Beyond the red line: are universities re-imagining cities and urban life through their capital investment programmes?

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Architecture of capital 1: atmospheres and practices

Dr Clare Melhuish
UCL Urban Laboratory, London
Dialogue Campus Näckrosen
University of Gothenburg, Sweden, 2013
‘The University’s broad range of activities are characterised by a strong sense of civic responsibility, proximity to city life and openness to the surrounding society. The University is firmly rooted both locally and regionally, at the same time as research, education and cooperation are characterised by extensive global engagement… People from different places and with different backgrounds will meet and work together, yielding outcomes that will exceed the mere sums of the parts… [it will be] A place for the unexpected…, accepting and welcoming… easy to access and a place that people do not want to leave… integrated into the city structure’
UCL Wilkins Building
London (1827)
William Wilkins in
Partnership with
J.P. Gandy-Deering

‘half-brother to the
National Gallery’
(Reginald Turnor)

• universities as landowners and clients in formal
histories of architecture

• universities as actors in architectural realisation of
hegemonic power structures: nationalist agendas
postcolonial urban practice

- formal/informal architectural production

- postcolonial practice disrupting models ‘that parade under a universalist guise and either exclude or repress different spatialities of often disadvantaged ethnicities, communities or people’

(Nalbantoglu and Wong 1997)
‘laboratories of the urban mangrove’ (Letchimy)
universities as agents of postcolonial urbanism and architectural practice

national identity

- global identity
- urban/metropolitan identity

cosmopolitanist vision

universities re-visionsing themselves in relation to cities and neighbourhoods – ‘beyond the red line’
‘the business schools that arose in prestigious universities such as Stanford and Harvard, generously funded by corporations and foundations, became centres of neoliberal orthodoxy from the very moment they opened. ...by 1990 or so most economics departments in the major research universities as well as the business schools were dominated by neoliberal modes of thought. ...The US research universities were and are training grounds for many foreigners who take what they learn back to their countries of origin as well as into international institutions such as the IMF, the World Bank, and the UN’.

(Harvey 2005)
• universities as planning animateurs (Benneworth et al 2010)

• shift from urban/civic to neighbourhood scale and focus

• alternative hybrid practices of formal and informal architectural production which disrupt the status quo
universities as centres of critical urban theory and practice: *laboratories of the urban mangrove?*

‘Today’s cosmopolitanism, however, extends more deeply into the social body. The pluralized culture of the university resembles the complex life of contemporary immigrant neighborhoods, where residents live in local urban neighborhoods and diasporic networks... The challenge for us as contemporary metropolitans (and cosmopolitans) is to locate ourselves – both in time and in relation to the places of local knowledge – in such a global perspective’

(Bender 2002/7: 162-163)
• institutional re-structuring

• modelling of new hybrid kinds of urban and public space

• from comparability and homogenization of space, to grounded relational typologies of university-led urban development, mediated by architects and communities
élite universal knowledge production - utopian and exclusionary spatial projects

The Academical Village, University of Virginia
Thomas Jefferson 1825

‘incomparably the most ambitious and monumental architectural project... conceived in this century’
New York Times 1895
non-campus campus; living laboratory; urban extension; communiversity; collaboratory...

‘the concept of the possible’

‘Both express the basic paradigm of modernity which emphasises that alternative futures are indeed possible. But the insurgent and the modernist are competing expressions, which I will distinguish as ethnographic and utopian, respectively’

(Holston 1996)
ethnographically-conceptualised spatialisation of cosmopolitanism and cosmopolitan citizenship

- re-framing notions of citizenship as a ‘cosmopolitan project’ (Binnie et al 2006) – ‘the world as both a single place and one comprised of multiple differences’ (ibid) – through spatial development itself

- challenging the model of postcolonial citizenship embodied in elite urban enclaves
• vision statements and masterplanning briefs as the **material interface between the university and the postcolonial city** through urban design

• urban design practice creates the space in which issues of **centrality, diversity and inclusion** are played out in rhetoric, design proposals and material form
1. new imagery and languages

2. wide range of partnerships and consultation, within and beyond university

3. integrated community facilities, resources and connected, accessible public space

4. masterplans v. roll-outs

5. interim uses of development sites
University of Cambridge, North-West Cambridge project, UK

‘a vibrant, urban extension to the City that predominates as a University quarter but is also a mixed academic and residential community ... connected internally and with the wider city by green spaces and pedestrian and cycle routes ... It will be an exemplar of what can be achieved through contemporary technology, architecture, and urban planning’

(Cambridge University Reporter 2010:3)
‘That’s how we’ve been developing this, looking for spatial structures around the buildings which encourage people to interact’ (architect 2014)
UNIFESP East Zone campus, Sao Paulo Brazil

‘The façade is a symbolic representation of university-society dialogue. There is tremendous potential for the campus to take part in its surroundings, to interact through research, reflection and actions, making a positive contribution to the development of the region and linking academic research with various public policies. Its location... allows its actions and local research to also have an exemplary and universal character in joining the global debate about large cities, their problems and solutions’
‘a model of integration – integration at several levels, between academics, researchers, business people, and members of the public’

‘The social dynamics on that site will be interesting...’

Science Central Engagement Manager
‘Today Penn celebrates its ongoing transformation into a world-class urban research university that is nourished by the neighborhood it helped to develop and revitalise’
(Rodin 2007: 182-3)
Columbia University, Manhattanville campus, New York USA

‘An urban campus isn’t defined by gates and walls, but by weaving the university into the fabric of city life’ (Manhattanville website)
‘to create a space where the Ivy League and West Harlem communities can share their day-to-day activities and thereby engage in a dialogue that will further human understanding’ (Huffman 2008)
‘The new campus will be a place of research and knowledge production integrated with the city, in close contact with its social reality, street culture and energy …’ (Renzo Piano Building Workshop)
universities are:

2. entering into a wide range of partnerships

• city authorities, businesses, third sector organisations, and community groups

• consultation at many different levels, external, long-term engagement and negotiation with planning authorities and communities

• architects appointed on basis of ability to engage with stakeholders and develop participatory working methods
3. incorporating community facilities and resources into spatial development projects

• public access to (public-facing) university buildings; health centres, schools (U Penn), (jointly-managed) community centres (eg Cambridge), open, accessible and connected public spaces

• widening participation, life-long learning

• community benefits agreements
4. questioning the use of rigid masterplan concepts

- the ‘roll-out’ acknowledges the importance of evolving form over time, responsive and adaptive to changing needs

- avoids over-promising, in light of changing needs and conditions
5. promoting interim uses of development sites

• encourage temporary and informal uses to promote future models of community occupation and ownership

• community gardens, temporary structures, festivals, public art, events, markets, information centres
community investment over time, and from the earliest stages

- frame university contributions to postcolonial cosmopolitan urban space and citizenship *through the lens of community needs*

- promote a hybrid approach to development, and a flexible architectural and planning model, allowing the formal and informal to co-exist and evolve over time, making space for diverse identities
CASE STUDIES IN UNIVERSITY-LED URBAN REGENERATION

Clare Melhuish
UCL Urban Laboratory
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clare.melhuish@ucl.ac.uk