selecting circle. And that had an important implication: because these weak ties were so multidimensional, news could be disseminated quickly between different social groups. Thus, people who used Facebook could also get “access to different websites that [they were] not necessarily visiting”, as Bakshy wrote.



Or, to put it another way, social media reinforced social silos but also created the opportunity to break those silos down. Or it could, if individuals connected to others with multiple different threads, to reflect different parts of their shifting hierarchies of identities, and viewed community as a malleable, multidimensional thing.

A couple of months after I first heard about Stone's vision of flocking and his revelation in the Austin bar, I happened to meet Dick Costolo, then the CEO of Twitter. I asked him whether he thought Twitter was a tool that united people, or not. He said that he believed – or hoped – that it could break down boundaries. But the issue was size: the bigger Twitter got, the more people tended to self-select into small groups. "People will come up to me and say I saw that amazing debate going on, on Twitter – about Italian cooking or Turkish architecture or whatever – and expect me to know about it," Costolo observed. "And I will say: 'Really? I had no idea.'"

But Costolo revealed that he had developed his own technique for dealing with the problem of social fragmentation. "Every week, or every month, I try to change around the people I follow," he explained. "I might knock half the people off the list and replace them with something completely different." The idea, he added, was to keep his vision of the world fresh; trying to see the Twitter landscape through a different lens, or a radically different group of people. This is a powerful idea. When presented with endless personal freedom to define ourselves and our community, our natural instinct is to retreat into what feels safe: namely,

our social tribes. Yet we know that this is dangerous: a world where everyone fragments into social and intellectual ghettos is also a world of political polarisation, and where we risk being profoundly ignorant of how the world works. But, if we want to break down tribalism and polarisation, we do not need to abandon our Twitter and Facebook feeds; we could just set a reminder on our computers that tells us to mix up who we follow and friend on a regular basis, and teach our children to be curious too. We could try switching out some of the people we follow on Twitter and replacing them with something radically different. Or we could try joining different Facebook groups, swapping around our Instagram account, or changing our newsfeed.

Perhaps most importantly of all, if we are seeking to campaign for change, rally a crowd, or simply get our voice heard beyond our narrow social ghetto, we need to think about how we communicate and interact with others. Reaching out into different Twitter and Facebook groups, sending messages via other platforms or trying to use varied forms of language are critical if we want to break down the new cyber tribalism.

That simple step won't necessarily change the world. Nor will it enable Stone's dream about humans flocking to materialise; sadly, the internet is never going to break down social barriers completely. But if we reflect on how we use the internet and how it shapes our identity, we can actively choose whether we flock together or fly apart. It just requires us to do something that no computer has mastered yet: namely, look at our social group – and think. ■

CULTURE CACHE

Art director Peter Saville and Matthew Taylor discuss the wider relevance of local stories, despite their humble origins

MATTHEW TAYLOR: The RSA's work on heritage started with a question: how can we make heritage a bigger part of how places thought about their future? We discovered an 'identity gap': generally, people did not have a way of talking about identity, and tended to find it a slightly dangerous idea. They worry that if you talk about identity, it implies you are trying to preserve something from the modern world.

PETER SAVILLE: There is the challenge of rearticulating heritage, in a contemporary way. In what way, if at all, is the heritage of a place relevant to the now? To what extent has the society connected with that heritage changed as a result of economic, geopolitical, socioeconomic issues? From Birmingham and Manchester to Detroit, the societies that were connected to their significant heritage were indispensably linked to those activities. Now, if the resonance or significance of the activities change, then the societies that they supported also change. These are the principle dynamics that one is dealing with.

In the case of Manchester, when I was first started working on it in 2004, I noticed that the city didn't have a contemporary sense of purpose; it didn't have a current sense of identity. The city's establishment always fell back on its status as the 'first industrial city'. So, they were falling back on heritage going back 150 years: Manchester as the principle city of industry in the world. There was still significance in that positioning until the mid-century. At the outbreak of the Second World War, Trafford Park in Manchester was still the largest industrial park in Europe. The next 50 years changed that dramatically. It seemed to me that being the first industrial city of the 19th century was not providing a route map for the 21st century but it *was* the essential provenance of the city.

PETER SAVILLE WAS A CO-FOUNDER AND ART DIRECTOR OF THE INDEPENDENT LABEL FACTORY RECORDS. IN 2004 HE WAS APPOINTED CONSULTANT CREATIVE DIRECTOR TO THE CITY OF MANCHESTER

What I ended up doing was rephrasing 'first industrial' into 'original modern'. I sat with [Manchester City Council's chief executive] Sir Howard Bernstein and said, "By virtue of having been the world's first industrial city, we can also understand it and its evolution and development at that time as the original modern city." Are they not values within which the city could aspire to operate now? You can only be first industrial once, but you can be original and modern forever. Hence the need to find a way to contextualise heritage in the now. For some places that will work and for some places it won't.

TAYLOR: Doesn't every place need some account of its future which is in some way rooted in its past? In some places, there is a richness that you can use to develop a concept as fascinating as that which you did for Manchester. It probably isn't as easy in Guildford or Warrington, but don't they still need to embark upon that creative process?

SAVILLE: Yes, but I think that we first of all have to accept that no place has a God-given right to a future. Unless you can articulate the value of a place in the now, then it will not have a future and it will be on the road towards a gradually declining sense of relevance. There are great cities of history buried under the sand, so the fact that the mortality of place and significance comes and goes, is, I think, a prerequisite in addressing these issues.

Additionally, the complicating factor is the social changes happening within a place. I was driving to Manchester to one evening, listening to a radio documentary from Marseille and I heard the following: "The culture of a place is the sum of the values of its society." Now, that, I found profoundly accurate. As we know, global intellectual migration is fundamentally changing the societies within places.

Manchester is a great example of this. It was the most important place on earth in the late 18th and early 19th



HERITAGE

The
Haçienda

1982 - 2002

The Madchester
music scene was
born here



“THE CULTURE OF A PLACE IS THE SUM OF THE VALUES OF ITS SOCIETY”

centuries. The new, modern world was being pieced together in the city. The world was going to Manchester to see these things called machines – the wealth of the future was being forged there.

Now, the families and businesses associated with that wealth are no longer there; the urgency of Manchester is no longer there. As part of its legacy from that period it has one of the largest university campuses in Europe, meaning that between the age of 18 and 24, a significant number of the world’s ambitious learning young pass through the city. Do they stay? Is there enough for them there? For the most part, the answer is not really.

TAYLOR: In terms of heritage buildings, one of the issues for the National Trust is acquisition. They’re now looking at fire stations and libraries; institutions that aren’t castles or cathedrals, that may have been more functional, indeed, places whose identity has changed. When you see campaigns to preserve buildings which were associated with punk, for example, clubs, do you say, “Yes, absolutely, this is the new heritage,” or do you think that we’re misunderstanding because these things were of their time? That we should celebrate what they did and recognise that they’ve moved on?

SAVILLE: I don’t think there can be a generic response. With fire stations and lifeboat houses, there’s some nostalgia at work. The sentiment’s not entirely out of place but it’s possibly not urgently significant. But actually, post-war pop culture is the ‘secular church’. It’s the one common disseminator of value across every generation post-war. And the challenge is deciding the places of significance. I mean, the Cavern Club in Liverpool has been made into a kind of heritage shrine. But apart from being a landmark of sorts, I don’t think it’s critically important; it’s no more important than Madame Tussauds. With regards to the Hacienda in Manchester, I think there are more significant issues. Because of how it was designed by Ben Kelly, it was in fact, the DNA of the former industrial city, regenerated as the post-industrial city. So, I would say that the Hacienda, because of its prominence, was the first manifestation of regeneration in the city. What’s frustrating is that this isn’t understood, even now, by the city and sadly was not understood 20 years ago

when they knocked it down and put up apartments. Now, this is of course intrinsically linked to the changing society.

TAYLOR: Isn’t it also linked to an insensitivity to heritage as a future resource?

SAVILLE: The thing is lack of awareness. Awareness is quite alive in London, even among the property developers. Now, because of intellectual migration, awareness is not particularly prevalent in some of the regions. Had the Hacienda been in London, there is a higher likelihood of its significance being recognised, but its significance was not recognised in the ’80s or ’90s and I’m afraid to say it’s still not recognised now.

TAYLOR: You need quite a deep and broad public discourse if you’re going to spot things like the Hacienda and realise that this may be looked back on as something of significance. In a conversation with Oldham, they said: “We’ve got mill after mill with listed status. One or two of them we could do something with, but we’ve got too many! They’re not financially viable, nobody visits them, they don’t do anything for us!” There was a frisson in the room when this was said. How on earth could you possibly say you’ve got too much heritage? But actually that’s part of the conversation, isn’t it?

SAVILLE: It’s the incumbent community and its establishment who don’t know what to do with it. The problem is, that in these places, they don’t know what to do with a mill. To be fair, and realistic about Oldham, there isn’t necessarily a vast amount of opportunity. But people know what to do with a mill building in East London. [Property developer] Tom Bloxham knew what to do in Manchester. His company, Urban Splash, was one of the few entities in the city that epitomised original modern, as did the football clubs.

TAYLOR: The process through which a place identifies a story about itself provides the granularity that enables people to make more intelligent, more nuanced decisions about what to keep and what not to keep; about what matters and what doesn’t matter; about what forms of repurposing are imaginative and creative and what forms are crass.

SAVILLE: Yes, that is exactly it. The point with ‘original modern’ when I put it forward, was that the channel through which you articulate it or bring it to life is open; it doesn’t matter how. So it can be healthcare, an architectural programme, a cultural programme, education, transport infrastructure. It’s a matter of taking control of the news



coming from your place. Somewhere might have been founded on milling woollen goods, but the energy, innovation and sensibility could be manifest 100 years later in the approach to education. It's the spirit of a place rather than its mechanical manifestation at a particular time. It is very unlikely these places will be able to literally be or do what they did before, but what spirit do they have inherent in the place, and how does that find itself in the now? That's what 'original modern' was about.

TAYLOR: When we talk about heritage assets, a critical asset is this sense of distinctiveness; this sense of place. Arguably the most important asset of all is the story of place and if you don't have that, it becomes very difficult to say what matters and what doesn't matter.

SAVILLE: Absolutely. You can call the West Country 'Constable Country', but other than a theme park, what does that mean? It requires an intelligent interrogation of place.

TAYLOR: There's a parallel conversation among the professions involved in the built environment, where there's immense frustration about the fact that all these planners, quantity surveyors and architects can't get their act together and so, despite, sharing some common principles, we end up with public space and buildings that don't speak to any kind of values. How can we create a voice for identity in place?

SAVILLE: Heritage, place and identity are all about culture. So we go back to the Marseille comment: the values of a society make its culture. What I realised, is that the relationship between culture and an advanced consumer economy is not understood. I used to blame the political body for being myopic and simply not getting it. I increasingly see that the cultural body itself is just as responsible. As a consultative entity – singular or body – unless you've got the ear of the chief executive, you are ineffective.

Unless a body is able to demonstrate the significance of its issues to the big issue of the economy, then you are doomed to forever hanging around in the anteroom waiting for scraps or at the moment, the opposite; you're being cut, cut, cut. Now, the failure to understand the role of cultural information in shaping consumer products and societies is mind boggling to me. The world's most successful company, Apple, is a marriage of science and art, and it is more about art than science. To not understand Jonathan Ive's work as the product of post-war British pop culture is blindness.

The relationship between culture and the economy is not well understood. Museums still talk about attendance figures as their *raison d'être*. For example, Tate Modern is a place to form ideas from which people make progress, do business, create jobs. That's what it's about. Great that 5 million people go through its doors, but its real value is as a learning tool. Why is culture placed next to sport in a ministry, as if it's some kind of sop to the masses like beer and skittles? Culture should either stand alone or at least be next to education. ■

LOCAL CHARACTER

In heritage, the personal and political collide. Aligning both viewpoints must be a collaborative process

by Helen Graham

Heritage is always contested. No matter how safe and settled buildings, objects or practices might seem to be from a distance, look closer and the truth is more complicated.

Take York, the city I live in and where I have been involved in a participatory research project called ‘How should heritage decisions be made?’, which has worked with many people who think about the city in different ways. You can look at the city walls and see them as monumental, standing for centuries and likely to still be standing when we have all gone. Yet if you look more closely you will find that large holes were made for railway access during the mid-19th century; a compromise from an earlier scheme to remove whole sections of the wall. Equally, during the post-Second World War period, the story is of city planners wanting to make interventions related to traffic flow. Each of these schemes was subject to local contest: the only reason the walls look the way they do today is not due to any inevitable survival but because of disagreement and compromise, characterised by repeated waves of activism by local people.

Clearly, the idea that local politics is defined by contest is true of any given policy area but there are specific political textures intrinsic to heritage. Definitions of heritage vary but most contain the idea of significant and important things from past or present generations being passed on to future generations. As a result, the idea of heritage is embroiled in some pretty ambitious claims. There are two aspects to this. The first is inclusion. The question of what is thought of as significant has resulted, over the past 50 years, in the expansion of heritage’s definition, to include history from below, LGBTQ history and intangible heritage such as dance and song. The

second aspect is the idea that any desire to pass on significant and important things implies some form of decision.

Of course, linking heritage with local policy is long established. You don’t have to look far to find claims about the positive impact of heritage: ‘It can increase well-being’, ‘museums can change lives’, ‘the historic environment can increase mutual understanding and cohesion’. The claims for heritage made by heritage advocates are often aimed at policy and decision-makers; as if offering heritage to them as a tool that can be simply deployed for various positive ends. The biggest weakness of these advocacy claims – especially when they make their way into more simplified headlines – is that they inadvertently disentangle heritage from its dynamic process in our lives as we make it, debate it, share it, keep it alive and pass it on. Heritage can never satisfactorily be something done ‘on our behalf’. Its structure calls us, even expects us, to get involved – as the history of York’s walls attest. As such, the role of heritage in local politics should be thought of, not as a tool to be deployed top down for our own good, but more as the very stuff of bottom-up engagement. It is active engagement in the ongoing production of our heritage and our places that produces all the other positive policy outcomes often listed, not the other way round.

This active and dynamic reading of heritage is very relevant to York right now. Despite coming close at the end of last year, the city has so far found it very difficult to pass a Local Plan and therefore to create a policy framework for planning and development. This is highly significant, as York is often cited as the most unaffordable place to live in the north of England. The new Conservative Liberal Democrat administration, elected in May 2015, recognised this in their 12-point plan, as cited in *York Press*: “The parties say

HELEN GRAHAM
IS UNIVERSITY
RESEARCH FELLOW
IN HERITAGE AT THE
UNIVERSITY
OF LEEDS



they will prepare an ‘evidence-based Local Plan’ that would deliver much-needed housing, focusing on brownfield land and taking ‘all practical steps’ to protect the green belt and York’s character.”

A close reading of this sentence might imply house building and York’s character are in some kind of tension. Indeed, some contributions to this debate have sought to portray York’s distinctiveness as related to its small scale, its existing urban boundaries or even its Georgian gentility – and therefore not overly open to development. Yet, in terms of heritage and housing, the question of what constitutes York’s character is far from settled. You don’t have to look far, with the work of the Rowntrees, their legacy trusts and foundation, to argue that addressing poverty and pioneering the development of high-quality social housing are as much a part of York’s character as its medieval streets or views of the Minster.

Constant debate and discussion about what might constitute the city’s character is a crucial precursor to a healthy democracy. However, when looking at the Local Plan and the challenges it needs to address, it is time to recognise that while the city has been brilliant at contesting what York was and is, it has not been so good at proactively and collectively deciding about its future. To explore how the political capacities offered by heritage might help this

local democratic process, in November, I, together with the city archives York Explore, and York Past and Present, a 9,000-strong Facebook group, am running an experimental participatory project called York and Housing: Histories Behind the Headlines. We will look at how collectively producing histories of housing and a shared understanding of the issues we face today might help the city develop a viable Local Plan. To this end, we will have contributions from the City of York Council leadership, local historians and people with local knowledge and memories as well as from our past via the city archives.

Heritage is a useful medium through which to conduct such debates over the places we live. This is not just because it allows us room to raise issues of inclusion and exclusion, although these are crucial. It also offers a structure for local democracy because questions about heritage always include what it might mean to create a legacy for the future. In other words, heritage offers something useful to local politics because its very orientation to the future requires us – collectively – to make some decisions. ■

■ ‘How should heritage decisions be made?’ was funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council’s Connected Communities programme: www.heritagedecisions.leeds.ac.uk

THE CONNECTED KINGDOM

Helping cities empower themselves could strengthen national ties, but first we must devolve real power

by Charlotte Alldritt

For decades the UK has been one of the most centralised countries in the OECD. However, recent and rapid policy progress suggests that the UK's political economy is now starting to show signs of reversing its march towards ever increasing centralisation. Since the RSA City Growth Commission published its final report in autumn last year, four places in England have received 'devolution deals'. Most significant of these was the handing over of responsibility for the entire health budget to Greater Manchester's Combined Authority. The NHS is, to many, a symbol of our welfare state and national heritage. Devolving a large chunk of it (to the tune of £6bn per year from April 2016) is nothing less than a watershed.

The opportunities are significant, if fraught with difficulties. Done right, with greater clarity and coherence of principle, we could strengthen social, economic and political connectivity, strengthening the fibres of national life. Done badly, tangled by territorial party politics or undermined by a persistent lack of clarity and coherence, we risk the very governability of the UK.

Deal-making – perhaps ever at the heart of politics – is enjoying its zeitgeist moment as an instrument of public policy. Arguably, 'the vow' committing Westminster to the Barnett formula prior to the Scottish referendum was the deal on offer between the UK government and the citizens of Scotland. The emerging array of bespoke city deals, across England as well as the devolved nations, means that devolution to local and national level tiers of UK government is inextricably and increasingly linked.

CHARLOTTE ALLDRITT
IS DIRECTOR FOR
PUBLIC SERVICES
AND COMMUNITIES
AT THE RSA

For example, the Glasgow and Clyde Valley City Deal heightened political tensions between Holyrood and Westminster and has gone on to expose deep differences in the extent to which the two Parliaments feel ready to devolve power to sub-national tiers of government: in Westminster, according to a seemingly strict quid pro quo of 'no mayor, no deal'; in Holyrood, a preoccupation with negotiating with the UK government as the Scotland Bill seeks to legislate for, or potentially augment, the conclusions of the Smith Commission.

In Wales, there are rumbles as to whether the St David's Day agreement of the previous government goes far enough. While in Northern Ireland, the fiscal freedom to set its own corporation tax from April 2017 – a unique step within the UK – is overshadowed by the suspension of its executive power-sharing meetings. The matter of English votes for English laws, itself a matter related to the devolution dynamics elsewhere in the union, as well as the newly differentiated powers to its city-regions and counties heightens complexity and uncertainty. What powers should places be entitled to? Will we come to prize the postcode lottery as the virtue of localism not the thorn in universal welfare? What are the implications for central government, MPs and Parliament? What role for the centre in setting the direction of travel for services and overarching policy – is this reduced to defining and monitoring minimum standards?

The RSA City Growth Commission made the case for city-led growth and devolution of fiscal and strategic policy powers to metro regions, aligning more closely local politics and administration with local economics. Our recommendations included, for example, the freedom for city-regions to set



and wholly retain their business rate revenues – a measure announced recently by the Chancellor prior to the 2015 Spending Review. The Commission also argued for a transparent process to give structure and independent scrutiny to a more integrated system of national and sub-national devolved governance, an idea that was further developed within the RSA in the run up to the general election. We need to be clear about the principles under which power in our governance system is distributed.

THREE REALMS OF CONNECTIVITY

In theory, devolution should enable a new type of place-based policymaking, leadership, accountability and delivery. Scottish, Welsh and Northern Irish devolution is about national autonomy. At a sub-national level it is about giving local leaders the space to work collaboratively across traditional boundaries of service or administrative geography, informed by the economic and social needs of their place.

In both instances, place-based identity can bring people together, creating a sense of social connectedness: the feeling of pride (or trepidation) when you watch your favourite national sports team, the feeling of belonging within a city of millions, or the sense of community spirit at a local club or society. Where political institutions can harness this as civic pride, it can be a platform for engagement, activism and enhanced accountability. Ever louder calls for a ‘new kind of politics’ speak to people’s desire for a more responsive, connected government. At a national level, this might lead to greater fragmentation within the UK, but the principles of localism and subsidiary, where decision-making happens at the lowest level possible (given the issues at hand) still apply.

In practice, it remains to be seen how we can avoid devolution being ‘business as usual’ where the structures, systems and shortfalls of the centre are replicated in the next level down. We need to think about three types of connectivity aimed at restoring the link between people, place and government. >>



First is economic connectivity; the bedrock of growth, driving productivity by linking people, information and finance. It requires strategic (appropriate, integrated and long-term) investment in high-quality local, regional and national level infrastructure. In the UK, officials across local and national governments are used to making business cases for such infrastructure and it is no coincidence that transport projects have dominated the city deal and growth deals announced to date. While transport connectivity is indeed central to realising the value of the Northern Powerhouse, for example, we need to improve our capacity for more sophisticated appraisal and financing of digital connectivity, house building and supporting infrastructure. This is particularly important at the city-regional level where places must be free to tailor, sequence and coordinate their investment decisions over the long term.

Economic connectivity means giving firms ready access to finance and business support, as well as ensuring locally applicable industrial strategies where supply chains connect across the UK, linking cities and their complementary competitive advantages. For example, developing stronger ties between the 'Golden Triangle' of biotech and healthcare research clusters in London, Cambridge and Oxford universities (and their associated enterprise communities) with other emerging and established innovation clusters across the county, including the Royce Institute (itself a collaboration between Manchester, Leeds and Sheffield universities) or the high-tech 'Silicon Corridor' between Bristol and Swindon.

Finally, at a national level, we need a fiscal system where the tax code and regulatory framework reflect the nature of 21st-century enterprise and our knowledge-based economy. This will be no mean feat, particularly as online businesses and their customers need not be located in any one place; a business rate revenue option for local areas could become narrower, requiring greater reliance on national level fiscal arrangements (such as income tax and corporation tax). While the political case for fiscal devolution might be strengthened on the back of

city deals, the economic case will be a much harder sell, both to cities and central government.

Second, we must consider social connectivity. By looking at the social fabric of a place we start to get under the skin of what makes it thrive and we better understand the different components that enhance communities' well-being: its universities and colleges, its environment, heritage, nightlife and cultural vibrancy, all of which help to attract and retain skilled people. Social connectivity speaks to the degree to which citizens feel an affinity with their place, identifying themselves as of their city or town, connected to their community.

The RSA's work has shown that, by harnessing the power of connected communities, we can improve a range of social and economic policy outcomes, from increased life satisfaction to greater participation in education and training. We have looked at how community engagement and volunteering can inform a new, 'people-shaped localism' and have explored the importance of heritage in bringing communities together around a shared appreciation of their place.

In understanding the importance of shared identity, and as this edition of the *RSA Journal* attests, we are starting to look at how 'living heritage' assets, such as local sports clubs or community groups, can be an important ingredient in place-shaping. Here is where people invest their time and energy to foster social productivity, leveraging the value of their social networks with potential for wider social and economic spillovers. Amid increasingly global investment flows, a strong place-based identity can put places on the map; this is why Yorkshire sought to host the Tour de France Grand Départ in 2014 and Hull the City of Culture in 2017. Economic connectivity without social connectivity is empty.

Finally, political connectivity is essential if we are to restore the link between people and government. The current yearning for a new kind of politics is symptomatic of a chronic lack of political connectivity at a local and national level. The politics of Russell Brand or Jeremy Corbyn gropes towards a new

“CALLS FOR A NEW KIND OF POLITICS SPEAK TO PEOPLE’S DESIRE FOR MORE CONNECTED GOVERNMENT”

system that reconnects the electorate. Whether you agree with the new Labour leader or not, his initial attempts to change the tone of PMQs with questions sourced from the public is a small, but significant, illustration of this bid for change.

Support for devolution and self-determination on the part of the constituent nations of the UK is itself arguably an expression of a deeper demand to be heard and understood. This looks set to continue as governments’ responses have been characteristically staid and top-down, with the Smith and Silk Commissions resulting in deals negotiated largely behind closed doors; a top-down rejection of the surge of political engagement in Scotland during the run up to the referendum.

Similarly, the requirement of Greater Manchester to have a metro mayor was thought by many local people to have been

a top-down imposed by London, where the capital and its political elites could be from, to quote one of the Mancunian deal-makers, ‘another planet’. How will the metro mayor defend its legitimacy if turnout is as poor as it has been in the city over recent years? The irony is not lost in the fact that Tony Lloyd – interim metro mayor until elections are held in 2017 – was elected Greater Manchester Police and Crime Commissioner with a turnout of just 13.93% in 2012.

New forms of governance need to seize an opportunity to reconnect with their citizens, enabling a talented network of public, private and civic leadership. Rather than the divisiveness of traditional identity or territorial politics, where you are either ‘like us’ and therefore ‘with us’, a connected, collaborative place-based leadership could encourage a genuine flourishing of civic, social and economic life.

Together, these three strands of economic, social and political connectivity could help us to create a more empowered, safe, resilient society and thriving political economy. As our constitutional footing becomes more variegated and uncertain, there is an opportunity to be more ambitious for our people and places. Devolution to cities and county regions presents significant challenges and risks, perhaps the biggest being ‘business as usual’ where the structures, systems and shortfalls of the centre are merely replicated in new tiers of government. The other major risk is that devolution will heighten inequality and economic imbalance between and within the nations, cities and rural areas of the UK, undermining the driving rationale behind many of the policy objectives of successive governments – of all colours – over the past 60 years.

If places are to be allowed to tackle inequality and economic disadvantages, we will need to strengthen their capacity to anticipate, manage and respond to increasingly complex socio-demographic pressures, all at a time of continued public sector budgets cuts. This will be a largely technocratic process. The more difficult job will be in bringing people together to agree a geographical footprint and define a clear vision for their place. People will define themselves as outside the tent, dividing as much as unifying along the way. But the prize of greater connectivity within our diverse political economy will be restoring the link between people, place and government. ■

FELLOWSHIP IN ACTION IN IT TOGETHER

At this year’s general election, the town of Frome in Somerset awarded all 17 seats on its council to Independents for Frome, a coalition of its own making. Now the town is breaking new ground again by being the first in the UK to roll out a Town Digital Hub – an online portal that helps the council, community groups and local businesses work together to maintain and even improve public services affected by funding cuts.

Led by Keith Harrison-Broninski, and with £1,800 donated by the RSA Catalyst Fund to get it under way, the project aims to help services such as health, social services, justice and education switch from reactive and curative to proactive and preventative. One initiative to provide minibus services, taxi- and car-sharing has helped mitigate the effects of budget cuts that had seen bus services to villages reduced.

Town Digital Hub is now rolling out to other communities, and hopes to develop employability and encourage young people to volunteer. “Without the RSA, it would have been very hard to get this far, this fast,” says Harrison-Broninski. “Fellows have been critical in making the introductions to other councils that we need in order to scale the project and make it sustainable.”

■ *Find out more at www.towndigitalhub.net*

NEW FELLOWS

ALEXANDRA JONES



As CEO of Centre for Cities, Alexandra Jones' work focuses on understanding and improving UK city economies. Prior to this, she worked at The Work Foundation, focusing on cities there. It's a subject that aligns well with the RSA's broad scope of research interests, so it's no surprise that she was invited to work as an advisor on the City Growth Commission that the Society launched late last year.

"The Centre for Cities has 10 years' worth of evidence on cities, and it was a real pleasure to be able to put that to the commission and make sure we were part of the deliberations," she says. "We're constantly looking at how to change policy and practice through our research and work with policymakers, and we've got a free interactive data tool for anyone wanting to peruse our facts and figures." Jones has also collaborated on other RSA projects, authoring a paper and speaking at a session with the Arts Council about how the arts can contribute to life around the country. "I think the RSA has a real ability to pull together different perspectives and ask new questions," she explains. "It's a really interesting community of people that do quite different things but are able to come together to talk about a whole range of issues."

STEPHEN JONES



Dr Stephen Jones is a lecturer at the Southern New Hampshire University, USA, teaching postgraduates about literary theory and British modernism. Born in Ohio, where his Welsh ancestors settled during the 1800s, he spent part of his doctorate thesis research in the UK as part of a Fulbright scholarship to the National Library of Wales in Aberystwyth. Here, he first heard about the RSA. "While my scholarly interests are mainly in the areas of literature, film and ethnic identity, I am very drawn to work in politics and environmentalism," he says. "The broader scope of perspectives at the RSA is very appealing to me."

Dr Jones is interested in various projects, particularly the Heritage Index report which recently launched, and relishes the ability to connect with others in areas of mutual interest. Now back in the US, Dr Jones is keen to maintain his involvement with the RSA and would be glad to connect with Fellows interested in folk music traditions. "I'm very interested in collaborating on projects related to ethnic identity and culture," he reveals. "I regularly give presentations at academic conferences in the US, including Harvard and UC Berkeley, and I think putting together a presentation for one of these would be an excellent way to get collaborative projects started."

IN BRIEF

Here are a few more Fellows who are working to drive social progress:

Lorna Prescott is a senior development officer for Dudley Council for Voluntary Service and an RSA Heritage Ambassador. She is currently working with residents of the Wrens Nest estate in Dudley and Civic Systems Lab to co-create Open Hub, helping people to connect and share ideas.

John Coleman is a historian and arts and heritage activist based in Ballymote, Ireland. He is interested in the way the society works to educate and increase mutual understanding, helping people maximise their potential.

Ruth Carter is the sector specialist for employability, enterprise and entrepreneurship at OCR (Oxford Cambridge and RSA Examinations). She is currently advising on a programme to support vulnerable young women into employment, teaching personal development and independent living skills.

Helen Palmer is the director of Palm Squared, a marketing consultancy which specialises in the arts and heritage sectors. She first joined the RSA for its impressive networking opportunities and now looks forward to offering strategic support to other Fellows.

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1 Connect online: Search for Fellows online at our brand new website. Visit www.thersa.org/new-website for details of how to login. You can also follow us on Twitter @theRSAorg, join the Fellows' LinkedIn group and follow our blog at www.thersa.org/blogs

2 Meet other Fellows: Fellowship events and network meetings take place across the UK and are an excellent way to meet other Fellows. Visit our website to find an event in your area.

3 Share your skills: Login to the website to update your Fellowship profile and let other Fellows know about your skills, interests, expertise and availability.

4 Grow your idea: RSA Catalyst offers grants and crowdfunding support for Fellow-led new and early-stage projects that aim to tackle a social challenge. Visit the Project Support page on our website.

Explore these and further ways to get involved at www.thersa.org



CURING WITH CULTURE

I read with great interest Professor Kelly Lambert's article ('Do or DIY', Issue 1 2015). This contribution illustrates nicely the influence of the environment on our mental health. My purpose in writing is to enrich Professor Lambert's perspective by focusing on the role of cultural participation (the engagement in cultural activities) on our psychological well-being.

Recent research indicates that, alongside other sociocultural factors (income, age, lifestyle, working condition, gender and education), engagement in receptive cultural activities and in active cultural practices (for instance, watching art shows, attending theatre performances or playing music) improves health, satisfaction with life and lowers levels of anxiety and depression. Although this empirical evidence further supports the notion that our environment contributes to mental health, most of our governments spend their resources on long-term care at psychiatric hospitals and on standard therapeutic models. If mental health issues are addressed early enough, the World Health Organization (WHO) acknowledges, the need for expensive hospital care would be radically reduced. This could be accomplished if a policy of preventive and effective welfare interventions were to seriously consider the influence of cultural participation on psychological well-being. Instead, as emphasised on various occasions by the WHO, UNESCO and the European Commission, in periods of crisis our policymakers enact significant cuts in funding to the cultural sector due to the common yet erroneous confinement of culture to the 'less relevant' sphere of pure entertainment.

As a neuroscientist, it appears obvious to me that deepening our understanding of how cultural participation affects our brain is not only of great importance in exploring the biological phenomena underpinning the mechanisms of human disease, but also in terms of improving supportive policies for the cultural and scientific sectors.

– **Luca F. Ticini FRSA, lecturer in Cognitive Neuroscience, University of Manchester**



LIMITS TO GROWTH?

Reading the article by Mariana Mazzucato (Issue 2, 2015) and finding many times the word 'growth' recommended, revealed a sad dupe of the 1% class for whom the word 'enough' has no relevance. Innovation, however smart, will never increase the finite resources of the planet we continue to heedlessly exploit. Worship of the market as a means to increase happiness for all citizens is an evident failure while poverty and homelessness increase. Growth, far from needing to be sustainable, needs to slow down if not cease before the air, land and water are polluted so much by manufacture that life is endangered.

The real change needed is to start putting the well-being of the many before the profit of the few. Capitalism is not working for the benefit of those who cannot afford the shiny new stuff on the market. We need to be spared from top-down 'techno-economic paradigms' in favour of bottom-up developments initiated in communities that know what they actually need for a satisfied life. Contentment does not come just from owning more stuff but from enjoying relationships with mutual caring. If this sounds like communism or anarchism, start by reading *Mutual Aid* by Peter Kropotkin. Bloody revolution is not a necessary consequence of these ideologies. It can be seen to lead merely to repressive dictatorships when people yearn for some stability.

– **Alun Rogers**

Please send us your thoughts on the *RSA Journal* by emailing editor@rsa.org.uk or writing to: Editor, *RSA Journal*, Wardour, 5th Floor, Drury House, 34–43 Russell Street, London WC2B 5HA.

HOW THE FRENCH THINK

14 July 2015

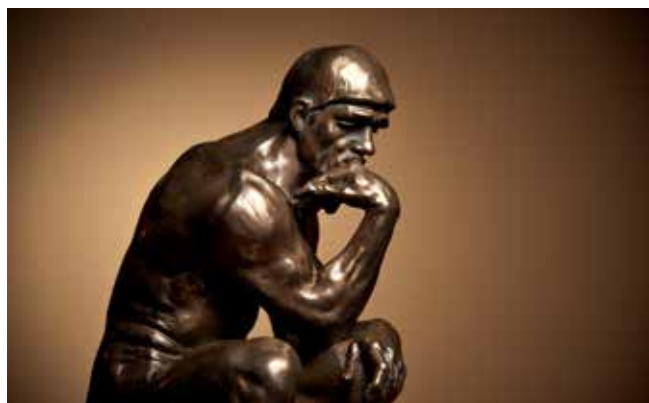


Sudhir Hazareesingh
analyses the history of French intellectualism

So, how do the French think? First, the French are very committed to rationalism, to the idea that reason is the defining feature of humankind. Then there is the love of general notions. You don't have to dig very deep into French thinking to find reference to overarching frameworks – modern French thought has produced many '-isms'. Beyond these is the deductive method: the idea that you start with a kind of general proposition and eventually work your way to a specific conclusion. The Brits typically do it the other way around: they start with something specific and use induction to work their way to a general conclusion. There's also a rebellious quality to French thought. Last but not least, there is universalism. The French classically, have thought of themselves as a people who don't just think for themselves, but for the world.

The legacy of the Enlightenment is very significant. Philosophers like Voltaire define French thought with this emphasis on rationalism, the attachment to these overarching framework and rebelliousness. Then, of course, there's the French Revolution. It shaped the way the French think about themselves in absolutely fundamental ways. It gives us what I call a 'political culture of generality' – everything about how the French think about themselves is defined in general abstract terms. So, you have the declaration of the rights of man and the citizen, an idea of citizenship that is framed around general principles; 'liberty, equality, fraternity', another example of how the French think about themselves through these abstract terms. The authorities then forged a certain idea of what it means to be French through the education system, using institutions like the *École normale*. Everybody doing the baccalaureate must take philosophy, for instance.

The strengths are almost self-evident to anyone who surveys French intellectual production over the past three centuries. The French have been extraordinarily creative and inventive, and like to see things in grand schemes. They aspire to provide what I call 'total explanations'. In Britain, most philosophers would say you can't provide a total explanation for anything. But the great philosophical schools of the 20th century saw themselves as providing total explanations. In Sartre's *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, he says: "My objective in writing this



treatise is to find out whether there is such a thing as truth in humankind." Truth in humankind. This is boldness at its best.

There are some weaknesses too. At its worst, universalism can result in an incapacity to see others except as a mirror of themselves. André Malraux, when he visited Mao tse Tung, said that the Chinese were the French of Asia. Deductive reasoning can lead to excessive abstraction while scepticism, a good thing if used in moderation, can ultimately be both philosophically and practically unproductive if applied to everything.

French thought has been in the doldrums since the late 20th century. The last heroic generation of great intellectuals, from Raymond Aron to Michel Foucault to Althusser to Roland Barthes all died. Gaullism and communism imploded more or less at the same time. The French have become increasingly worried about their social model – an interventionist welfare state that spends a lot on health and education and public infrastructure and they worry whether it will remain viable.

There are only two French people in *Time's* 2015 '100 Most Influential People' list. One was economist Thomas Piketty, the other was Marine Le Pen. It says something about the state of France today that the leader of the extreme right is regarded as one of the most influential people.

I think the way the French have approached multiculturalism highlights the pitfalls of some of their traditional patterns of thinking. They write about the status of their ethnic minorities without any kind of reference to empirical evidence – there are actually no reliable statistics about French ethnic minorities because it's illegal to collect statistics about ethnic minorities. It seems to me a basic principle of rational discussion is that the discussion should be based on facts, right? Scaremongering articles, particularly in the conservative press say: "Minorities don't speak French at home." They have no way of knowing because there's no solid sociological enquiry about this. The information is often based on fear and rumour.

There is an optimistic France. They tend to be younger, more educated, live in cities and have a buoyant outward-looking approach. I think that will grow over time. France still remains an intellectual nation, with a recognisable intellectual class. It's still a country that, for good or ill, reasons conceptually. ■

THE FUTURE OF GOOD FINANCE

29 September 2015



Anat Admati
explores how we
can rethink the
financial system

The top 100 corporations in the world by asset size are mostly financial institutions, according to *Forbes*. When conglomerates get very big, markets force them to break up. So why is it different for financial institutions?

For the bank, deposits are debt, but banks tend to forget that because depositors are such nice creditors, you'll never find anybody as nice as depositors. The CEO of my bank said to the *FT*, "We in the Wells Fargo Bank have a lot of retail deposits and therefore we don't have a lot of debt," he said. Huh? It's very telling that he could let that slip; he knows deposits sit on the liability side, but it doesn't feel to him like a debt because depositors don't behave like creditors. And there's the beginning of what's wrong. We make loans to the bank that they owe to us at any time we want. They lend it, take risks with it, go to the derivatives market, and so on.

What happens if they lose? Well, they'd better have some equity. Otherwise, they either take each other down because they're very connected contractually or simply fail at the same time because they took the same risks. So the whole system is failing. For corporations like Apple, it would mean default. But in banking, levels of equity have dramatically declined over the past 150 years. In the 19th century, banks were partnerships – 50% equity, 50% deposits – and the equity was owned by partners with unlimited liability. If the bank wouldn't pay depositors, the assets of the owners had to be used. That was how depositors could trust the banks – because the owner's money was on the line. Of course, they could only be very small and only certain people could own them, as they had to have enough of their own capital to put in. But now, they're limited liability corporations; they walk away from debt; they can buy and sell their stocks on the markets and so on.

Risk is not bad. In developing a new product, you have lots of false starts. You diversify the risk, fund it appropriately and when it doesn't work out, the world doesn't come to an end. It's absorbed by the investors who took the risk. However, risk in lending is not that risky a thing to do. Who bears the downside? We do. The reason debt is so attractive to bankers is because it allows them to pass on some of the cost and risks to other people. From society's perspective, it doesn't make sense



that the risk has takes that form, because few people actually benefit from the upside. As a result of high indebtedness and bad regulation, everything about the economy is distorted.

We need the system, but are we getting it at a reasonable price or are we overpaying in terms of excessive subsidies? They may throw a bone to some, but they take a lot off the top. Is the system too big for doing what we need for it to do, providing the services at a reasonable price or not and with reasonable risk to the rest of us, or is it a crazy system?

A financial crisis, especially this last one, usually is manmade. It's an implosion of a system, especially these days when they have so much support that liquidity problems are not the problem. The problem is different. It's an unsafe, really fragile system. It's a house of cards. The more you look at it and you really kind of try to see through it and you see what you don't see, it's opaque and incredibly risky. We're on borrowed time. ■

MORE FROM THE EVENTS PROGRAMME

Physicist **David Deutsch** and cosmologist Martin Rees explored optimism as a force for 21st century progress; renowned thinker **Robert Putnam** discussed inequality and the 'opportunity gap' for our annual Chairman's lecture; No 10 'nudge' guru **David Halpern** gave some fascinating insights into public policy and decision-making; Channel 4 economics editor **Paul Mason** spoke about a new, sustainable way forward for capitalism; economist **Martin Ford** spoke about the economics of technological change and rising unemployment; and a panel including **Maria Adebawale FRSA** and **Anastasia Knox** discussed the impact of non-tangible heritage in individual and community well-being.

For highlights of forthcoming events, **see page 9**

These highlights are just a small selection of recent RSA events. All of these, and many more, are available as videos on our popular YouTube channel: www.youtube.com/user/theRSAorg

Full national and regional events listings are available at www.thersa.org/events



Adventure is right on your doorstep – if you know how to plumb the depths

by Bradley L. Garrett

When we think about exploration, most of us envision long voyages at sea, sledges being dragged across ice sheets by weary men and women with chapped skin, or grainy images of battered mountaineers with frostbitten fingers. Less often do we consider the urban explorations of perambulators such as Iain Sinclair – who traced the M25, London’s outer-ring motorway, on foot – as journeys worthy of notation by venerated cultural institutions.

Yet these more parochial investigations, often lacking ostentatious climaxes or Guinness World Record entries, divulge fascinating details about the infrastructure of the city, wheeling out the behind-the-scenes machineries that make urban life possible and connecting us to urban heritage that might otherwise remain obscured. As a recreational trespasser, I have interloped into hundreds of abandoned buildings, subterranean infrastructural systems and construction sites to get a glimpse of the city in the city. I am infatuated with municipal excavation, the slow, fastidious and often circuitous unveiling of small stories otherwise overlooked.

I make my case in an unlikely place: the sewers of London. In the 19th century, when the Tube and sewers were first being excavated, public infrastructure captured imaginations, with the new sewers frequently in the media. Joseph Bazalgette, the engineer who guided the placement of the 318 million hand-laid bricks that frame their skeletal network, clearly valued public engagement. Maps, plans, photographs and illustrations of the construction often appeared in outlets such as the *Illustrated London News*. Citizens were also enticed to visit. In 1862, William Webster, one of Bazalgette’s sub-contractors, hosted a dinner party in the sewer to celebrate the completion of the Southern Outfall. In today’s metropolis, where public utilities seem fit only for material and conceptual burial, these kinds of stories have an air of fiction. That dearth of

BRADLEY L. GARRETT IS A SOCIAL GEOGRAPHER AND THE AUTHOR OF *EXPLORE EVERYTHING: PLACE-HACKING THE CITY*

participation, founded on a distrust of the public, leaves many of us feeling disinvested in the city where we live and work.

Where participation is not offered, we urban explorers simply make our own way in. Week after week, teams of trespassers check weather reports carefully and then pop manholes to walk the hidden pipes of London. The enigmatic names of these old waterways – the Neckinger, the Walbrook, the Westbourne, the Effra – haunt the city through their absence at street level. Below, their spectral patina is expelled by our torches bouncing off the ornate 150-year-old subterranean archways and junctions. In the River Tyburn, I stood underneath Buckingham Palace, the faecal flow pinning my fishing waders to my legs. I could not help but imagine the stream from thousands of bodies flowing past us, all notions of class, race and gender rendered moot in the murky grey wash.

Exploring sewers is an admittedly odd, and perhaps for some slightly deranged, way to spend a weekend. However, the undercity is, for me, both an underappreciated wilderness of connectivity and site of hidden heritage ripe for rediscovery. Sewers, like construction sites and abandoned buildings, are places of solace where explorers can run wild off the map. Those feelings of freedom and escape are often also noted by more traditional explorers of wild places. Perhaps in that light, our desire to trespass everywhere we travel, whether in London, Phnom Penh or Las Vegas, is primarily grounded in a quest for agency that often eludes us as we age and become incrementally overburdened by responsibilities and social expectations. Perhaps exploration in all its forms, from icy peaks to smoggy slipways to sub-urban tunnel networks, are always journeys of rediscovery, as much about our own latent desires to feel connected to places as about claiming victory over the landscape or cataloguing the urban unsung. Exploration as a concept closer to home, a state of mind rather than a bucket list of achievements, accessible without need of a passport or plane ticket, is one path towards recreating the city as a place of play and participation rather than of fear and distrust. ■

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