

Barnsley - Re-making the Northern England Midsized Town

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Connecting cities
Building successes



Remaking Barnsley, Strategic Development Framework 2003-2033

The article focuses on the experience of Barnsley, a medium-sized town in Northern England and a member of the URBACT II network on Creative Clusters. Barnsley offers an interesting case of combined economic restructuring and urban regeneration, in which creative industries are being targeted as a potential driver for change.



4th URBACT Creative Clusters thematic workshop, Barnsley, March 2011

The town and its region.

Barnsley is located in Yorkshire, within the **triangle Leeds-Sheffield-Manchester**. It is a market equivalent to London; not as wealthy but not so expensive or congested, according to the assessment of such a geographical position by the local council. The town has a great history as a centre of coal mining and related industries and a strong heritage as a market town of over 750 years standing.

The Metropolitan Borough of Barnsley has currently a **population of 226,300**, back at the 1981 level, after having experienced a virtually constant decline between that date and 2000. In the urban area surrounding the town and

the town centre itself the population is 82,000. In this area, the decrease in the number of young people aged between 20 and 24 is a particular issue, with a drop of 40% over the last 12 years. In ethnic terms, Barnsley has a white British population of 99%, and over 98% were born in the UK, one of the highest percentages in England and Wales. In terms of socio-economic class, Barnsley has 22% professional and managerial, compared to 39.5% nationally. 18% of the population is educated to above degree level, up from 15% in 2000 but well behind the national average of 29%.

Facing productive mutation.

Barnsley once had a thriving **economy based on coal mining**, but with the demise of the coal industry during the 1980s Barnsley's community suffered a profound loss of economic activity and unemployment was rife. At the turn of the century, the town still displayed business numbers and economic activity rates that were lower compared to national and regional averages, and was among Europe's poorest areas, earning its Objective n°1 status. In particular, the urban core had suffered and deteriorated. By the beginning of the 21st century, the town centre was characterized by a stagnant property market, lack of private sector investment, an over abundance of bargain-orientated retail shopping and a one-dimensional night time economy based around the successful pubs and clubs sector for the young adult market.

From the mid-1990s, the South Yorkshire coalfield area started a huge **regeneration effort followed to rebuild an economic base** that would offer a future for people and to eradicate the dereliction left by industrial decline. Barnsley has been at the forefront of this effort, with a lot of backing from Government and European funding, and through working together with neighboring districts. This effort has also had to try and tackle a deep seated legacy of deprivation for too many people.

In a general context of favorable economic climate creating conditions for growth [before the current economic downturn], public intervention allowed the following initiatives:

- A huge public sector investment in economic development and regeneration;
- A very large and successful uptake of resources for people, communities and learning, helping them to take part in the economy;
- Considerable improvements in transport infrastructure;
- A big increase in factories development.

Economic progress in Barnsley has allowed the local economy to be back to its size of 25 years ago. Before the current crisis, in the last 10-15 years: claimant unemployment rates for men and women had fallen from 17.7% and 6.5% to 3% and 0.8%. 10,700 more jobs existed in Barnsley, up by 17%, and the number of locally registered businesses had grown by 400 – a 10% increase. School aged education attainment has improved drastically, rates of house building have accelerated. The regeneration policy has already resulted in a much more attractive environment.

In spite of these achievements, the town is still characterized by much smaller amounts and proportions of retail and office accommodation, although major office developments have taken place, mainly in the town centre. The "Markets" project, Barnsley's major retail development designed to raise the profile of the centre retail sector, is currently constricted by the changing economic climate. Furthermore, businesses have not taken up Barnsley's 'share' of the business support and skills development available from public funding.

Getting the economy back to the size it was when coalmining was so important does not mean it is now the same shape, nor the 'right' size. The notable differences are stronger representations in manufacturing, retail and construction, and a weaker show in business and financial services and in the private sector knowledge and creative economy. It is the size of the economy within the Borough that now needs addressing. It is too small in relation to the size of population and so does not fulfill people's expectations or make a full regional contribution

The creative-based driver in Northern England

The economic restructuring process and the current bet on creative industries in Barnsley echoes in some extent the mutations under way in Northern England, the heart of the industrial revolution in XIX century which then experienced an economic decline in late Twentieth century, along with the global deindustrialisation process in Western economies. Many urban poles in the region have engaged in processes of economic restructuring, and now Northern England is on the way to the convergence to the national economic structure. In this context, **creative-based activities are acting as one of the drivers to revitalize urban economies.**

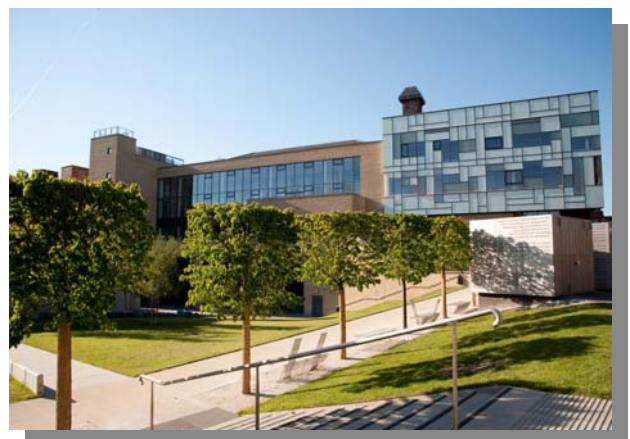
Creative industries have acquired significant relevance in Manchester and Leeds. Meanwhile they are experiencing growth in other city regions, especially around Newcastle and Sheffield, where the Cultural Industries Quarter emerged as early as 1988 and started to gain international recognition at the turn of the century as a best-practice in building the so-called "creative city" within the EU. Nowadays, Yorkshire creative industries are backed by numerous actors, especially the [Creative Investment Development Agency](#) (CIDA), which has provided support to more than 3,000 companies since it started its activities in 2000. The [Cultural Industries Quarter Agency](#) (CIQA), initially the driver of the development of Sheffield's cultural district, has extended its intervention to South Yorkshire.

Furthermore, creative industries were elevated to the status of **national strategic priority**, with the diffusion in 2008 of "[Creative Britain - New Talents for the New Economy](#)", a report endorsed by the then Prime Minister which encompasses 26 basic commitments drawing the path towards turning the creative cluster into one of the major economic strengths of the United Kingdom. As one of the developments of the strategy, **Creative England** is currently being established as the new body that will support the growth of the creative industries in England. Set to start operating in October 2011, it will be based in three creative hubs outside London which will operate from Birmingham, Bristol and Manchester.

Re-making Barnsley: the strategic framework 2003-2033.

The **Re-making Barnsley regeneration strategy** stems from an initiative of public participation which aimed at producing a long-term vision for the town involving local communities in partnership with a panel of experts. The vision resulting from this process is one of a "**21st Century Market Town**", with the central role of the town centre at the heart of an enterprising and innovative local economy, taking advantage of its central location between Manchester, Sheffield and Leeds. This programme is committed to creating a thriving and enjoyable urban environment, based on quality architecture set within an exciting and imaginative public realm, arts, culture and urban living are all part of this vision alongside trade and employment. In this framework, **creative industries are to**

play a significant part of local economic development. Turning Remaking Barnsley into reality involves the mobilization of over £400 million of public and private investment for transforming the town. Between 2006 and 2009, several major projects of new or renovated buildings, but also of green spaces and transport infrastructures, were delivered.



The Civic - gallery, theatre and workspace

Among them, “Westgate Plaza One” and the “Digital Centre” make up flagships of contemporary architecture, whose development was governed by environmental and social sustainability and high quality design. **Westgate Plaza One** is a five-floor building equipped with a state-of-the-art ICT infrastructure, which hosts Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council offices. The **Digital Media Centre** provides 72 offices and various meeting spaces for small businesses and entrepreneurs in the new media sector. The facility offers advanced business and incubation services to its hosts, as well as virtual offices for home-based businesses.

The refurbishment of **The Civic**, an iconic former Victorian theater, is another major operation aligned to the creative-based local economic strategy. The Civic is a paradigm as a creative-based facility in the sense of hybridation. It comprises exhibition spaces and galleries, workspaces for local entrepreneurs or even leisure and

retail uses. All connected to creativity in the same venue. The completion of the renovation and extension works in March 2009 made the building available again, after being closed for more than 11 years

The **Elsecar Heritage Centre** completes the range of facilities and infrastructures specifically oriented towards cultural and creative industries. Located within a former ironworks and colliery workshops, the centre’s current ambition is to, according to Helen Ball, Head of Culture and Creative Industries in Barnsley, “provide a unique, effective and sustainable setting for heritage, learning, events, retail and commercial activity”. Its restored historical buildings now house an antique centre, individual craft workshops, and the so-called Building 21, a 12,000 square feet event venue. It also includes the Hive Gallery, the first contemporary art gallery in Barnsley whose programming promotes from local talent to internationally recognized artists, and Hive Artist Studios.

Elsecar Heritage Centre



The Digital Media Centre



Hive Gallery
at Elsecar Heritage Centre



In parallel, Barnsley is investing in its **education facilities**, assuming the necessity to promote their central role in community life, including in the emergence of local talents.

The borough was among the first to embark on the government's "Building Schools for the Future" programme with access to initial capital investment of £150 million. The programme, initially scheduled to be completed in September 2012, undertakes the merging of Barnsley's 13 secondary schools into nine newly built "Advanced Learning Centres", along with a heavy intervention of its two special schools, boasting state-of-the-art facilities, with an emphasis on IT and sport. They are also to become a focal point for the wider community, welcoming post-16 and adult learners as well as offering use of their leisure amenities to everyone.

Barnsley College is one of the country's largest further education establishments and the major provider of post-16 learning in the borough. Local firms looking to build their employees' skills base can take advantage of the college's Business Solutions Centre. The Business Solutions Centre offers a broad range of choices to

companies, from government-sponsored initiatives such as apprenticeships to tailor-made commercial training.

In 2005 the University Centre Barnsley, a campus of Huddersfield University opened in the town. UCB offers full-time and part-time study, including degrees and specialist postgraduate and professional courses currently offering a range of visual art, design and media courses at undergraduate degree level from which are emerging talented practitioners/artists. The campus boasts a new learning resource centre, industry-standard television, radio and recording studios, an art studio and advanced IT infrastructure.

One of the key findings extracted from the learning itinerary carried out in URBACT Creative Clusters, is to show how cities actively dealing with the creative driver in economic development are also seriously improving their education systems, at local level. These cities, such as Reggio Emilia (Italy), Óbidos (Portugal) or Jyväskylä (Finland), are performing with **the concept of "the educational city"**. They are introducing innovation and creativity in the curricula at primary and secondary levels. They are incubating the future local talent.

The Civic, main auditorium



Attracting and retaining creative talent: the Barnsley approach.

Inspired by the cluster development initiatives launched in the region (especially in Sheffield and Leeds), and after initial pilot projects, the **Creativity Works/Creative Networks programme** was specifically designed to support the development of a creative and digital industries (CDI) cluster in the South Yorkshire coalfield area, consisting of Barnsley, Doncaster and Rotherham. During 2003-2007, the programme, supported by ERDF resources plus a 20% contribution from private entities, was managed by

Barnsley Development Agency on behalf of the local authorities of the 3 towns and the Arts Council England, and its delivery was contracted to CIDA agency. Focused on the formalising of the business direction of individual entrepreneurs and the acceleration of business development and growth, the programme's purpose was to develop support measures, taking into account the specificities of the sector: a vast majority of small and micro businesses, especially freelancers, diversity and specialization and the domination of the creative role over other capabilities necessary for sustainable business.

Mapping creative entrepreneurs in Barnsley

Aware of the necessity to develop sector intelligence, the Barnsley Development Agency entrusted a mapping study of local Creative and Digital Industries, which was carried out between August and October 2010. The study identified **540 active companies**, which majority (82%) are micro-businesses generating a turnover between £50,000 and £99,999. "A small but emerging creative sector" sums up Tracey Johnson, creative & digital sector specialist at the Barnsley Development Agency.

The study allowed highlighting the following features of local CDI businesses:

- A diversified basis in terms of sectors with a relative specialization in the design sector (21%) and software and computer services (12%).
- CDI businesses are usually working from home or a rented office.
- 82% trade with clients outside Barnsley, with half of them operating at national level (43%) or at international level (12%).
- 50% established their activity before 2000.
- A wide awareness of Barnsley's cultural spaces and workspaces.

The importance of ICT-related activities somehow reflects the impacts of national and regional economic development policies, which have aimed at supporting growth in the 'digital' industries specifically. Across the sub-region, there is also a particular strength in hardware and manufacturing-related CDI activities. This bias is likely to reflect the industrial heritage of the area, but offers potential for Barnsley to differentiate itself and generate a greater economic impact, through integration in local supply chains. Activities such as design can also be used to help support the manufacturing base more widely.

Another interesting teaching highlighted during informal feedback sessions is the existence of an inclination to cooperation. Collaborations are perceived as a means to maintain activity levels in challenging economic conditions or to generate growth opportunities. Thus, networking events, along with marketing events, are part of the key expectations of CDI businesses, while recruitment and retention are seen as a major issue for future growth.

Source:

Barnsley CDI Business Mapping Report, Barnsley Development Agency/Ask Insight, 2010.



Making connections at The Civic

The Creativity Works programme developed a relevant portfolio of support schemes:

- The **Creative Sector Business Advisers** were established as a pool of 45 mentors, who received previous specific mentor training, in order to assist businesses in the elaboration of a diagnostic review and in the preparation of an action plan, followed by mentoring in the execution phase. This service basically intended to foster new product development, business planning, funding arrangements and the incorporation of wider business issues such as finance, human resources, marketing or export. Up to October 2005, over 100 businesses were advised.
- The **Creative Business Grant Scheme** offered grants for development projects, covering a maximum of 60% of total project costs, with a maximum of £5,000 per beneficiary. The scheme, which foresaw the support of 145 projects, included mentors support for application.
- Focused upon the creation of new jobs, with the ambition to contribute to the retention of local graduates, the **Creative Apprenticeship Scheme** provided a brokerage service between employers and potential employees (among unemployed

individuals) with recruitment assistance leading to a subsidised and mentored 6 month work and training placement.

- With **Creative Business Networking Events**, the programme added the idea of cluster development to the basic goal of sector development and growth. The development of local district creative networks, through events and digital media tools, aimed at supporting the sharing of ideas and increasing awareness of business contacts and opportunities for collaboration.

Initially carried out in the framework of the Creative Works Programme, events and networking activities have emerged as a pillar of Barnsley's strategy towards the CDI cluster, towards the development of a "conversation", focusing on business-to-business relationships, within the sector but also with the rest of local economy, and on links with regional and national networks.

Basically, what is at stake for public intervention is the provision of environments to the sector for free discourse and informal skill sharing and networking via digital platforms. According to Tracey Johnson, from Barnsley Development Agency, a core challenge is

being successful in “animating the places and spaces that we have built, with cultural and sector development focused events such as networking, and encouraging sector-led ‘guerilla’ activity across all venues and places, as well as programmed activity”.

Interestingly, the case of Barnsley teaches us that the provision of key venues and facilities for cultural and creative industries does not make it all. “Buildings only become hubs when there is activity here and when the sector takes ownership”. There is a strong belief in Barnsley that events encourage this **sense of ownership** of the sector and its physical assets, which in turn builds confidence, continued engagement, pride and word of mouth promotion. “**A confident sector retains talent**” declares Tracey Johnson.

Accordingly, cultural events, beyond their social functions, must be opportunities to link individuals of the sector. Networking events are usually organized at the margin of local events. High profile events, such as Small World, a festival of international animation, are intended to bring audience from outside, inspire ambitions among local artists, allow new connections and new ideas, and position the local sector in wider marketplace.

This is also a key message from **URBACT Creative Clusters** network. Many creative entrepreneurs from Creative Clusters city-partners refer to “making connections” as the main task by local governments when promoting local creative ecosystems.

The new **Creative Arts strategy**, whose first version was elaborated in 2009, is currently acting as an important input for the elaboration of Barnsley’s Local Action Plan within the URBACT Creative Clusters thematic network. The strategy is actually evolving, enriched by the work of the network and the mapping study carried out in 2010. In addition, changes brought by the new national strategy for local development by the Coalition Government have made necessary a reflexion on the funding and execution of the strategy.

A new framework for local development in the UK

Issued on October 2010, the British Government’s White Paper entitled “[Local Growth: realising every place’s potential](#)” establishes the new national strategy on sub-national economic growth. That is a new rebalancing power between local, regional and national scales in Britain. Such a policy paper is fundamental to understand the new framework for local policies within the “Big Society” conservative project.

The most spectacular changes brought by this new strategy are the abolishing by March 2012 of Regional Development Agencies – the regional level is considered as inappropriate for the concept of functional economies and an effective acknowledgement of the diversity of local situations – and a global **decentralisation process** in order to empower local authorities and communities in the delivery of planning and development policies, in a bottom-up approach.

The major decentralisation measures are the following:

- The establishment of directly-elected Mayors in the 12 main largest English cities;
- The promotion of Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEP), which are to bring together the private sector, local authorities and their communities for the development of local strategies for growth. Barnsley is included in the Sheffield City Region LEP, whose proposal approved by the government in October 2010 identifies the creative and digital sector as one of the main growth sectors.
- A reform of the planning system.
- The Localism Bill was introduced to Parliament on 13 December 2010, with the objective to organize power shifts to local government and empowerment of individuals and communities.

As recent and deep changes in the institutional landscape, these measures are still surrounded by uncertainty on their implementation and consequences, especially regarding the LEPs and the funding resources for development projects.



Main lessons.

As a conclusion we shall point out some key aspects in Barnsley's case that we consider relevant for the success of creativity-driven urban strategies.

1. Formal strategic planning and capacity for constant foresight.

This is a primary lesson from Barnsley. Formal planning means converting visions into a strategy ready to be implemented through a work agenda. During the last 25 years the town developed its capacity on how to reshape its local economy from a coal-mining and steel-manufacturing base to a post-industrial economic model. Mutation and economic change are well known concepts in the area; they are drivers in a local culture of systematic strategic planning. There is a good reason why the Barnsley Strategic Plan is called "Remaking Barnsley". Dealing with the creative driver in local development demands a powerful vision [which also demands political leadership] and the

operational capability to translate into a working agenda.

In fact, such a strategic culture is behind the rapid local response to the effects of the on-going global crisis in the city.

2. A range of very well focused new urban facilities related to creative entrepreneurs.

Barnsley has been successful in carrying out a voluntary policy to develop such facilities, whose orientation was significantly determined by the public participation process of Remaking Barnsley – avoiding in that way the risk of elitism – and whose funding has been based on public-private partnership schemes. The town is also an interesting case in terms of combining newly-developed contemporary buildings and renovated old industrial sites.

The Barnsley case illustrates that there is no a truly creative-based strategy in local development without a specific spatial framework, which is another key message from URBACT Creative Clusters.

A new generation of creative-based facilities driven by flexibility, hybridation and interaction is emerging.

3. Making connections between local creative people and entrepreneurs.

That is the distinctive element in the Barnsley approach attracting and retaining creative talent. As Tracey Johnson, executive for creative and digital industries at Barnsley Development Agency says: "we are aiming to attract creatives with the animation of our spaces, and our openness to ideas, and retain them with a strong, supportive infrastructure and a sense of ownership. The sector is encouraged to have its own voice, be confident and connected, get on everyone's radar and be a friend to many. It isn't about just throwing money at the sector".

Far from Barnsley, creative professionals and entrepreneurs in Reggio Emilia or Jyväskylä mentioned to us that "making connections" should be the main task of a local government when trying to promote a local creative ecosystem.

4. Ad-hoc packages of support measures to creative professionals and businesses.

It is not enough to plan a creative-based local strategy or providing ad-hoc facilities for innovative entrepreneurs. Effective creative-based strategies include a specific package of support measures [financial and non-financial] adapted to creative industries and creative-based business models. The Creative Works Programme in Barnsley is a good example; a well-positioned scheme combined with a successful partnership for funding, management and delivery.

The ambitious configuration of the programme, which allowed concentration of funding resources, worked successfully thanks to effective communication and distribution of tasks between the delivery, management and communication entities. The role played by a specialist delivery agency, not necessarily local such as the Creative Investment Development Agency (CIDA) guaranteed the credibility of the programme and contributed to the satisfying engagement of businesses in the programme. The user-driven approach of the programme, along with the crucial support of the network of mentors, has been another decisive factor for this engagement.

On the other side, the Creative Works programme acted as a gateway [especially built for creative industries] to the wider business support infrastructure in the town, thanks to the central role played by Barnsley Development Agency, a well-established interface between culture/arts and economic development in Barnsley. The agency is currently delivering the ERDF-funded "Enterprising Barnsley" programme, accessible to creative businesses, in a partnership with the University Centre Barnsley and Barnsley Innovation Centre. Building on previous initiatives, the programme provides coaching services and support to networking programmes for creative and digital businesses, as well as new business incubation and graduate start-up programme [in line with Barnsley's ambition to retain local talent].

In a larger extent, the dialogue between cultural policy, economic development strategy and urban planning is constant within the Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council.

Recommended sites:

www.barnsleydevelopmentagency.co.uk

www.enterprisingbarnsley.co.uk

www.barnsleydmc.co.uk

www.barnsleycivic.co.uk

www.barnsleylive.co.uk

www.building21.co.uk

www.cida.org

[URBACT Creative Clusters](#)

This case study revisits the town profile contained in the baseline study of the URBACT network on creative clusters. Our sincere gratitude to Tracey Johnson and Barnsley Metropolitan Council for all the material provided.

URBACT II

URBACT is a European exchange and learning programme promoting sustainable urban development.

It enables cities to work together to develop solutions to major urban challenges, reaffirming the key role they play in facing increasingly complex societal challenges. It helps them to develop pragmatic solutions that are new and sustainable, and that integrate economic, social and environmental dimensions. It enables cities to share good practices and lessons learned with all professionals involved in urban policy throughout Europe. URBACT is 181 cities, 29 countries, and 5,000 active participants

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