3S RECIPE - Smart Shrinkage Solutions

Fostering Resilient Cities in Inner Peripheries of Europe

STOKE-ON-TRENT (UK) POLICY BRIEF #3 • COMPACT CONNECTED CITY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This policy brief displays a successful compact and connected city solution – the consolidation of Staffordshire University into **a distinct University Quarter** – that has been implemented in Stoke-on-Trent – a medium-size polycentric industrial city in central England[1], coping with population loss. Building on local knowledge and stakeholders' experiences, it shows how better **integration of local knowledge infrastructure** can improve the compactness and connectivity of the city. It reveals a number of conditions to make it happen. The key lesson is that achieving compactness and connectivity depends on building unique university expertise, meeting the current and future requirements, and aspirations of the academic staff, students, and visitors, and on providing good learning, teaching, and everyday life experience.

INTRODUCTION

For a city of its size, Stoke-on-Trent has rather sound knowledge infrastructure, being home to four institutions of further and higher education. They include **Staffordshire University** (14,910 students in total), **Stoke-on-Trent College** (17,000 students), **the City of Stoke-on-Trent Sixth Form College** (1,800 students), and **Royal Stoke University Hospital**, a teaching and research body affiliated with Keele University School of Medicine (750 students). The **University of Keele** itself (with 10,600 students in total) is located approximately 4 miles (7 km) west of Stoke. These many advantages notwithstanding, until recently, the city had not been able fully to explore and utilise its knowledge base for urban regeneration.

For decades, this heavily industrialised urban area has struggled with both attracting potential students and retaining fresh graduates. To improve this situation, local actors have worked towards improving the University campuses to offer current and potential students a unique high quality education experience in a more compact, convenient, safe and pleasant urban setting. The work to remake Stoke-on-Trent into a growing centre for learning has also included a £26m City of Stoke-on-Trent Sixth Form College redevelopment, Staffordshire University's investment in a £30m science centre, and £270m Building Schools for the Future central government programme to improve the secondary school provision across the city.

[1] Stoke-on-Trent (pop. 255,833) is a local authority created in 1910 through federation of six historical towns – *The Potteries* – including Tunstall, Burslem, Hanley, Stoke, Fenton, and Longton, with an area of 36 square miles [93 km^2]. The municipality was granted city status in 1925 by King George V during a personal visit to emphasise its importance as the centre of the china and pottery industry.

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A SUCCESSFUL DELIVERY OF STOKE-ON-TRENT'S UNIVERSITY QUARTER: KEY MECHANISMS

Staffordshire University, College Road Campus, Stoke-on-Trent.

The University Quarter or **UniQ** is a proactive initiative implemented through a partnership between three educational organisations – Staffordshire University, Stoke-on-Trent FE College and Stoke-on-Trent Sixth Form College – to address the effect of shrinkage on the city's academic and student community through consolidating their main campuses in a unique learning centre. The Quarter has been a major improvement to an important area laying between Stoke-on-Trent railway station and Hanley, the city centre.

Since 2009, the **UniQ partnership** has implemented a number of high-profile investments, including: Stoke on Trent FE College's Lifestyle Building; The Enterprise Hub; The Technology Hub; Stoke-on-Trent Sixth Form College's relocation to a landmark site opposite the Stoke-on-Trent railway station; a new £18.7m St. Peter's Academy on the old Sixth Form College site in Fenton; Staffordshire University's Beacon Building; and Stoke-on-Trent College's Sports Academy (see the image on the right). There are, however, 'a lot of things' that need to happen for the initiative to realise its potential for the city. To identify some of the practical mechanisms driving the creation of the University Quarter, we have used a distinctive in-house *Urban Futures Method* designed to facilitate stakeholders' collective reflection on and learning about this solution, its benefits, and necessary conditions for effective urban regeneration and smart shrinkage practices (Lombardi et al, 2012). During a special workshop on 12 March 2019 hosted by B Arts (Beavers Arts Ltd), the local actors involved in or influenced by the University Quarter projects revealed ten locally specific outcomes that the UniQ initiative can deliver for the city along with the necessary enabling conditions to achieve them, as follows:

Outcomes	What are the necessary conditions that make it happen?
Greater potential for students to stay in the city	Willingness to go to a higher education institution (HEI); the availability of jobs and affordable housing to keep students in the city; supporting a student lifestyle
Better academic cadre, attracting businesses to co-locate	Expertise (appropriate subjects and people); investment; willingness from the university and businesses to make partnership; spaces for businesses to be there, and people with right skills
The city is recognised for its expertise in key areas	Opportunities, with the city getting renowned by its association with a key economic sector. Scale needs to be large enough to make a difference
More variety for leisure	Infrastructure required for good leisure experience: not too far away; diverse; serving different interests; affordable

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More private sector development	Investment opportunities; availability of land; cost attractive; planning permission; demand
Bring more students to the city via easier access from surrounding areas	Transport infrastructure (cars / travel / cycling opportunities); linkages available between modes of transport; affordability. The city needs to become an attractive place
Stop the brain drain from the city	Willingness to come here; quality teaching and jobs; affordable housing; willingness to commute with the wages allowing it
More jobs into the city centre (e.g. lecturers and managers)	Attractive salaries; quality housing in right locations; a good university of appropriate scale, supporting a large labour pool of available lecturers
A two-university knowledge hub	Enough opportunities to sustain 2 universities; proximity necessitating them to work in partnership, not to compete, but develop complementary specialisations
Staffordshire University campus in Stoke is a public transport hub (bus and rail)	Continuous maintenance of transport infrastructure; investment; university partnership working; availability of wider connections and interconnectedness (access to London, outdoor nature, etc.)

RECOMMENDATIONS: LEARNING *UniQ* LESSONS

- **Improve internal and external transport links and services to support the diversity of lifestyles**

Universities and colleges should work with transport authorities, commercial operators, and public sector companies to develop the right variety of affordable, sustainable, and active travel means for staff, students, and visitors by tapping into their everyday travel needs and experience. Priority should be given to non-motorised and public transport choices. Wider transport connections (to major conurbations) should be improved, as these are equally important for the academic and student community.

- **Create opportunities that could draw students to stay in the city**

Shrinking cities often face a huge challenge of a continuous decline in the number of young people willing to enter higher education and students choosing to stay for study in their home city or region, more generally. Complex factors contributing to the local young people being disinterested in higher education and/or choosing to leave the city-region to study elsewhere must be investigated and addressed. This work should engage with proactive cultural and civic organisations working with the local youth, students, and graduates to understand their dilemmas and to learn what is needed effectively to tackle the brain drain. Some factors affecting the location choices of young people include access to good well-paid jobs, affordable housing, and access to a broad range of everyday life facilities and services.

- **Local universities need to build a distinguished expertise in key areas**

The local university (or universities) should develop as an institution offering a nationally and internationally renowned expertise in particular areas and study programmes, which are unique or hard to find anywhere else in the country. Young people should be equipped with a range of high-level capabilities to enable them to work effectively in today's dynamic and complex professional environment. The local universities should consider providing a new learning and teaching approach, a cadre of high calibre academic experts, and state-of-the-art study facilities.

WOULD THE UNIVERSITY QUARTER DELIVER THE SAME BENEFITS WHATEVER THE FUTURE BRINGS?

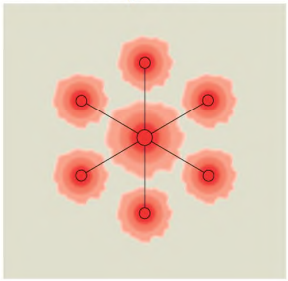
A specialised University Quarter offers a strategic solution to urban shrinkage through the construction of high-quality local knowledge infrastructure aimed at attracting students to study, live, and play inside the shrinking city. The successful delivery of a specialised knowledge-based urban quarter could well be affected by wider and dynamic political economy settings that are difficult to predict and comprehend locally. A smart shrinkage solution may be strategic (e.g., brownfield regeneration) or detailed (e.g., refurbishment of a local entertainment venue). Whatever the short-term effect of a given solution, policy-makers must adopt a longer-term perspective to ensure its **continued performance** throughout its intended lifespan, despite changing conditions. The question to ask is, thus: Will today's smart shrinkage solutions deliver their intended benefits over a 40-year regeneration cycle, typically used for planning investment and development proposals? During this project, we have tested the likely future performance of each urban development and regeneration-related 'smart shrinkage solution-benefit pair' – that is, actions taken today in the name of sustainable urban development – in a series of possible future scenarios for the year 2060. If a proposed solution delivers a positive legacy, regardless of the future against which it is tested, then it

can be adopted with confidence. Four **plausible but distinct** future scenarios were included into our analysis (Lombardi *et. al.*, 2012: Table 2). A summary of these four global **urban future scenarios** is as follows:

New Sustainability Paradigm (NSP)

Key driver: Equity and sustainability

Settlement pattern



Description

An ethos of 'one planet living' facilitates a shared vision for more sustainable living and a much improved quality of life. New socio-economic arrangements result in changes to the character of urban industrial civilisation. Local is valued but global links also play a role. A sustainable and more equitable future is emerging from new values, a revised model of development and the active engagement of civil society.

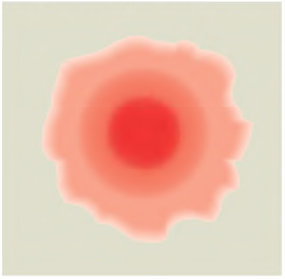
Philosophy

The worldview of the *New Sustainability Paradigm* has few historical precedents, although John Stuart Mill, the nineteenth century political economist, was prescient in theorising a post-industrial and post-scarcity social arrangement based on human development rather than material acquisition (Mill, 1848).

Policy Reform (PR)

Key driver: Economic growth with greater equity

Settlement pattern



Description

Policy Reform depends on comprehensive and coordinated government action for poverty reduction and environmental sustainability, negating trends toward high inequity. The values of consumerism and individualism persist, creating a tension with policies that prioritise sustainability.

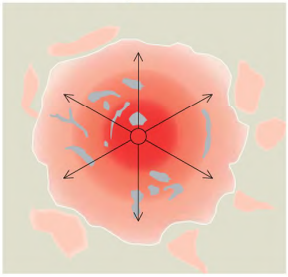
Philosophy

In *Policy Reform*, the belief is that markets require strong policy guidance to address inherent tendencies toward economic crisis, social conflict and environmental degradation. John Maynard Keynes, influenced by the Great Depression, is an important predecessor of those who hold that it is necessary to manage capitalism in order to temper its crises (Keynes, 1936).

Market Forces (MF)

Key driver: Competitive, open global markets

Settlement pattern



Description

Market Forces relies on the self-correcting logic of competitive markets. Current demographic, economic, environmental, and technological trends unfold without major surprise. Competitive, open and integrated markets drive world development. Social and environmental concerns are secondary.

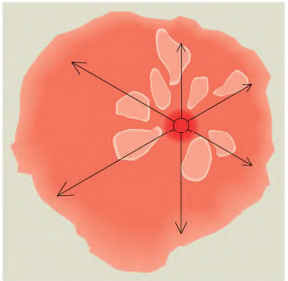
Philosophy

The *Market Forces* bias is one of market optimism, the faith that the hidden hand of well-functioning markets is the key to resolving social, economic and environmental problems. An important philosophic antecedent is Adam Smith (1776), while contemporary representatives include many neo-classical economists and free market enthusiasts.

Fortress World (FW)

Key driver: Protection and control of resources

Settlement pattern



Description

Powerful individuals, groups and organisations develop an authoritarian response to the threats of resource scarcity and social breakdown by forming alliances to protect their own interests. Security and defensibility of resources are paramount for these privileged rich elites. An impoverished majority exists outside the fortress. Policy and regulation exist but enforcement may be limited. Armed forces act to impose order, protect the environment and prevent a societal collapse.

Philosophy

The *Fortress World* mindset was foreshadowed by the philosophy of Thomas Hobbes (1651), who held a pessimistic view of the nature of man and saw the need for powerful leadership. While it is rare to find modern Hobbesians, many people believe, in their resignation and anguish, that some kind of a *Fortress World* is the logical outcome of the unattended social polarisation and environmental degradation they observe.

The Urban Future Method does not favour any particular scenario. Indeed, for a solution to be determined to be robust and resilient to future change, the necessary conditions to support intended benefits being achieved over

time must exist in all scenarios. Drawing on expertise, experience, and knowledge of the local context, we have graded the likely performance of the University Quarter's necessary conditions in the future as follows:

Urban Futures Method applied to the construction of a specialised university quarter				
Necessary Conditions	**New Sustainability Paradigm**	**Policy Reform**	**Market Forces**	**Fortress World**
Economic opportunity to sustain several higher education institutions	Local commercial, co-operative, and social enterprises thrive in the new environment and offer amble opportunities for local universities to work together. University collaborations with the local business to support the sustainable urban development of local communities grow and expand	Sustainability of HEIs depends on national higher education, science, research and development policies, and on regional equalisation (levelling up) attempts. An effort is needed to facilitate universities collaborating and working with local communities. A university merger may be advocated, if such a strategy fails	Universities will battle each other to attract students and build business partnerships separately. This can be overcome through encouraging strong university leadership able to push for co-operation in complementary fields and discover other business opportunities	Universities become rivals. Support exits for the strongest. Local businesses are too weak, basic, and fragmented to get involved with the higher education sector
Attractive built environment offering choice to students	A local university is an anchor institution, part of sustainable place-shaping activities with focus on people's knowledge-based aspirations	Regional equalisation (levelling up) is a government priority delivered through major infrastructure projects. 'Choice' may be constrained by political rationalities. Creating attractive learning and living environment would require the University to engage with local leaders and projects	The focus is on boosting growth, working with local businesses. Minimum concern for students' needs. The University would be required to demonstrate the economic value of meeting students' requirements	Outside the exclusive affluent fortress community, the build environment is not maintained to retain attractiveness. Accommodating students' 'choice' is limited to the lowest common denominator of quality and value provisions
The city getting renown by its expertise	The need to develop distinctive expertise locally is understood and fostered, for it ensures long-term sustainability through local production and reduces carbon dioxide emissions embodied in international trade	Policies exist to use universities to utilise the unique local material and knowledge assets. But a positive outcome requires from local and regional authorities an innovative vision, commitment, and political power to lobby for central government support	The HEIs are freer to develop their own strategies and priorities. Success depends on the ability to clearly identify and develop one's own niche in the market	Local universities struggle to move higher up the global league-table rankings influenced by 'top' universities. Success depends on the university leadership being able to manipulate and boost its ranking position relative to local competitor's

Key: condition highly unlikely to continue in the future condition is at risk in the future condition highly likely to continue in the future

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

➢ **Local universities have distinctive resources of urban dynamics to address population loss**

Apart from specific initiatives to provide a better physical settings for research and learning, universities have unique and multiple capacities for redressing shrinkage and fostering innovation in their respective cities. For example, within their own community, they can act as pro-active actors to build knowledge about and accommodate a wide range of urban living aspirations beyond the immediate education setting. Within the wider urban community, they can work in partnerships and collaborate with actors at different local, regional, and international scales and across physical, social, economic and cultural dimensions. However, until now, universities have not been fully acknowledged as primary actors of urban regeneration, remaining inside the city but being separated from their wider local, regional, and national policy-making circles.

➢ **Attractive learning and urban environment offers more choice for students**

Local authorities and private businesses are typically the key responsible actors and agencies for the provision of jobs, affordable housing, and civic infrastructure within an urban area. Therefore, the local university should consider building relationships with those actors as early as possible to negotiate students' requirements and impact on the city. The focus should be, in particular, on demonstrating to those actors the benefits of diversification that reflect student aspirations, which would help growth and develop their business and maintain vitality of the city

itself. The university should engage with its community to develop appropriate standards and specifications for housing, employment, and everyday life infrastructure, and to lobby for a change in traditional development practices.

- **Create enough economic opportunity to sustain several institutions of higher education (HEIs)**

Close collaboration between local higher education institutions may be an effective way of finding complementary learning opportunities, building a wider range of study programmes to attract more students and involve local businesses and communities. However, such collaborations would usually require funding support from the higher tier of government and commitment from the leadership teams of the local HEIs. National and regional government policies should take into account the opportunities for redressing 'urban shrinkage' created through collaborations between local universities and aim at providing funding and other measures to support such partnerships. The HEIs' leadership teams have to seek a deeper understanding of the collaboration dynamics in the local context, how to address the local rivalry, and get the best out of this co-operation.

- **The city needs to get renown by its expertise**

By boosting knowledge infrastructure through developing institutions of further and higher education, offering a unique approach to learning and distinguished expertise, a city could create conditions for redressing urban shrinkage. However, the establishment of a unique university quarter in a shrinking city will not only require commitment, innovative thinking, and a strong political voice from local and regional decision-makers to lobby the national government for the required support. It will also depend on their organisational capacity to identify, develop, and strengthen academic expertise in niche and locally unique subjects to boost their university rankings against other competing HEIs across the country and worldwide.

Local universities should be supported as 'connectivity anchors' for a shrinking city

The significance of local universities for an effective resolution of urban shrinkage and, especially, for achieving compactness and connectivity, lies in their ability to deepen and diversify existing structures and linkages within and beyond the shrinking city itself. This unique capability is demonstrated today though university-led activities that often involve multi-layered and multidimensional processes. As connectivity *anchor institutions*, knowledge-based organisations are required to operate in a more comprehensive and collaborative manner, utilising the full range of their capacity. The latter may include the following roles and measures: building better evidence on transport issues and effects of policy interventions through innovative methods; utilising local and regional research networks to improve connectivity and access to desired services within the wider city-region; and engaging community leaders and local citizens in decision-making processes through various events and activities.

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