Building Legible Cities

Andrew Kelly

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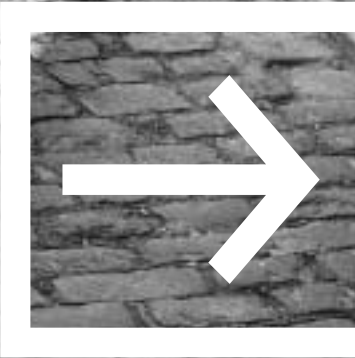
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BRISTOL CITY COUNCIL

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Building Legible Cities
Andrew Kelly

Bristol Cultural
Development Partnership
Bristol, 2001

Bristol street scene circa 1950s

Bristol street scene circa 1950

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We live in a global economy. As a result, cities have to rethink how they present themselves, both to their existing residents, businesses and visitors, and to the outside world.

Cities are back. The launch of the Urban White Paper in late 2000 – the first in over two decades – builds on the growing realisation that cities are good places to live in as well as visit and enjoy. We are in a time of potential renaissance, one in which our cities and urban areas could become the centres for living, working, culture and enjoyment that characterise leading European and North American cities. But this hope comes after years of decline, poor investment in public services and facilities, and government apathy. A White Paper, however welcome, is only the start; much more important, though much more difficult, is delivery. Motivation is one

problem; funding another. Yet another is the ingenuity gap – the problem of not knowing *how* to create and sustain a renaissance.

There are wider issues. We live in a global economy. As a result, cities have to rethink how they present themselves, both to their existing residents, businesses and visitors, and to the outside world. For cities to appear on the map of the 21st century they need to focus on how they communicate, and how they can trade on their differences. Successful cities will be those that connect people, movement and places efficiently. They will be engaging, welcoming, accessible and easily understood.

At-Bristol

BLC project development

To do this requires partnership between all who live and work in the city – a complex but essential task. It needs a learning city – one that seeks to learn from its past, understand more about the values and views of citizens, businesses and visitors, and change as a result. And renewal should be inclusive, with the involvement of all people affected. In launching the Urban White Paper, Secretary of State John Prescott said: 'A clear message from regeneration projects over the last 20 years is that local people must be fully engaged from the outset. All too often this has not been the case.' The old days – described by one Liverpool community leader as 'when we want your opinion we'll tell you what it is' – are gone, thankfully.

In fact, many British cities have started already on their urban renaissance. The renewal of Glasgow, Manchester, Leeds, Birmingham, and Newcastle show what is possible. As does Bristol. The city is changing rapidly. New visitor attractions, mixed use dockside developments, old office blocks being transformed into apartments, redundant warehouses becoming artists' studios all show the rising of a new Bristol. Major developments at Harbourside, Broadmead, Temple Quay, College Green and Queen Square are creating new office, housing, leisure, culture and education centres.

But Bristol, like many cities, still faces problems that are a legacy of the past and that arise from new prosperity. In meeting current problems, and in grasping the opportunities of the future, cities need to address key questions.
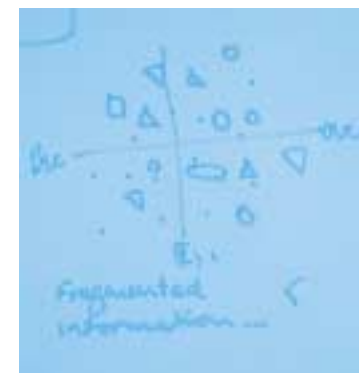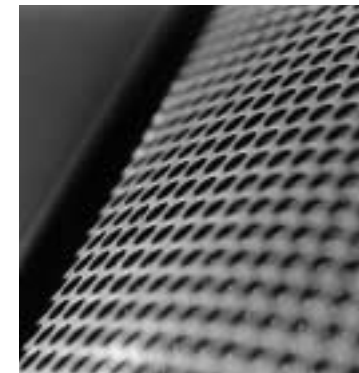
BLC project development

How can cities be made more understandable and enjoyable?

How can cities communicate more effectively with their users, providing simple yet comprehensive information?

How can transport be improved, whilst maximizing the experience of cities for all?

What is the role of partnership in connecting city structures, organizations and attractions – and how are partners found, enrolled and managed?

What is the role of design, branding and public art in the 21st century city?

Can new approaches to art and design help residents and visitors understand the history of the city more and help them enjoy the contemporary city better?

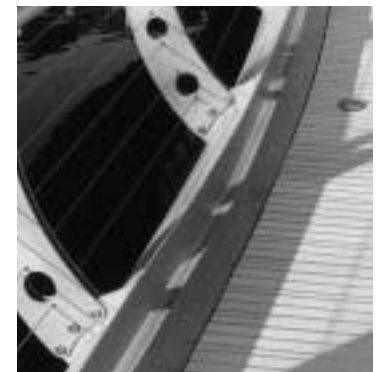What does "place" mean in the digital economy?

Above all, cities have to look to the long-term, promote and manage change in the short-term, and make this change stick. Too often, cities are sacrificed on the altars of short-term electoral cycles and the bottom line of companies. Always at the forefront of thinking should be the most important stakeholders of all – those too young to be participating now, and those not yet born. Cities should be aiming to achieve what John Ruskin said. 'Let it not be for present delight, nor for present use alone. Let it be such work as our descendants will thank us for, and let us think . . . that a time is to come when . . . men will say, *"See! this our fathers did for us."*'[1] This is a responsibility for all – but a special responsibility lies with local government. As New York's Mayor Rudolph Giuliani said in November 2000 supporting the proposed new Guggenheim museum in New York: 'Civic leaders have a responsibility to leave cities far greater and more beautiful than [they] were transmitted to us.'

Bristol Legible City (BLC) aims to answer some of these questions to help connect people with places in Bristol's desire to develop into a leading European city. This essay reports on the BLC project so far. It looks at the origins of BLC; the philosophy of the project and its key influences; the creation and management of legible cities; and the future. Though the main lessons are drawn from the Bristol experience, these are applicable to many British towns and cities. It is, necessarily, a report of work-in-progress. As a long-term project, where the creative process itself is a journey of discovery, just as we hope the user of BLC will be on a journey of discovery in Bristol, BLC will change and evolve, in many cases deliberately so, in the years to come. However it turns out, success will be due to the vision established from the start, the time and resources allocated to research and development, and the commitment to quality throughout.

BLC project development

Valentine Bridge

Building New Cities and a New Bristol

The Orange Imaginarium

Building New Cities
and a New Bristol

Bristol as a person was Michael Palin -
quirky but classy; an explorer; distinguished
but with an edge.

Legible cities aim to improve peoples' understanding, experience and enjoyment of the city. The concept is simple – the right message at the right time. Integrating information, identity and arts projects, legible cities link users to destinations in a complete movement and information system. Whether a tourist trying to find a hotel, someone with a business appointment to keep, a filmgoer on their way to the cinema, a cyclist going to the shops, or an occasional ferry user, legible cities aim to take the user into account at every step. Easy information benefits business, transport, culture, tourism and, most importantly, the people of the city. Making connections can also help achieve wider social, economic and cultural benefits and promote civic pride.

The Challenges Facing Cities
So what are the threats and challenges that legible cities need to meet and overcome? What can they do, and what are they not able to do, to help build a new future for a city? In a global economy, following decades of under investment and indifference, cities face many challenges. This is not just about the need to improve public transport, and discourage private car use; nor is it simply about economic regeneration. Cities operate within complex political, social, economic and cultural frameworks in a time of major urban change, a revolution in information provision and distribution, and

increased competition for business location, tourists, and cultural facilities. For cities to develop, not just as regional centres, but on the national and international scale, they need to become culturally vibrant; share prosperity through re-engaging disadvantaged communities; promote and welcome knowledge-based industries; and renew neighbourhoods. To do this needs leadership, motivation, partnership and an acceptance of the world role of cities. It needs also the promotion of business, the development of good schools and good public transport which is accessible to jobs, cheap work space, safety and security, and decent public spaces. It needs funding, though this is often achieved only through competition. So cities need to be adept marketers as well.

The market creates much activity in city regeneration. But there are clear tasks of management for public bodies and local authorities including co-ordination and attracting investment. Most are in agreement on what these are. The Brookings Institution report, *10 Steps to a Living Downtown*, calls for 24 hour centres that are accessible, safe and clean; with new housing and the renewal of older buildings; and new and improved regional facilities. There should also be streamlined regulations, and the centre should be surrounded by viable neighbourhoods. Finally, downtowns need to be legible.[2] American thinking on cities is echoed in recent British government initiatives on urban renaissance, the Urban White Paper, and the commitment to quality in urban design with the Better Public Buildings Group, amongst others.

Another Brookings report, this time on the new economy, found 10 factors for successful cities in the digital age. The city and its place in the region need to be understood and the competitive advantage held by the city should be identified. Skill shortages mean that there is a constant need to invest in human capital. Cities need also a research and development infrastructure and good physical capital. Quality of life is paramount if new industries, companies and entrepreneurs are to want to come to the city. Companies need straightforward planning permission procedures and good public

services. There is a need for seed and venture capital, and support programmes for entrepreneurs – whether they are ones dealing in the social, public or private sectors. Finally, it is essential that public and not-for-profit organizations are operating effectively and therefore should be using information technology fully.[3]

Cities that meet these challenges will be the prosperous world cities of the future.

The Challenges and Opportunities Facing Bristol
So, why does Bristol need to become legible? Bristol is a leading British city, the (unstated) capital of the South West, a regional centre for leisure, culture, business, health, education and a gateway to major tourism destinations as well as being a significant tourist centre in its own right. Bristol faces a number of problems, however, in relation to city form and design – and also image and public engagement – that make BLC relevant. Some of these problems are historical, some can be anticipated. A few are unique to Bristol, though most urban areas face similar challenges. Some are the results of planning failure locally; most result from planning failure nationally. BLC is therefore essential to Bristol because it helps reconnect the components of the city, contributes to the creation of future investment, and positions the city at the forefront of government urban thinking on how the cities of the future can succeed.

Bristol is a historically important city (it was Britain's second city before the industrial revolution) defined by its rivers, harbour and bridge crossings. Its major routes have been built up over time, based though, on the needs of the horse and cart. The bombing attacks the city suffered in the Second World War destroyed much of the central historic fabric of the city, though the road network survived. Post-war planning and development saw the destruction of traditional neighbourhoods with the construction of an inner circuit bypass and generally poor quality development especially in areas of the public realm outside the city centre spaces. More recently, the growth of

out-of-town shopping and fringe office developments threatened to destroy Bristol's retail and business centres.

The legacy is compounded by difficulties with Bristol's public transport. Temple Meads train station is based approximately one mile from the main centre with poor linkages to the city and only limited signage there and throughout the city. The bus and coach station, though located more centrally, offers little information to users. Much of the post-war signage that does exist is redundant (removal of duplication and reduction of clutter has been a key principle in BLC - between 30-40 per cent of existing signage is unnecessary). Generally, private transport use is high. The problems caused by traffic, pollution and poor public transport are three of the top four worst aspects of life in the city according to its residents. Bristol City Council is keen to encourage people to leave their cars and strongly promotes walking, cycling and greater use of public transport. However, it is accepted that journeys have to be made safer and easier and the pedestrian environment improved, if people are to be encouraged to use alternatives to the car. BLC attempts to do this. It is one of the priorities of Bristol City Council and its partners for the next 10 years.

There is the additional problem of too much information, but often not the right information, and information that is badly planned and designed, inconsistent and of poor quality. Cities generate a fog of content overload – tourist books, timetables, maps, road signs, pedestrian guides and advertisements. Too much, and too much that is inappropriate, out of date and inaccurate. The World Wide Web has provided us with a richness of information, and cost effective ways of booking tickets and accommodation. This is of little use, though, if the road signs are confusing, there are no maps in the car parks (which are difficult to find anyway) and there are only damaged signs pointing the way to the desired venue. Though there have been improvements in some vehicular signage in recent years, most signs in city centres need renewal. Lack of action generally on cities and their connections is one of the legacies of the last government's attitude to urban areas.

'Speaking personally, on a project dedicated to "making the city easy to get around, promoting integrated and seamless journeys, encouraging discovery, giving reassurance", I have frequently lost my way, gone round in circles, ended up frustrated in cul de sacs, and I have been lost more times than I care to admit. And then on the positive side, I have occasionally meandered off the beaten track on purpose and enjoyed the diversion . . .'

Colin Pearce

As a result, Bristol has no clear visual identity to bind all its disparate parts together. Almost everyone has a story about their first arrival in Bristol - no maps, no bus information, little guidance offered in advance. Most love the city, but find it difficult to understand, and even now difficult to explain. For visitors, there is little on-street guidance, and not much sign of welcome. This does not help them see what the city has to offer and means that they may not come back. Bristol's retailers, attractions, leisure and cultural facilities all suffer as a result.

A personal note is justified here. Prior to coming to work in the city, I had travelled to Bristol twice: once by bus, once by train and both for a day. On each occasion, I arrived in a city I longed to explore, but found impossible to discover in the time available. The one map at the train station told me how to get into the city centre by bicycle (useful, but not enough); there were no pedestrian signs – not even one to the tourist information centre (normally the first port of call for the traveller); and the bus system was confusing.

As a result, I missed much. After seven years, I still encounter confusion – even though serendipitous discovery remains one of the delights of city-going – whether it be finding a new place, or giving advice to a lost motorist asking that impossible to answer question in Bristol 'where is the centre?' (there are four, at least). It is not a question of there being no there, there, as Gertrude Stein said famously about the lack of experience of place in Oakland; Bristol has much, often too much. The issue is that there is no *information* there. And the problems go on. A new tourist information centre in the prime cultural attraction of Harbourside opened in 2000 without a sign on the building itself though BLC is rectifying this.

This is a problem found also by Colin Pearce, the BLC launch artist in both working in Bristol and as an artist. 'Speaking personally, on a project dedicated to "making the city easy to get around, promoting integrated and seamless journeys, encouraging discovery, giving reassurance", I have frequently lost my way, gone round in circles,

ended up frustrated in cul de sacs, and I have been lost more times than I care to admit. And then on the positive side, I have occasionally meandered off the beaten track on purpose and enjoyed the diversion . . .' He wrote a poem about this experience – *It's About Knowledge:*

The Finns say you walk through your problems

And presumably see your own footsteps in the Arctic Snow

accusingly, giving evidence of travelling in circles.

My mind turned off

As somewhere near an ancient bell tolled

Deep and sombre, like an old buried river

It's about knowledge, it's not something you're

suddenly bathed in

It seeps in, gradually.

BLC is not just about solving problems. It is also about providing a basis for future change. After many years of parochialism, Bristol is now a confident city wishing to see new cultural facilities, increased tourism, greater use of an eventually integrated public transport system with, overall, a better quality of life for all. The city is changing rapidly. New cultural facilities have been built – though still not the range required for the city's aspirations – and people are flooding back to live in the city centre, often in refurbished office blocks, or new-build apartments on brownfield sites.

It is also pioneering new methods of public consultation and stakeholder engagement using referenda, citizens' panels and focus groups on a wide range of issues. Bristol City Council, for example, has been involved in a programme of citywide consultation in relation to the contentious Canons Marsh project, which has probably rescued the development. BLC is a new attempt to engage a wide public about movement and information.

Finally, Bristol has a good record of partnership working between public, private and voluntary sectors. A major factor in changing Bristol was the formation of The Bristol Initiative in 1990, bringing together civic leaders, business, and voluntary sector representatives in an informal partnership. This has promoted networking and collaboration and made all sides better aware of the challenges faced by each other as well as promoting joint working. Such knowledge clusters build social capital and trust in the long-term, and have been essential in facilitating and promoting the creative thinking needed for building BLC.

Bristol is a boom city, approaching full employment. This brings its own problems: increased car use, limited parking, new office developments, high cost of housing. Some might argue that now is the time to do nothing and enjoy the economic benefits of boom. But action is needed, not only to ensure that the benefits of boom are felt by all, in the long-term, but also that boom does not induce complacency. Bristol needs to position itself for a future that is not definable with any certainty.

Business leaders in the region back the need for the first phases of BLC. Over 70 per cent find navigating around the city difficult or very difficult. Just under half see road signs as either poor or very poor with 39 per cent describing pedestrian signs as poor or very poor. Recent changes to the city centre prompted most criticism with 45 per cent citing problems understanding new route signage. The same amount criticised signage that petered out. 27 per cent said that there is a lack of road and pedestrian signs in some areas, whilst another nine per cent found them dirty and difficult to read.

In terms of improvements, most respondents favoured the use of on-street maps at key locations (76 per cent) and better designed road signs (64 per cent). There was support also for more public transport information (40 per cent), hand-held maps for visitors (36 per cent), on-street computer consoles (32 per cent), greater use of art to direct and inform visitors (28 per cent), use of electronic overhead road signs (24 per cent), and on-street information helpers (12 per cent). Only four per cent felt that fewer signs would be useful.

30 per cent called for greater promotion of the campaign. This is not surprising when 48 per cent were unaware of BLC and another 48 per cent had only a vague awareness of the project. An advocacy campaign is therefore needed, internally in the organizations concerned, and with other stakeholders.[4]

So as Bristol, in common with other cities, seeks a new and confident future, it needs a renaissance of the urban core to fulfil its role as a regional capital, and take advantage of the growth in the leisure, cultural and tourism industries. But it has to find innovative solutions to old problems, identify better the needs of the city in the future, and promote greater strategic marketing, in particular consistent messages, about the city. For all these reasons, BLC is a timely, if not overdue project.

Building Legible Cities

How did BLC start? The genesis goes back to 1993 when the first report on a pedestrian system for Bristol was published. Little happened for some years. The inspiration for BLC came from Mike Rawlinson, then a city council planner, later a consultant (he now runs City ID – consultants to Bristol City Council and lead designers responsible for the creative direction and project coordination of Bristol Legible City).

There have been – and continue to be – many influences and inspirations behind BLC, including people, projects and products. Inspiration generally has come from the diverse fields of environmental graphics, social geography, environmental psychology, and information planning and design theory. The notion of city districts pioneered in Birmingham, Miami and New Orleans, though related more to tourism and heritage, prompted thinking on sub-dividing the city into neighbourhoods. Equally as significant were Gillespie's work on public realm strategy in Glasgow and Francis Tibbalds' projects in Birmingham together with the work there of the urban design team in renewing Victoria and Centenary Squares. Common Ground's advocacy about understanding the importance of local distinctiveness in place making has also proved significant as has work by urban artists in promoting a sense of place.

Harbourside

Individuals have also proved influential, especially those who have identified and delivered innovative solutions to information planning and design. Franck Pick's guiding hand at London Transport, Erik Spiekermann's work in Berlin, Gordon Cullen's advocacy of quality in public spaces and Per Mollerup's emphasis on the importance of information design, amongst others, have contributed much to the project. Perhaps more than anyone, though, it is Kevin Lynch who provided the analytical tools for the initial development of BLC.

Lynch (1918-1984) has been called the 'leading environmental design theorist of our time'.[5] He has influenced BLC not just in what he wrote about and practiced (he was concerned equally with both) but also how he went about his work. Whether it was his vision for legibility and imageability in cities, the clear way he articulated his research, or the emphasis he placed on ensuring that the needs and values of the users of cities were paramount, his contribution to BLC has been profound. This is not the place for a full account of his work - he provides that better in his writings. It is worth a short note, however, to set BLC in context first by looking at Lynch generally, and then specifically at his work on legibility, before looking at the Bristol project.

For Lynch a city was ideally 'a work of art, fitted to human purpose.'[6] In a range of books, articles, reports, and consultancy documents, he looked at how people perceive and evaluate their environments. He was interested especially in the *experiential* factors of a place – the sensuous qualities, or simply sense. The subject range he covered was immense – from general theories of city design in history and the present day, to children in the city, the planning of open spaces, the city as an environment for development, stimulation and education, and transport. One article covered 'sensuous criteria for highway design'. He even wrote a series of papers on the city after nuclear attack, to invest rationality into the US President's then fixation with the potential of a limited nuclear war.

In his teaching, but also in his work, he ensured that the right questions were asked. He was concerned primarily with *substantive* clients – present and future users of a place, rather than with nominal clients of a project. He believed that people, not designers, made places successful. Though he appreciated the work of experts, he found their hold over city design aesthetics was not helpful and failed to promote public debate.

In a memorial speech, one of Lynch's colleagues said he was 'a brilliant and subtle designer, always looking for those few simple strokes which would both give form to a place and open it to the creativity of its users.'[7] Much of his work was influenced by his reading in the humanities, a progressive school education, his apprenticeship to Frank Lloyd Wright (when he saw 'the world for the first time'), and personal observation of cities. He concluded that planners and designers had failed cities. Preoccupied with major civic structures and small spaces, they failed to see the bigger picture in the city and regional form. They were also poor at involving users. In his last speech, *Localities*, he said that though the most successful places were loved and owned by people, and had a bond of community and place, most planners were not successful in creating this due to time, expense, lack of training, will and fear. But successful planning and design, he believed, needed local control, engagement by individuals and community participation.

He was able to rethink cities anew. There are three theories in city design (a term he favoured over urban design). *Planning* or *decision theory* covered the complex decisions determining city development. *Functional theories* attempted to explain the organization of cities in terms of spatial structures and dynamics. *Normative theories* analysed and interpreted the connections between settlement forms and human values. They were about looking at what a city *should* be.

Lynch started with planning theory, but found much of the literature pointless, 'outstanding for its stupefying dullness'[8]. He found that functional theory overall failed to help design and planning. But it

also could not solve the fundamental problems of modern cities – promoting quality of life for all; developing individuals; overcoming resistance to spontaneity and social change. Lynch preferred to 'make the environment conceivable to the "man in the street," as a prerequisite for intelligent and enjoyable behavior in the street.'[9] As a result, a legible city can have a profound impact. 'Legible structure has an obvious value in facilitating the practical tasks of way-finding and cognition but it has other values as well' he argued:

It can be a source of emotional security, and one basis for a sense of self-identity and or relation to society. It can support civic pride and social cohesion, and be a means of extending one's knowledge of the world. It confers the esthetic pleasure of sensing the relatedness of a complex thing, a pleasure vividly experienced by many people when they see a great city panorama before them.[10]

He added: 'The landscape can orient its inhabitants to the past, to the cyclical rhythms of the present, and even to the hopes and dangers of the future.'[11]

He moved eventually to the normative approach. Lynch was interested not just in *how* a modern city works; he was concerned about how a city should work for human beings. For Lynch, values were critical – engagement, freedom, justice, control, learning, creativity, access, continuity, adaptability, meaning, health, survival, growth, development, beauty, choice, participation, comfort and stimulus. Values were also essential to making city design sustainable and adaptable for future demands. He wrote in *Good City Form*:

The linkages of very general aims to city form are usually incalculable. Low-level goals and solutions, on the other hand, are too restrictive in their means and too unthinking of their purposes. In this dilemma, it seems appropriate to emphasize the aims in between, that is, those goals which are as general as possible, and thus do not dictate particular physical solutions, and yet whose achievement can be detected and explicitly linked to physical solutions . . . . performance characteristics of this kind might be a foundation on which to build a general normative theory about cities. Developing a limited and yet general set of them, which as far as possible embraces all the important issues of form, will now be our aim. This will be our alternative to the dogmatic norms that customarily guide discussions about the goodness of cities.[12]

Much of his work was concerned with the imageability, or legibility, of a city. Though this was not the only important part of a 'beautiful environment'[13] – other properties included stimulus, choice, meaning and sensuous delight - using legibility helped all users of cities understand the urban environment in its complexity and size. Like much of his work, Lynch was concerned with the city as 'perceived by its inhabitants'[14] and not just the city form itself. For Lynch, city design is complex. 'At every instant,' he wrote, 'there is more than the eye can see, more than the ear can hear, a setting or a view waiting to be explored. Nothing is experienced by itself, but always in relation to its surroundings, the sequences of events leading up to it, the memory of past experiences.'[15]

Lynch admitted that the legibility concept needed refining and definition was – perhaps in its more visionary outcomes, such as its contribution to beauty – difficult, especially in large urban areas. It was also something that he saw as being in continuous development. Yet, at its basis, legibility is a simple notion – that 'a city whose

layout can be understood, or whose history is visible, is better than one that is chaotic or has destroyed its past.'[16] In *The Image of the City*, based on a detailed study of New Jersey, Boston and Los Angeles, Lynch talked about clarity or legibility of the cityscape: 'By this', he said, 'we mean the ease with which its parts can be recognized and can be organized into a coherent pattern. Just as this printed page, if it is legible, can be visually grasped as a related pattern of recognizable symbols, so a legible city would be one whose districts or landmarks or pathways are easily identifiable and are easily grouped into an over-all pattern.'[17] As ever, it was the individual experience that counted – people had to perceive and conceive the city easily, if they were to use the city efficiently.

Few cities – or even parts of cities – achieved this. Lynch perhaps had his doubts whether any could, calling his approach a fantasy at one point (tongue-in-cheek, no doubt). Building on work in the arts, Lynch talked further about the imageablity or legibility of a city. This would 'seem well-formed, distinct, remarkable; it would invite the eye and the ear to greater attention and participation.' He added, 'The sensuous grasp upon such surroundings would not merely be simplified, but also extended and deepened. Such a city would be one that could be apprehended over time as a pattern of high continuity with many distinctive parts clearly interconnected. The perceptive and familiar observer could absorb new sensuous impacts without disruption of his basic image, and each new impact would touch upon many previous elements. He would be well oriented, and he could move easily. He would be highly aware of his environment.'[18] As examples of this 'highly imageable environment', Lynch gave parts of Manhattan, Boston, San Francisco, the Chicago lakefront and Venice.

Lynch said that there is no great mystery in wayfinding, and that few got completely lost in a city - street signs and maps, amongst other tools, meant most can find their way. When disorientation does occur, however, it leads to fear, sometimes terror, and loss of confidence. But however important orientation is, Lynch felt that there was more to legibility than simply an avoidance of being lost.

The *positive* values of legible surroundings include 'the emotional satisfaction, the framework for communication or conceptual organization, the new depths that it may bring to everyday experience.'[19] This does not remove the joy of haphazard walking and surprise in a city but 'Complete chaos without hint of connection is never pleasurable.'[20]

Lynch identified three components in analysing an environmental image: identity, structure and meaning. Identity is the object, distinct from others, a separate entity. Structure is 'the spatial or pattern relation of the object to the observer and to other objects.'[21] Meaning is the emotional or practical feeling the observer has to the object. As meaning is very much up to the observer – and as Lynch wanted to look specifically at cities that were designed to appeal to large numbers of different people, and be adaptable to change – he looked at identity and structure. He gave an example of a journey:

If an image is to have value for orientation in the living space, it must have several qualities. It must be sufficient, true in a pragmatic sense, allowing the individual to operate within his environment to the extent desired. The map, whether exact or not, must be good enough to get one home. It must be sufficiently clear and well integrated to be economical of mental effort: the map must be readable. It should be safe, with a surplus of clues so that alternative actions are possible and the risk of failure is not too high. If a blinking light is the only sign for a critical turn, a power failure may cause disaster. The image should preferably be open-ended, adaptable to change, allowing the individual to continue to investigate and organize reality: there should be blank spaces where he can extend the drawing for himself. Finally, it should in some measure be communicable to other individuals.[22]

He had five criteria for legibility. First, the region might have 'vivid differentiated elements'[23] but these are organized legibly so, for example, the main metropolitan elements can be understood by the majority of adults. Secondly, the image can be investigated and understood at detailed levels, as well as at the more general level. Thirdly, the image should be able to be seen differently by different people, dependent on their interests and experience. Fourthly, it has

to be adaptable, so that change to circulation systems (from rail to flight; from people movement to electronic communication) would not destroy the image. Fifthly, the image has to be able to be associated with functional and social organizations. Linked to this are accessibility – low cost movement/communication; adequacy – enough quality roads, schools, shops, factories; diversity – a varied range of activities and facilities; adaptability; and comfort – low stress in terms of climate, pollution, noise and communication.[24]

Lynch looked particularly at what he called the "public images", held by most of a city's inhabitants. These included abstract and fixed directional systems, moving systems and those directed to the person, the home, or the sea. He said that there were five elements of city images: paths, edges, districts, nodes and landmarks. Paths are where the observer moves (streets, canals, roads, rail). Edges are also linear elements but not considered as paths. These might be cuts, shores, edges of development. Large-to-medium parts of cities are districts that can be said to have common identity. Nodes are the strategic points into a city where the observer can enter, including crossings, junctions, breaks in transportation. Landmarks are external points of reference, mountains, buildings, signs and stores.

This is not an argument for uniformity. Lynch said: 'Different groups will search for different clues which they wish to link together: work places, historic spots, or specialty shops, for example.' He added 'Yet certain elements will be crucial to almost all of them: the main system of circulation, the basic functional and social areas, the principal centers of activity and of symbolic value, the historic points, the physical site, and the major open spaces.'[25]

Lynch remains important and, arguably, has been waiting to be rediscovered. Though few of his ideas have been implemented in totality in the contemporary city, they remain critical to the future development of viable and livable cities. His legacy is that his work has been a continual source of inspiration for subsequent generations of city readers. Legibility continues to infect aspirational city thinking.

→ Bristol Legible City

Lynch argued for a place that could be understood easily and which people could navigate with few problems. He argued also that the consideration of this was not based on the views of city managers, urban planners, and construction companies but must start with the user.

Bristol Legible City follows this approach and tries to break through some of the key problems facing cities. It builds on Lynch by moving beyond analysis to provide new workable definitions of city legibility by taking a holistic approach to city development. Many cities have under way similar initiatives to Bristol; what they do not have is the *totality* of the approach. BLC is about building a layered approach to city identity so that it can compete through local distinctiveness. It does this at two levels. At a local level, it creates a more convenient, safer, cohesive and accessible city centre. At national and international levels, BLC portrays Bristol as a dynamic, multi-faceted city.

BLC is about cities as communicators of the right information at the right time. It is about creating an integrated message of wayfinding especially in the movement of pedestrians and vehicles, and better accessibility into the city centre by public transport (cycling is an area for future development). It is about making a seamless, integrated trip based on the provision of clear, accurate and quality information, from the home to the arrival point, whenever it is needed. Finally, it is about sustainability and flexibility. All products created are built using the best quality material. They are also adaptable so that future changes to wayfinding can be integrated without requiring new investment in infrastructure.

BLC is not about branding – selling a city on one theme. It is difficult for a city to have a corporate identity. As Sean Griffiths, BLC lead artist said, 'A place can become a brand but a brand cannot become a place.' Rather, it favours promoting unique place-specific design within the public realm, building on those things and values that Bristol has that makes it different to other cities.

There are three key BLC themes: cohesion and integration; identity; and strategic city marketing. Through selected environmental improvements, signage and information initiatives, BLC promotes better linkages between elements of the city and those who use it. It also has wider integration in mind – bringing together urban regeneration, community participation and empowerment through facilitating and adding value to joint initiatives. Secondly, BLC aims to support Bristol's positioning as a major visitor destination within a global market. As part of this, it seeks to promote the creation of a city centre embracing diversity and vitality and hence offering wide consumer choice. Thirdly, it seeks a strategic approach to city promotion. This allows relevant interests in Bristol to use BLC as part of their visitor management and marketing strategies individually. BLC works also to facilitate collective marketing to sell public transport, places and attractions.

So how is this achieved? The project remains in its early phases even after five years of development. The starting point was to go back to basics by looking at the city and the needs of the user, whether a resident, business person, visitor, out of town shopper or tourist. Basically tuning in to the city, research covered history, population, existing and likely future mix of uses, building types, topography and landforms. Audits were conducted of existing information in the city, lessons learned from other areas, and the beginnings of a vision prepared. The aim was to achieve what T S Eliot talked about in *Little Gidding* (he could also be arguing in favour of the experience of the visitor in a legible city, perhaps):

We shall not cease from exploration

And the end of all our exploring

Will be to arrive where we started

And know the place for the first time

Early buy-in from stakeholders was essential. City council support was needed as the organization would deliver and implement much of this work, and would need to provide some risk funding. But there was a need also to enroll key private sector interests as well as those responsible for retail, tourism, transport and cultural activity.

Much of the early work was done by an officer working group led by Mike Rawlinson and Andrew Gibbins, both then based in planning, and supported by other senior planning officers (Andrew was the author of the original 1993 working paper, *City Centre Spaces: pedestrian linkages and legibility*). BLC was able to build on recent successful urban design projects with the closure of roads in Bristol's Queen Square and College Green, and the beginning of public consultation to change the centre area. Alastair Brook, also in planning, later became the lead officer. Other planning officers, especially from the Urban Design team, joined the project and provided input on public art and neighbourhood development. Much of the rest of the group – what became eventually a semi-structured working party known as the client group – was made up of outside interests.

The result was a series of detailed papers and advocacy work. In a remarkable meeting of the city centre committee in 1997 - itself an important factor in the success of BLC as key representatives of council committees and service areas had worked together in this group for some time - a presentation on BLC was met with applause. Such a response was unheard of then and is still talked about now. Councillor Helen Holland commented three years later, 'BLC hit a very definite need felt even by Bristolians about their own city, let alone visitors coming to the city from far beyond.' Bristol City Council subsequently allocated funding to allow time to develop ideas and produce an exhibition and leaflet. This highlighted the comprehensive nature of the approach. It generated further political support and public interest.

The next two years were devoted to project development. By this stage BLC was embedded in the City's City Centre Strategy and neighbourhood strategies. Both original project leaders worked elsewhere during this time at London-based Urban Initiatives, where they had responsibility for the project's continued development. The result, routinely entitled *Project Framework and Development Brief*, proved to be a catalyst for the further development of BLC. Mike Rawlinson returned to Bristol in 1999 with his own company, City ID, to act as consultant to the project (Andrew Gibbins joined him in 2000). In the meantime, MetaDesign (now Icon Medialab), PSD Associates (and, later, the city council's Visual Technology team), were commissioned to work on the development of identity systems. These companies, leaders in their fields, brought the ideas, experience and creative thinking to the project, fulfilling the quality requirements of BLC. With Bristol City Council and partners, these companies created the knowledge cluster critical to the development of the project. Mike Rawlinson comments:

Perhaps for the first time in a British city a multi-disciplinary team was put in place to consider the issue of city identity and legibility. The team included urban design, planning, transport planning, product design, public arts commissioners, information design and visual communication specialists. The team brought fresh perspectives and ideas to complex problems. Thinking around the process came first, design followed.

Early debates concerned perceptions of the *identity* of Bristol. Bristol's perceived colour was blue (not surprising given the preponderance of water and the history of Bristol Blue Glass). Bristol as a person was Michael Palin – quirky but classy; an explorer; distinguished but with an edge. Though these are fun to do, there is a serious purpose in using such exercises to get to the core of problems and find solutions. Three fictional visitors, each taking a journey in Bristol, were also created. One, a Bristolian, wanted to shop; another, from London, had a business appointment to keep and needed to be away quickly; a third – this time a family – were on

holiday. This enabled the design team to imagine who the users of a city are, how they navigate, what systems they understand, and the constraints that exist.

There was, at the same time, a need to make sense of Bristol. Following Lynch's lead, a range of landmarks was identified in the main city centre area, known as the blue route (Lynch argued for legibility starting with urban centres as they are the 'foci for organization and memory' and the place where citizens meet). The main pedestrian route links the train and bus stations with the Broadmead and West End shopping areas, the centre, and the Harbourside attractions.

There are 150 landmarks in all, ranging from Bristol Cathedral to the Council House, through arts organizations and significant private buildings. These provide anchor information to map journeys and would eventually form the basis of the new maps created. A hierarchy of attractions was created to allow easy route planning for users, and those giving directions. This meant that there would not be huge numbers of signs at Temple Meads station guiding visitors to attractions on Harbourside. The generic title Harbourside would be used here; only when nearer the venue is an individual sign for attractions used.

Finally, a legible font was adopted, to provide local distinctiveness to signage and all public information icons, whether they be baby changing facilities, toilets, taxis or buses. Clear and modern, Bristol Transit provides a confident image. It is not for everyday use, however, and will be used only for initiatives carrying official public information.

Corresponding to design development was stakeholder enrolment, consultation and field-testing. Consultation ranged widely. Each organization involved in the client group helped sell the project to their stakeholders. Many presentations were made with council members and officers. Public consultation with existing organizations

Centre promenade

including the Harbourside Design Forum, Conservation Advisory panel and with amenity groups promoted wider involvement and ownership. Field-testing took place, using a full-size model of a sign and maps, with key stakeholders and with members of the public. There have been four exhibitions so far. The most recent, in 2000, took place in the city centre and other parts of the city. It was accompanied by the publication of *You are Here*, a marketing pamphlet and progress report. The quality of the publication showed once again the commitment to excellence at the heart of BLC.

Given recent difficulties in Bristol with public protests at changes to the centre area, and the proposed Harbourside commercial development and long-standing hostility towards planning and development officers by some amenity groups, this was essential, if time-consuming, work. Whether this consultation and enrolment will ensure that contemporary signs, in what is still seen by some as a Georgian city, will be greeted with acclaim remains to be seen.

The results at this first stage – over 40 projects are currently in development – aim to link diverse parts of the city with consistent information, provide a clear identity, and help promote greater use of public transport. Projects include:

At-Bristol Car Park: One of the first BLC projects, it uses BLC icons and fonts.

New Pedestrian Signs: The most comprehensive pedestrian signage system in the UK with new Bristol-specific pedestrian signs deployed according to BLC principles across the main pedestrian routes in the centre. The signs keep words and icons to a minimum (in tests, users could understand only five signs on any one signpost) to maintain the principle of legibility and clutter reduction.

Heads-Up Mapping: Lynch said that maps should be keyed to real objects. BLC maps are the first examples of heads-up mapping to be created and deployed extensively in a British city. Through the use of

3D buildings dropped in at the angle the user is looking, instant recognition is possible. Where you are is what you see is a key principle of the mapping system.

I+ Touch Screen Consoles: A range of on-street digital touch screen information consoles providing information about tourism, leisure, accommodation, Bristol City Council, and transport. Users can send an e-mail, and print out maps and journey planners. Twenty units are based in the main pedestrian routes in Bristol (principally those covering the shopping, working and leisure areas) as well as significant points of arrival in the city – at the bus station, train station and Bristol International Airport. Four additional units will be placed in areas outside the city centre, to test community response. Though this system has been tested in London for the past three years, this will be the most comprehensive deployment in a British city.

Public Information Units, Monoliths and Advertising Drums: Though used mainly for advertising, these new specially designed units will provide information about the city, and special city events.

Tourism Infrastructure and Strategic Marketing: As tourism bodies are often the first port of call for visitors, the official website - www.visitbristol.co.uk - and the signage of the tourism information centre, have been redesigned according to BLC principles.

Integrated Maps: Based on a royalty free mapping system, a series of walking and bus maps will be created and distributed free of charge.

Navigators: Though signs are crucial, people contact is critical, not just in obtaining information, but also in learning about the city. Navigators will be a team of on-street guides providing information about the city, attractions, hotels and transport.

Plaques: A series of plaques is being placed at various points around the city to celebrate individuals born or residing in Bristol and commemorating significant events. So far celebrated include Sir Michael Redgrave and Nipper the HMV dog.

→ **Artworks**

Important consideration has been given to aiding informal navigation – those landmarks, roundabouts, petrol stations, pubs and, more nebulously, the feel of a place, what Lynch called sense – which people use to find their way or describe the way to others. This is personal wayfinding. As part of this, a BLC arts programme has started which aims to help create a vibrant and exciting environment in the city centre and surrounding neighbourhoods, providing a voice for navigation. This integrates artists' work within the more formal elements of the programme as well as promoting interventions and collaborative approaches to show what is often hidden about Bristol's built environment. Unlike much public art this is an integral part of the overall project, and artists are equal members of the team, not brought in as an afterthought. Public Art South West has been a member of the client group from the start. Bristol City Council appointed two public art officers in 2001, one devoted to legible city work to take this forward strategically in the authority.

iPlus unit

pArts, a northern-based public art consultancy practice, was appointed in July 1998 to be a member of the team and to prepare a strategy for future development. There are three aims. First, to harness the power of public art to promote confident, fluid and well informed movement of residents and visitors within and between the different offerings and neighbourhoods of Bristol. Secondly, to increase levels of physical and intellectual access to the public realm of Bristol. Thirdly, to enhance the unique environment of Bristol and enable Bristol City Council and its partners to add meaning and introduce ideas and interpretation to the public realm of the city.

A series of principles were established also. These included reduction of unnecessary street furniture; sensitivity to light pollution;

integration of artists with design teams; creation of high quality contemporary art; commitment to employing local artists where possible, but always on merit; no duplication of existing work in Bristol. pArts has put forward a range of permanent and temporary areas of activity where artists' work can be integrated into directly commissioned areas of the project and into projects linked to legible city work. Indirectly, the strategy proposes artists' work involved with the city council's transport plan and in linking with planned or existing projects of local arts organizations and new developments.

The strategy proposes involving artists in the pedestrian movement system by reinforcing information sites and reinforcing routes. It suggests integrated transport could be helped through artist involvement in the creation of street furniture, and in welcoming points, as well as in 'humanising' the transport experience. It proposes also that artists are involved in advertising – whether it is encouraging the use of artists in the design of advertising campaigns or working on component design. It sees a role for artists in conveying interpretation and information about parks; in the lighting of buildings, places and routes; and in and on bridges, as key communication points in the city.

A key aspect of artists' involvement is in traffic management, planning and the promotion of public transport. Artists can be involved in the creation of significant gateway sites; at interventions on corners, junctions and buildings to make key points 'memorable, distinctive and beautiful' for drivers and passengers; and in the creation of new traffic signs and junctions.

FAT – Fashion Architecture and Taste – is the lead BLC artist, as part of the Arts Council of England's Year of the Artist initiative. Its brief – as open as it is possible to be – aims to challenge BLC and its partners to find new approaches to legibility. FAT has promoted collaboration in its work. On integrated transport, for example, it has involved urban designers, transport planners, information and identity designers, product designers, and engineers.

This has not proved an easy task on both sides. Both daunting and exciting, for all involved, FAT put forward a pluralistic approach to legibility. 'My own view' argues Sean Griffiths of FAT, 'is that places become legible both in a global and local sense through a diverse and organic approach to the design of urban elements.' He adds:

Barcelona gains its identity through variety within an overall framework, which allows elements to be different, but still relate to the overall identity of the place. The same goes for cities such as New York and London. However, in certain cases, the unification of particular urban elements can contribute to the development of identity - one thinks of red London buses, black taxis and yellow cabs in New York - but these elements are very particular in their characteristics, and differentiate themselves from the more universal qualities of much 'contemporary' design.[26]

FAT has put forward a range of possible projects for future development, based on its work in the city, walks undertaken, bus journeys made, discussions with partners and as part of the overall collaborative work with BLC designers. This includes use of lighting on main routes; poster art promoting debate about the meaning of place and city branding; major art installations at the start and end of the key pedestrian routes in the city; work in Queen Square - one of the major public spaces in the city – with artist designed bird boxes, horse maquettes and paving design. A major project is *ID 4 ITran*, artists involvement in integrated transport identity, with ideas put forward so far for humanising the experience of bus routes and development of park and ride sites as gateways to the city.

New arts projects, led by Colin Pearce, will play a part in the launch of BLC through the creation of lines of pavement text encouraging dialogue with the city. Ralph Hoyte, a Bristol-based performance poet, is the poet-in-residence for BLC. In Beacons Over Bristol, artist Phil Power uses the panoramic view of the city visible from the Bristol children's hospital to enlarge the state of the city. Using light beacons operated by telephone lines on top of selected buildings, participants glance both public spaces and their network of interconnections.

In working on the project, Colin proposed that there was a need for a third element of the project, verbal information, to complement BLC architecture and graphics. This fulfils his aim to use art to promote gradual knowledge of the city and the place, and to promote informal wayfinding. He talks of three voices. The *personal* is 'a conversational voice, a chatty, colloquial stream of consciousness, which sets out to address the person hurriedly going about their business, waiting for a bus or strolling at leisure in one of the new civic piazzas.' The *poetic* is 'a lyric voice, poems giving an epiphany of the moment, the lyric of heightened language which conveys the pleasure of word play, and the impact of rhyme and rhythm in a public place.' Ralph Hoyte calls this spatial poetry. The third voice is the *past* – 'intended to give an insight into something lost, literally or metaphorically buried or just plain forgotten or ignored – culverted rivers, old prison walls.'[27]

The issue then was to make these voices appear. Originally, short text pieces and streams were to be placed on pavements at the new signs with new poetry and historical material. The full texts would then be placed in nearby monoliths. This proved not to be possible. It was then suggested that a number of converging lines of text would link the main monoliths in the pedestrian areas of the city. Again, this failed, this time due to technical problems. The solution is to focus on the main pedestrian route in the city, with a unitary line of text – the project is called 'Walkie Talkie' – resembling the new fingerpost panels lain end to end, carrying a public voice through people walking, transport systems, attractions, landmarks.

Next Steps
This programme of work ends the first phase of the BLC implementation programme. The next phase will build on the identity developed to extend current activity, geographically and in scope; organizational development; and, crucially, integrated transport.

The award of £10.55m to Bristol as part of the Local Transport Plan in December 2000 means that the current programme will be extended to many areas of transport information and infrastructure, including

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properly sign-posted.'

Councillor Helen Holland

new shelters for the proposed light rapid transit system and programme of showcase bus routes. There will be a further programme of street furniture removal, and marketing and advocacy work. Additional organizational development work will take place around evaluating the impact of the project in its first phase and the promotion of debates – locally and nationally – about tourism, retail, integrated transport and legibility.

It has always been the intention to extend the existing product range to vehicular signage, especially to main radial routes and motorway junctions, though this needs national government partnership given the scale of the problem. It needs also a partnership with local transport providers, which may take some time to develop. However, work can take place immediately on developing new vehicular signs.

The main project in phase two is the promotion of an identity for integrated transport. This has three elements. First, again based on an understanding of the journey experience, there will be promotional work around the concept and needs of integrated transport. Secondly, product and graphic design will be used to promote connections across all modes of transport. Thirdly, information on transport will be made legible and easily understood. This could include timetables, tickets, and maps, amongst others. In addition, showcase bus routes, park and ride, and light rapid transit will all be enhanced in terms of service and profile.

Who is Bristol Legible City For?
Those involved in BLC say that it is for everybody. Lynch believed this also. He talked about legibility working for the senior resident and knowledgeable inhabitant doing their daily tasks, the anxious and wide-eyed tourist, and the casual, relaxed stroller. Councillor Helen Holland believes the impact will be wide. She says 'I think. . . [it] has appeal for everybody. I think its main attraction initially will be people coming to Bristol for the first time and I don't apologise for that, because we are hoping to make Bristol more of an attractive centre for people. We are attracting up to 750,000 extra people

annually to the city for the millennium projects and they need to feel comfortable in the city. And there's a lot of the city that they can enjoy outside the main events. They will enjoy those as well if they're properly sign-posted.'

The impact is just as significant for Bristolians. She added: 'I think in terms of Bristolians there's a lot to be said for having a system which they know works when they want to use it. A lot of people who've lived in the city don't know all of it or their way around it, and it is quite helpful to be given a hand. I think the greatest impact will be to convince people that public transport and public information systems will be high quality which could help lift the stigma that somehow public transport is a second class system.' Finally, she believes that a range of private sector interests will also benefit from legibility.

Those involved in the client group also believe that it will be of great benefit. All agree that they want to see the city work to the advantage of all. Anything that promotes better and more efficient movement and coordinated marketing will have an impact. The private sector – through the Bristol Chamber of Commerce and Initiative – believe that too much business is lost to the city through poor information provision and transport problems. The Bristol Cultural Development Partnership wants to see a joined up city where new cultural infrastructure is serving the needs of the people of the city and region as well as promoting the city as a European centre for culture. Transport bodies – though slow to participate at first – see great opportunity in promoting public transport. Public Art South West benefit because Bristol has a major programme of innovative public art in progress, and artists are integrated throughout the process of development and delivery. And tourism organizations like the fact that more tourists will be attracted to the city.

A good example of the detailed benefits that will occur is the case of Broadmead, Bristol's main shopping centre. The Broadmead Board, a public-private partnership, has been involved in the management and funding of the project since 1998 as well as being a strong supporter

and promoter since the start. It has also been actively involved in the style of signage developed and its location. They believe that BLC offers major benefits in putting right the historical problems of the site, meeting the threat of out of town shopping and internet retail, and in helping to create a sense of place and a more enriching experience in the future.

But the benefits go wider. Though geographically separate from the rest of the city, Broadmead wants to play a part in promoting the overall offer of Bristol, and BLC is seen as important in attracting and managing more visitors in the future. BLC will help especially with ensuring that visitors can first of all know about, and then move more easily from, one attraction to another.

And it is these wider benefits that are perhaps of significance. Bristol, in its new guise, is aiming to position itself as a European city that prides itself on discovery and exploration; innovation and adventure. It seeks to see itself as a cultural city of excellence, culminating in the bid to be European Capital of Culture in 2008. BLC provides a living and working example of innovative activity promoting the culture of the city in its widest sense. It is this – and the fact that the project meets genuine need, and is for all the people of the city and those who visit Bristol – that makes BLC a successful project.
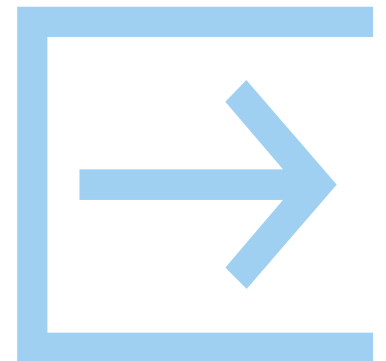
→ Partners
No city council could support such a major development alone (in any case, much of the local funding for BLC has come from central government sources). A private sector partner was essential, as was discrete sponsorship and funding of individual elements. It was decided that some of the support needed to be driven by advertising revenue. After a long search, Adshel was chosen. For a *limited* amount of additional advertising, a comprehensive range of new public information resources are being made available in the city, with state of the art components. Adshel is also responsible for cleaning, maintenance and updating where necessary.

This relationship has proved to be a positive one, and not just in financial terms. An officer commented: our designers 'found that advertising companies were at the forefront of good graphic design and good street furniture design.' He added: 'Adshel had a lot to offer in terms of looking at ways and means of not only creating [street furniture] but also maintaining and looking after them. There was a fast learning curve to find out why they were there, what they were doing and what was the reason behind them doing it, other than to make money . . .' Lessons were learned also from other cities. 'We found in Europe that there was a very different attitude towards advertising and that was an eye-opener. We realised that there is an opportunity in this country to make BLC the focus for a major advertising company who will also be doing a lot for the city and will be able to do a lot to make sure that they are at the forefront of design.'

There are significant benefits to the city and to Adshel in this partnership. Adshel gets a financial return. But they also see Bristol as being a showcase city for future development. In addition to financial investment, Bristol gains a range of new, modern street furniture and one of the most extensive programmes of integrated urban public art currently under development in the country. It also has the opportunity to promote free of charge civic events and cultural activity in the city centre and elsewhere in the country through use of Adshel poster sites.

Conclusions
BLC has made great progress over the past five years. For such a wide-ranging, crosscutting project, progress has been relatively smooth. This is due to the commitment to quality, outstanding design thinkers, the extensive resources devoted to research and development and the establishment of vision, the holistic approach taken to city development and the creation of a wide partnership of stakeholders to work on the project. How the project has been managed also offers many lessons.

Building a Creative Partnership:
Managing Legible Cities

Centre sail structure

Building a Creative Partnership:
Managing Legible Cities

Partnerships need vision and mission,
leadership, a long-term perspective and a
stakeholder focus if they are to be managed
well, developed continually and allowed
to prosper.

There are 10 key factors in creating partnership projects like Bristol Legible City. The foundation is a vision for Bristol as a modern European city and the will to create this. It needs a commitment to finding long-term solutions to long-standing problems. There has to be a framework of creativity, and the ability and willingness to promote and fund further creative work. There needs to be a background of partnership working between public, private and voluntary sectors and an intention to take this further. There should be joined up thinking and joined up work within the local authority – but it needs also a joined up city so that all are working towards common goals. The will to take risks must be present, as should a desire for quality in all work. Finally, persistence is essential. Turning a city round is not a short-term project. BLC is, at least for now, a 10 year programme of work, and will need to be in continuous development thereafter.

Management is key to the successful development of BLC, but the management of partnerships is not easy. Partnerships differ from traditional forms of business and public-sector organizations and require new ways of thinking and working: the development, motivation and management of networks of stakeholders; the strategic assimilation of different organizational cultures; skills in leadership, marketing and market research; and a focus on process as

well as product and outcomes. They need to secure funding from organizations whose timetables differ sometimes from the needs of quick implementation. And they must remain accountable – both to the people they serve and, through partners, with shareholders, amenity societies, the electorate and other stakeholders. Legible cities need new management. No longer is the management of the city the preserve of one body: a stakeholder-based approach sees other sectors responsible. The local authority has a lead role, but in partnership with others.

Fundamentally, partnerships bring together public, private and voluntary sectors sharing risks, failures and successes, to maximise resources for a common purpose for long-term development. They bring together the best from all without letting the problems of each get in the way. They are about creating a community of people and organizations who might disagree on some issues, but who must solve their problems in the interests of harmony and development. They are creating what Chris Huxham calls collaborative advantage: '...when something unusually creative is produced - perhaps an objective is met - that no organization could have produced on its own and when each organization, through the collaboration, is able to achieve its own objectives better than it could alone. In some cases, it should also be possible to achieve some higher-level...objectives for society as a whole rather than just for the participating organizations.'[28]

Partnerships may be informal, where organizations collaborate in response to new funding schemes, or formal where projects are planned and implemented through joint venture companies and charities. They are not just networks, though networking is a key role. A distinction should be made also between *strategic* partnerships and *project* partnerships, though there is little difference in managing the two, even though focussing around an issue or cause is more conducive to progress. Both are about joining together and adding value to the work of individual partners – pooling, allying and linking financial, intellectual, and physical resources, as management writer Rosabeth Moss Kanter states.

They are also about *connection*, 'joined up thinking', building links between groups, organizations and individuals responsible for development. A key belief of all partnership working is that the wider the network involved the greater is the opportunity for creativity and innovation. BLC brings together not just a group of people, but a wide range of skills, competencies and experiences. In creating specific components, or working on the philosophy of legibility and place, those needed include designers, urban designers, management consultants, planners, architects, environmental psychologists, social geographers, political scientists, preservationists, thinkers about the future, historians.

This process is not just about adding different skills to the design 'mix', however. The crucial factor in developing successful partnership projects is the quality of thinking that takes place around the first stages of scoping and concept development. City ID call this First Thinking. They argue that the real value of a project is determined by the quality of thinking at the outset. This, in turn, conditions the quality of subsequent stages of the project. Making changes and resolving issues at a latter stage become more time consuming and costly without First Thinking.

The benefits of this approach are strong. For Bristol general partnership outcomes have included the promotion of synergy in city development, greater levels of involvement and participation in projects, increased financial support, and higher quality management and marketing skills. Specifically on BLC, greater resources, investment and creativity have been added. Without partnership and time devoted to thinking the process through, indeed, the project would not have succeeded.

What makes a successful partnership? The Drucker Foundation says partnerships require not just an understanding of the values, goals and constraints of each member, but also the values, goals and constraints of the partnership itself. They need to translate goals into measurable targets and timetables. Finally, they must have clarity of mission but also mutual understanding of partners' roles.[29]

Above all, partnerships must be action oriented. There must, in addition, be an overwhelming need to work together with all partners accepting that each is unable to achieve solely what it wishes to do, whether solving drug abuse, building a concert hall, developing a legible city, creating social housing. Each partner needs to be honest about motivations and recognise that all may expect to gain and should actively encourage such self-interest when necessary. Partners generally eschew philanthropy. Adshel is not in BLC for philanthropic reasons: they want a return as much as Bristol City Council and other stakeholders want the benefits. In this case, the return is both financial and profile, with Bristol being a showcase city for this new type of project and partnership.

Whatever form the partnership takes, there needs to be a marketing focus so that relationships are built with stakeholders and the brokerage role required to achieve enrolment in sharing and implementing vision is created. The timescale is always medium-to-long term, with significant results, especially with the more intangible benefits, occurring often only after the partnership ceases to exist or be involved. Finally, there is a need for continuous organizational development. Partnerships need to promote widespread learning and knowledge, not just about the partnership itself, but *for* partners and other stakeholders.

The right conditions and people need to be in place. In *The Tipping Point*, writer Malcolm Gladwell says that change leaders need to be connectors, mavens and salespeople. *Connectors* are networkers who know a lot of people and know the right people; *mavens* are those who accumulate knowledge and want to tell people about that knowledge; *salespeople* – well, they sell. This is not all that is needed: the knowledge that connectors are trying to impart to the right people must stick and the context has to be right.[30]

Though he did not look at partnerships, Gladwell is describing well, at least in part, the reasons why BLC has been successful: knowledgeable people were hired who had messages to sell to people who wanted to hear. The context was right in that there was

a receptive audience, with political leadership wishing to work in partnership for the good of the city. The message also stuck. Finally, all partners worked to create the right context.

There is a wider issue. The best partnerships have the skills to prosper in, and take advantage of, a rapidly changing economy and society. They are stakeholder focused, flexible, change-oriented, with limited hierarchy and few boundaries. They are entrepreneurial and empowered to take action.

Partnerships need vision and mission, leadership, a long-term perspective and a stakeholder focus if they are to be managed well, developed continually and allowed to prosper. Vision and mission, based on core values shared by all, forms common purpose, helps overcome differences of opinion during development and identifies the *added value* a partnership provides. Establishing partnerships needs top leadership support from all partners, individuals/groups with the power to make change happen. These should have institutional weight, peer respect and the ability to commit resources. Such leaders need not form the management of the partnership - that should be left to those most able to deliver – but they need to maintain support.

Those involved in partnership working need a variety of skills and competencies including extensive research ability using qualitative and quantitative research; diplomacy and tact; lateral thinking; a not-for-profit management ethos with for-profit rigour; creativity in ideas and delivery; the ability to manage expectations as well as ideas. They need the experience and training of the academic, the *realpolitik* skills of the politician and an endless capacity for work. They need to be articulate. They should have freedom to operate, to speak openly and honestly. They should be as at ease with a community organization in a depressed area as with a council officer, a cabinet minister, a member of the Royal Family. They should be intolerant of bureaucracy and look to the future not the past. They need to be *connectors*, *mavens* and *salespeople*.

Only a long-term perspective can allow the necessary flirtation, courtship and marriage, which will create trust and confidence and build, enrol, sustain, develop and renew the stakeholder base. Most Bristol partnerships see their work in terms of decades, not years; BLC is – at least – a ten year project. Long-term projects, however, are difficult to sustain. Whilst the vision is the goal, quick wins are essential to show progress and maintain support. BLC has been able to do this through publicity and promotion (ensuring that quality is always at the core of work) and specific projects including legibility principles applied to St Marks Road, Easton in 1997 and the At-Bristol car park in 2000.

Equally as important is developing and managing the wide network involved. No partnership should start without a stakeholder analysis identifying who to involve, how to involve them, and what each expects and needs to get out of the partnership. It needs to embrace all, though the intimacy required with individual stakeholders differs with each project. It helps to achieve the balancing act required in making a common purpose out of competing agendas.

Given the need to attract and enrol stakeholders, marketing plays a key role. This is not simply a matter of selling. Overall, it is about creating a strategic framework. It is also about building relationships, improving levels of customer satisfaction and assisting in the attraction of resources. There are three levels of partnership stakeholders. First, those connected most immediately to the partnership. Secondly, project stakeholders. Finally, there is the extended stakeholder family – in the community, regionally, nationally and sometimes internationally.

This creates a wide stakeholder portfolio. Wide networks promote creativity and innovation, but they are difficult to manage and the search for collaboration and synergy requires time. BLC is a network as it involves many organizations in its work. Creating the network and building network capacity is the partnership. Making a successful partnership is the *management* of this network. Thinking in terms of

network, rather than organizational management, enables more creative thinking and innovation through the incorporation and enrolment of stakeholders. It helps overcome problems of departmentalism common in partnerships or at least amongst the partners involved.

Networks involve the bringing together of a range of people – internal and external to the organization – as teams of knowledge workers devoted to working together to achieve results, and the necessary trade-offs, which the organization and its partners need for success. It means that partners can be *independent* at the same time as being *interdependent*. The results are negotiated and brokered rather than forced or imposed. Such a culture needs flexibility, involvement and integration. Silos and boxes need to be ditched in favour of coalitions and teams collaborating for mutual advantage.

The organizational structure is flat with limited hierarchies. Thinking in network terms is particularly useful for dealing with stakeholders. To operate in this way requires new ways of managing, though networks have to self-manage to an extent. Management's task is to *lever creativity* – to build, develop and make permanent the work of the different organizations and individuals involved. Staff need to make agreements, broker compromises, build relationships and trust, and create new partners and funders.

None of this is easy. Partnerships are about changing to new ways of working. However, some partners are not used to change, let alone working with others. Partnerships can also alienate people who work in partner organizations. Faster decisions are possible but consultation can be accelerated with public and voluntary sector organizations left behind. Businesses are partners, not philanthropists and sponsors; they are *active* partners in development, not simply a source of easy funding. Finally, too many partnerships, without co-ordination, can exacerbate problems instead of solving them. These are some of the challenges faced by partnerships.

BLC is a partnership of many organizations and companies. Main partners include Bristol City Council, Adshel, South West Regional Development Agency, Bristol Tourism and Conference Bureau, Harbourside Sponsors Group, Broadmead Board, Public Art South West, and the Bristol Cultural Development Partnership (BCDP). However, each of these organizations has partners and stakeholders of their own. The Harbourside Sponsors Group, for example, brings together Railtrack, the JT Group, Bristol City Council and Lloyds Bank. BCDP combines South West Arts, Bristol City Council and the Bristol Chamber of Commerce and Initiative (a partner too in many of the other initiatives listed).

As a partnership, BLC has not been working in a vacuum. Project leaders were able to build on, and in some ways exploit, a decade of partnership working in Bristol. BLC is one of 25 not-for-profit partnerships in Bristol. These cover initiatives as wide-ranging as housing the homeless and regional economic development; cultural development and foyers; tourism and community development; retail and heritage. The environment for development was good. In addition, there were officers and members experienced in working in partnership with the private sector. Though there is a learning curve for everybody in any project, this experience meant that BLC had a good start.

Not that this makes management any easier. BLC, like all partnerships, has a wide network of organizations it works with. An indication of the range of groups and organizations involved can be seen in the BLC stakeholder analysis in Figure 1.

The most significant partner is Adshel. Adshel has identified four key needs in working with a local authority: responsiveness, co-ordination, strong political support and a can do attitude. For them, Bristol has all these factors. From their side, Adshel believe that they offer investment, risk-sharing, flexibility for delivery, an ability to build collaboration with other partners, access to the latest technology, and the contacts to communicate the messages of

success. All of these – and from both sides – are essential if the partnership is to succeed.

→ Challenges Faced and Met

As both a concept and in terms of delivery, BLC has faced and met (and is still to meet) many challenges. Urban change management is a new concept that needs further development. Changing organizational cultures is especially difficult when the cultures needing to be changed are in different sectors and in many different organizations and companies.

Joining up cities and local authorities is not easy, especially in bringing together and managing the network involved. There was only limited support for the joined up approach initially. This combined with a lack of funding put constraints on early development. BLC has had to create innovative formal and informal working arrangements: traffic engineers work with artists; designers with planners; advertising providers with council officers; tourism with retail. All of these have to work with each other. The position is complicated further as many of those directly involved have no formal contract with BLC, and provide services as part of normal duties. These have to be motivated and made into a team like any other project.

As a partnership, the management structure is loose. A client group, made up of leading partnership organizations in the city and Bristol City Council brings together tourism, retail, culture, transport amongst others. Formal and informal specialist working groups on identity, transport and communications support this. Specialist consultants undertake much of the work, though overall financial and management responsibility remains with Bristol City Council.

The involvement of artists has provided a particular challenge. Sean Griffiths, lead artist, talks about the problems in bringing art to the table, especially in terms of collaboration (itself a problem for the artist used to pursuing a project independently): 'Collaboration is a

Figure 1 BLC Stakeholder Analysis

Resource providers (existing and potential)

Bristol City Council, and departments within Bristol City Council
Adshel
DETR
Public Art South West
Sponsors
Arts & Business

Personnel

Staff working directly on BLC
Staff from partners working with BLC as part of normal duties
Members of client group
Bristol City Council staff
Consultants
Consultees

Customers

Adshel
Artists
Bristol City Council staff in traffic management, visual technology
Public transport companies
Street furniture/component suppliers

Community - geographic

Bristol people and businesses
Amenity societies
Regional agencies

Community of interest

Wide range of amenity societies, planners, government departments, and urban designers
Beneficiaries of signage system, maps

Suppliers

Of design services
Of manufacturing services

Commentators and influencers

Local, regional and national media
Academic community
Amenity societies

Owners and enablers

Transport providers
Highway authority
Private sector landowners

Political

Local councillors directly involved
Local councillors not directly involved
Local MPs
Government departments in arts, heritage, urban regeneration, community planning

Collaboration is suggestive of a cosy sharing of ideas. In the context of BLC, the word evokes the image of the great minds of the artist, the transport manager and the politician meeting across the table. The reality is, of course, not like this.

Sean Griffiths

buzz word of the moment. It, of course, goes hand in hand with the idea of team work but it also obscures the real nature and difficulties of team dynamics' Sean says. He adds:

Collaboration is suggestive of a cosy sharing of ideas. In the context of BLC, the word evokes the image of the great minds of the artist, the transport manager and the politician meeting across the table. The reality is, of course, not like this. Artists do think in a very different way to transport managers. They also speak different languages. This goes for all the members of the BLC team, from way finders to urban planners. Curiously, whilst the idea of collaboration implicitly criticises the received notion of the artist as an egoist and creative force, this received notion seems to persist amongst other people the artist comes into contact with in a project such as BLC.[31]

This causes problems. Whilst the artist is expected to bring creative genius to the table, this attitude can lead to easy condemnation of artists as being impractical and too creative.

There were also some difficulties initially within the city council in pursuing the extensive, and costly, procurement design process. One of the key quick wins in the project, indeed, was the creation of the three main briefs for the work. Finally, the name itself proved problematic. Mike Rawlinson says 'BLC is not simply a question of signage; it is a philosophy of city communication, management and development. As a result, ownership of BLC was difficult at first within the authority. Ironically, though, it was the nebulous name that proved a key factor in ultimate success as it meant that the project could be seen as being relevant to many departments' work though much persuasion was needed'.

The solution to such challenges is often simple, though still often elusive. At a basic level, well-organized meetings with regular attendance, which are minuted correctly, ensure smooth management. Informal networking outside regular meetings

maintains momentum. Regular officer contact – preferably someone with a long-term commitment and responsibility for the project – means relationships with the city council is maintained. Finally, leadership at the political level – again, someone with a long-term relationship to the project – is essential to maintaining links with elected members. The principles of partnership come into their own here, with differences of philosophy, approach, and working practices discussed openly, and compromises achieved. Fortunately, leading councillors – especially the recent chairs of planning and the council leader who promoted the concept of neighbourhoods – meant that the project had the critical political support.
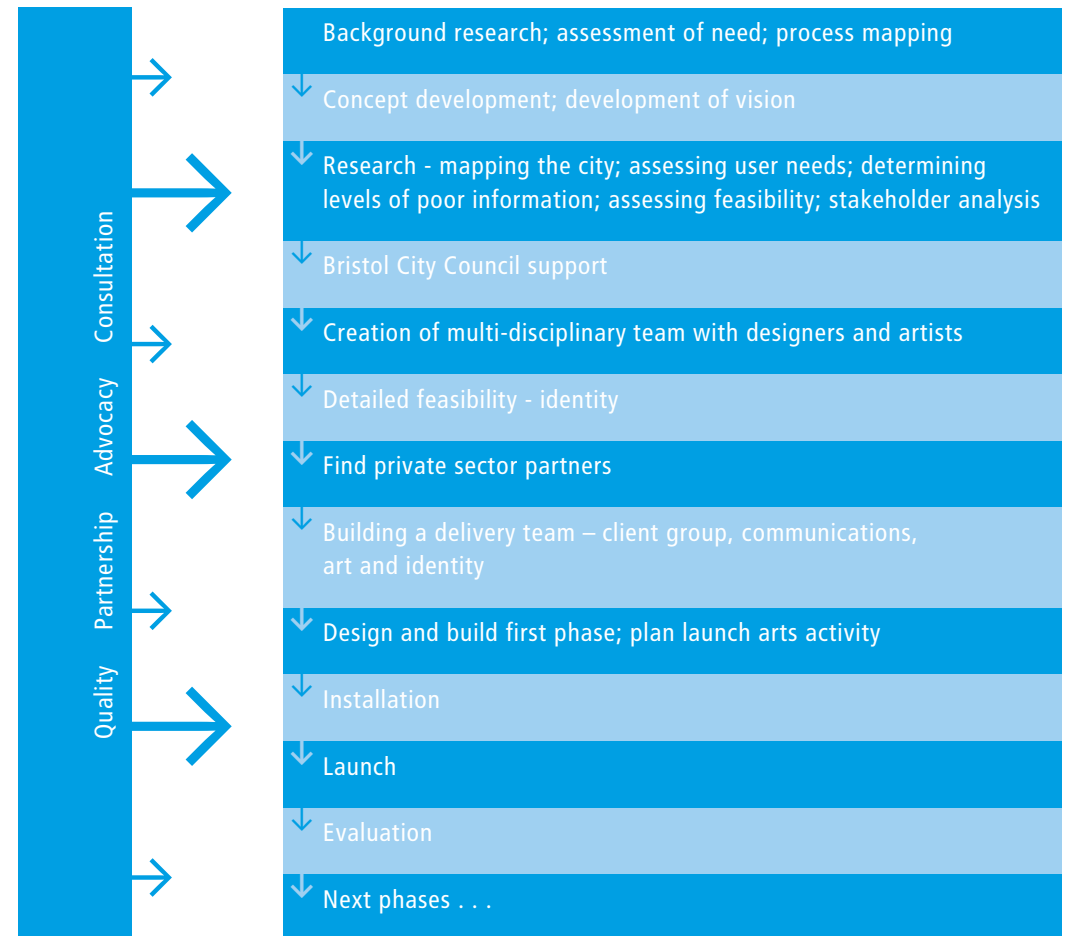
Though the process has been smoother than most partnerships, more formal management is required for the project to develop in the future. A charitable trust to manage the arts programme has been established. The client group may need a more formal constitution as a partnership with an independent chair. And communications – not a priority so far – will need greater resources to promote the debate needed for progress and to learn from stakeholders. There is also a need for member, officer and partner training programmes to ensure that all are working effectively and are at least aware of the needs and responsibilities of working in partnership.

Ideally, and looking back with hindsight, the strategic approach should have been as figure 2 illustrates.

Conclusions

Innovative projects require innovative management if creativity is to prosper and delivery be achieved. Though the lead responsibility in city development is the local authority, wider partnerships are essential to bring in the full range of experiences, skills and funding required. The issue, then, is one of managing a wide network. Bristol is fortunate in having a decade of partnership working to learn from and develop further. By doing so, BLC is helping to build on and create a new sense of place in the city.

Figure 2 BLC Process

Quality   Partnership   Advocacy   Consultation

| Background research; assessment of need; process mapping |
| Concept development; development of vision |
| Research - mapping the city; assessing user needs; determining levels of poor information; assessing feasibility; stakeholder analysis |
| Bristol City Council support |
| Creation of multi-disciplinary team with designers and artists |
| Detailed feasibility - identity |
| Find private sector partners |
| Building a delivery team – client group, communications, art and identity |
| Design and build first phase; plan launch arts activity |
| Installation |
| Launch |
| Evaluation |
| Next phases . . . |

BLC signage

Conclusions:
Building a Sense of Place

…cities are collections of diverse cultures, memories, voices, roles, occupations, neighbourhoods, myths, smells, sights (and sites), sounds and futures – some present, some lost; some remaining in the memory, others waiting to be rediscovered.

In both methodology and delivery, building a legible city is an exploration of place; a debate about what place means; a strengthening of existing elements of place; and the creation of a new sense of place. Or places, given that cities are collections of diverse cultures, memories, voices, roles, occupations, neighbourhoods, myths, smells, sights (and sites), sounds and futures – some present, some lost; some remaining in the memory, others waiting to be rediscovered.

Building, and building on, a sense of place is essential if cities are to embrace what they are good at, expand what they offer to all residents and visitors, and create new futures. The public sector has a special responsibility here. We no longer have large companies that are attached to a city or a place, and who have helped build that place. The Wills family helped create many of the great civic public buildings and monuments in Bristol (wealth based, admittedly, on tobacco). Twenty-first century companies, generally smaller, have little to contribute financially; other companies, often in absentee ownership in this time of the death of distance, feel no loyalty to a city, with the attachment being one simply of convenient location. And as working patterns change and become more flexible, an individual's loyalty to a place – or place of work – becomes lessened through commuting, and through temporary jobs held elsewhere.

Finally, the decline of social capital means that there is little opportunity to promote place making at a local level.

Place is not solely community, a term which now embraces interests more than geography. Nor is it just about culture, nature, property, tradition, history, accents. It is about all of these and more. American writer William Leach calls it the 'collective outgrowth of our control over our own lives and destinies' and adds:

Place has a layered quality for those people who feel it. For most it has taken the form of the country, of the provincial or regional areas of the country (and these provincial areas can exist in cities as well as in rural towns), and of specific home towns and neighborhoods, each with its own history, its own store of common memories and traditions, its smells and sounds that never wholly disappear from memory. All of these, too, at their best, have been joined together by a common tissue, providing people with a manifold sense of connection and achievement.[32]

But like legibility, place should not be seen as being about uniformity. As Richard Sennett writes, 'Place-making based on exclusion, sameness, or nostalgia is socially poisonous and psychologically useless.' He adds, 'Place-making based on more diverse, denser, impersonal human contacts must find a way for those contacts to endure', if a 'more sociable, truly cosmopolitan existence' is to be created.[33]

Above all, it is a deeply personal experience, one felt by the individual. It can only be *facilitated* by others. In *The Experience of Place*, Tony Hiss says 'We all react, consciously and unconsciously, to the places where we live and work, in ways we scarcely notice or that are only now becoming known to us.' He adds:

Ever-accelerating changes in most people's day-to-day circumstances are helping us and prodding us, sometimes forcing

us, to learn that our ordinary surroundings, built and natural alike, have an immediate and a continuing effect on the way we feel and act, and on our health and intelligence. These places have an impact on our sense of self, our sense of safety, the kind of work we get done, the ways we interact with other people, even our ability to function as citizens in a democracy. In short, the places where we spend our time affect the people we are and can become.

Hiss continues: '[We have a] built-in ability to experience places directly, an ability that makes it possible for people to know personally, through their own senses, about many of the ways our surroundings work within us. Paying careful attention to our experiences of places, we can use our own responses, thoughts, and feelings to help us replenish the places we love.'[34]

By being based always around the needs of the user, BLC is building on the personal experience of place to help create a new future for Bristol. It is one way of meeting the threat, or greeting the opportunities, posed by the digital revolution. Digital city guru, William Mitchell, argues that the web will transform notions of place. He states: 'The worldwide computer network – the electronic agora – subverts, displaces and radically redefines our notions of gathering place, community and urban life. The Net has a fundamentally different physical structure, and it operates under quite different rules from those that organize the action of public places of traditional cities.'[35]

American writer Joel Kotkin argues that cities will need to capitalise and expand on their own essence to meet this. He says 'cities and communities will need to respond to the diminishing need for space by focusing on the qualities that only *places* have – that is, the intrinsic appeal of specific buildings and social environments.' They will need to look to the fundamental cultural and economic characteristics that 'ultimately assure their authenticity and

New signage

distinctiveness.'[36] They will need community structures, such as libraries, arts centres, museums, but also more – in total, the 'social and cultural glue' that holds the local community together. He adds:

The construction of 'town centers' built around community institutions certainly is viable, but the vitality, the centrality of the marketplace, will not easily be replaced as a motivation to bring people out of their homes. Cultural events, by their nature, make for weekend places; they cannot sustain a constant flow of people. Securing a long-term role for a geographic place depends on the recognition by local merchants, developers, and property owners, as well as by the citizenry, that the success of many areas depends precisely on maintaining and cultivating a place's unique characteristics as a *marketplace.*[37]

Cities need to find their own solutions, based on their history, strengths, traditions, mores. In a time of little imagination in city centre developments, creating a unique place experience helps promote competitive advantage. Go to one shopping centre in Britain, and even Western Europe, and you could be anywhere – the same shops, with the same storefronts, and the same architecture. Place is good for creativity; it is also good for civil society. William Leach says: 'A living sense of a boundaried place, some kind of patriotism beyond love of abstract principles, is the main condition for citizenship.'[38]

And there is little point in importing the latest trend from outside, a strategy rejected in Bristol. The original proposal for Harbourside was an aquarium as all waterfront cities have an aquarium. This was not acceptable. In its place, a new wildlife centre and a renewed science centre were created. Both build on the strengths of Bristol – in natural history media and in innovation in hands-on science education.

As a result, Bristol has created new visitor attractions to complement what exists already, with significant support locally (given that developments emphasized the city's strengths), and regenerated a

brownfield site. Good architecture has won plaudits, especially as it embraced old buildings with the modern. Visiting Bristol Harbourside now (and many do – visitor numbers since opening in mid-2000 have been well ahead of target), it is possible to learn about natural history and science, but also about the railway industry and lead production, previous occupants of the site with the old buildings retained sympathetically. And with new public squares, it acts also as a haven, a meeting ground, a place for special events, a space for reflection.

Cities need a sense of history also. Legibility should be applied equally to the past as well as to the present. This means commemorating aspects of history some would prefer to remain hidden as well as celebrating more positive aspects. It took Bristol many years to acknowledge publicly its past as a slave trading port. Only recently have public monuments been commissioned and placed. Pero's bridge – a new pedestrian bridge crossing the historic harbour – is named after a slave boy who lived in the city. Though painful, this is an essential part of legibility and a symbol of future intentions. Lynch talked of temporal legibility, so that cities show how what is here now relates to the past, even if this means exposing the scars of history.

BLC will not be able to meet all the challenges facing cities, at least in the short-term. But it can do much to help create unique place elements that help change an otherwise staid environment. So, Bristol will have new signs that are not the usual off the peg designs. It will have advertising and publicity opportunities that will help sell Bristol and tell something of the history of the city. It will use art to humanise public transport, as well as help people find their way. And the very existence of the project acts as a spur and inspiration. As a new shopping centre development begins to take shape in the centre of the city, BLC is already present in the debates and will ultimately be involved in planning. This may help ensure that what is created is not another mall, or another centre, but something which offers unique opportunities to experience the city in which it is located as well as allowing all to benefit from extensive retail.

A legible city, like all initiatives that involve crosscutting themes, numerous partners and innumerable stakeholders, and which need a long-term process of development and product delivery, is difficult. Legibility involves changing a city, not just the signs. Bristol has not got it all right, but – so far at least – is well on the way to creating a genuinely innovative project. Whilst making a city legible is only one factor in creating dynamic and vibrant cities, it offers a vision that is deliverable, benefits that are substantial, and a methodology and process that will help other areas of renewal and regeneration in the years to come.

In *Soft City*, author Jonathan Raban argues that 'The very existence of the city, with its peculiar personal freedoms and possibilities, has acted as a licence for sermons and dreams. Here society might be arranged for man's greatest good; here, all too often, it has seemed a sink of vice and failure.' This 'melodramatic [and] moralistic view of city life' has been held not only by theologians and philosophers: 'political bosses, architects, town planners, even those professionally tweedy sceptics, sociologists, have happily connived at the idea of the city as a controllable option between heaven and hell.' Raban concludes that 'Bits and pieces of ideal cities have been incorporated into real ones; traffic projects and rehousing schemes are habitually introduced by their sponsors as at least preliminary steps to paradise. The ideal city gives us the authority to castigate the real one; while the sore itch of real cities goads us into creating ideal ones.'[39]

In Bristol we have seen the difficulties of cities, felt the 'sore itch' of reality, learned about the challenges of the future, and debated what we need to do. As T S Eliot said, we now know the place for the first time. Based on this – and always from the point of view of those who will use what we create – what needs to be done to build a legible city, and how to do this, is clear.

Cities need to find their own solutions, based on their history, strengths, traditions, mores. In a time of little imagination in city centre developments, creating a unique place experience helps promote competitive advantage. Go to one shopping centre in Britain, and even Western Europe, and you could be anywhere – the same shops, with the same storefronts, and the same architecture.

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Pero's Bridge