The Engineered and the Vernacular in Cultural Quarter Development


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Abstract
This article explores how the cultural quarters in two UK cities have developed namely Leicester and Nottingham. By referring to a distinction first used by Ivan Illich between the ‘engineered’ and the ‘vernacular’, it explores some of the key cultural and political differences between institutional cultural quarter development on the one hand, and informal, D-I-Y cultural development on the other. It argues that informal and D-I-Y cultural practices raise important political questions concerning the meaning, production, consumption and ownership of culture, the nature cultural institutions and how culture contributes to urban development.

Introduction
This article will explore different types of cultural quarter development in two UK cities, namely Leicester and Nottingham. Primarily, I want to explore different underlying rationales for cultural quarter development by highlighting the differences between Leicester’s professional, policy-oriented and institutional-led cultural quarter development on the one hand, and on the other hand, cultural quarter developments in Nottingham that have grown out of informal, D-I-Y cultural practices. I do not want to suggest that one rationale is always ‘better’ than another. However, highlighting informal and D-I-Y developments does raise important political questions concerning the production of culture and the nature creative work, cultural institutions and urban development. Because the rationale behind public policies towards culture is often institution-led, it often tends to neglect the informal and tends towards a formal rationality, geared towards devising universal means to achieve cultural objectives. This formal rationality can easily miss the importance of D-I-Y cultural activity that may both create and sustain vibrant cultural life. Recognising the D-I-Y suggests the efficacy of a more substantive rationality that re-directs attention towards the ‘ultimate ends’ of cultural life and interaction, rather than the ‘universal means’ of policy levers within official cultural institutions (Weber 1978).

The exploration of the cultural contours of the two cities in question is helped therefore by a theoretical discussion developed most extensively by Illich (1973, 1981) that demarcates the ‘engineered’ and the ‘vernacular’. In using this distinction one can begin to envisage ways to develop a more inclusive politics and policies for cultural quarters that are more open and responsive to cultural production and interaction as it is experienced within peoples’ everyday lives. This raises political questions concerning the ‘professional’ construction of knowledge about culture and how this relates to questions of the ownership and authorship of cultural spaces within cultural quarters. It signals different conceptions of culture, as something extrinsic, institutionally located and passively consumed on the one hand, and something intrinsic, actively created, produced and lived on the other. These political dimensions therefore raise issues that have implications for more general discussions of the nature of culture, politics and everyday life (Lefebvre 1971), for a discussion of an alternative relationship between labour, work and life (Gorz 1987, 1989, 1999) and nature of cultural solidarity and conviviality (Marcuse 1969, Illich 1973). The vernacular exhibits characteristics that are perhaps embryonic conditions for the de-alienated expression of creative labour power (Fromm 1966).

A Tale of Two Cities
Nottingham and Leicester are the two main cities of the East Midlands region of the United
Kingdom. They are of comparable size and history. Both cities have had a similar industrial past based largely around manufacturing industries. Both are now centres of local administration, retailing and other service industries. Both have comparable student populations, with two universities in each city. Both have in recent year paid attention to the development of a cultural quarter and to urban regeneration through cultural development. Both cities are testament to the general proposition that ‘cities are good for us’ (Sherlock 1991. Prud’ Homme 1995, Rogers 1997, 2001). However, if we compare the growth and policy approaches that each city has taken to the development of their cultural quarter, the similarities end.

Nottingham’s cultural quarter has grown in and around the Lace Market area. This is an area just to the east of the city centre, that was in the 1960’s an area of textile and lace factories. Architecturally, this area is made up of large 19th century factory buildings that during the 1970’s were unused and available at very cheap rents. Artists and other creative practitioners started to re-cycle these old buildings and use these ‘left over’ spaces as studio and workshops. This provided a rich mix of people and creative disciplines within the area, and the process grew apace such that by the late 1980’s the Lace Market area was generally recognised as the cultural quarter of the city. During this time the retail area that borders the western edge of the Lace Market area began to change. The area had previously been a fairly run down retail area of no particular distinction. Independent designer-retailers, sole-traders in fashion and other ethnic-designers goods began to rent retail space in the area. Again this process really got going during the 1980’s when alternative bookshops moved into the area and the local bars began to cater for the student and alternative market, becoming music venues and exhibiting independents’ artwork.

The Midland Group (an independent performance and visual arts centre) and Nottingham Film Theatre were situated in the Lace Market. The Midland group folded, but Nottingham Film Theatre became the Broadway Cinema in the 1980’s. The Broadway’s core function is as an independent cinema, but it quickly became much more than this, and grew to be a central cultural space within the Lace Market area. Once it had opened its café-bar it became the natural meeting place for the independent cultural practitioners of the city, consolidating the area as the cultural quarter of Nottingham. In the 1990’s this was further consolidated when The Broadway began offering incubator spaces to local cultural producers. Given this, The Broadway quickly became the central creative hub where independent cultural producers and participants would regularly congregate. Nottingham’s cultural quarter has recently received some much needed infra-structural development, investment and capacity building from public and private cultural institutions. However, it has to a very large extent grown organically out of the informal creative interactions which local creative people engage in within the context of their everyday lives. The process is still very vibrant, thoroughly informal and unplanned. Although recent gentrification and large scale capital development has meant the creative spaces at cheap rents are no longer available, a sense of informal D-I-Y congregation still remains. These processes are as much social gatherings as they are institutionally based events for cultural consumption. Rather than being a planned and policy-led development, the designation of the Lace Market as Nottingham’s cultural quarter has grown from its recognition as the de facto cultural quarter of the city (Shorthose 2004).

Leicester’s cultural quarter is evolving in a very different way. It has taken a largely top-down approach to the development of its cultural quarter, focusing upon infra-structural planning, investment and development. It is planning a £58m investment in a new performing arts centre, a new film and media centre, a new contemporary visual arts centre, a new music venue, and production facilities for creative businesses. All these infra-structural developments are planned for a cultural quarter at a newly designated site within the St. George’s area of the city. Whereas the development of Nottingham’s cultural quarter was largely characterised by the re-cycling of old industrial buildings, Leicester’s is characterised by the building of large, new signature
architecture. Leicester’s cultural quarter development is an infrastructure-led approach that adds a whole new dimension to the city. Rather than growing out a de facto sense of informal congregation, the rationale behind this cultural policy and planning includes capacity building and the recognition that the city’s infrastructure was not suitably developed for its cultural and demographic needs. In particular, the capacity building includes the need for more audience opportunities at new cultural venues, as well as the growth and synergistic re-location of existing cultural organisations.

The St. George’s area of the city was chosen as the site for a variety of clear institutional policy reasons. Firstly, its proximity to the city centre and transport links is an important factor. The St. George’s area is to the south east of the city, situated close its main retail centre, the railway and bus-stations. Secondly, the City Council’s ownership of some of the existing buildings and the eligibility of the area for regeneration funds from national and European sources meant that developments in the area were seen as more deliverable. Thirdly, the St. George’s area is deemed to be culturally neutral. The fact that it does not come with any pre-existing cultural meaning suggested to the policy-makers that it holds the potential to be a successful cultural quarter acceptable to all sectors of the very diverse community in Leicester. It is relatively close to the Belgrave area of the city, where the large Asian retail and cultural area is situated. This is an important factor for the cultural policy-makers in encouraging a diversity of audience use. Given these factors the St. George’s area it was chosen a priori as the site for the cultural quarter development, rather than growing out of a de facto use.

Leicester’s infra-structural developments include plans for incubators spaces for cultural organisation and producers as well as attempts to encourage the re-location of smaller creative industry firms to the area. The retention of students graduating from creative industry disciplines from the city’s universities is also an expressed need of the cultural policy-makers. However, there is a clear recognition on the part of cultural policy-makers that Leicester has relatively little independent creative production from which cultural quarter developments can grow. As a result they have identified the need to first develop an infra-structural base for cultural development focusing largely on its existing institutional base.

A Bleak House and Great Expectations: The Engineered and the Vernacular in the New Cultural Economy

So the development of cultural quarters of the two cities exhibit marked differences. The development of the cultural quarter in Leicester is clearly directed by policy-makers and is institution-led, whereas in Nottingham it has grown up through the informal activities of cultural producers themselves, helped by some light-touch cultural policies from organisations such as the Broadway. These two pictures, brief though they are, demonstrate the different origins and texture of the cultural development in the two cities in question. But it also begins to signal key issues in the politics of understanding and enabling cultural quarter development. The two cities are less than 30 miles apart geographically, but the evolution of their cultural quarters stand at opposite ends of a spectrum of the engineered and the vernacular.

Illich defines an engineered approach as something that is directed from within a professional and institutional remit. In this sense there is a direct link between an engineered approach and a professional cultural policy and planning ambit exemplified by the often bleak house of organisational and organising approaches to cultural life and interaction. The engineered approach alludes to a formal rationality that is geared towards universalised means within an ‘expert system’ (Giddens 1991); to a hierarchical separation of functions; and to an institutional nexus for action. The institutional nature of much policy-making makes such features a regular occurrence within the field of cultural policy. The institutional and local government nexus of the cultural quarter development in Leicester is an example of this formal rationality. Within such a cultural policy agenda, the arrival at a particular, institutionally pre-
defined stage of cultural development is central. This exemplifies an engineered approach in that it tends to focus upon macro-structural issues such as capacity building, job creation, investment and the economic impact of the creative industries, rather than the actual doing and living of cultural life as a set of personal, everyday life interactions and creative acts. In this sense, there is a tendency towards the official designation of cultural activity and participation that reduces culture to passive consumption and under-values the more D-I-Y aspects of cultural life and its active, autonomous production.

The expert system that exemplifies the engineered approach that is the current orthodoxy within cultural policy signals the expansion of formal rationality into areas such as culture. Marcuse (1964) has revealed the political consequences of this ‘technological rationality’ as it tends towards the consolidation of control by the organisational official. A case in point of this is offered by Low (1991) who highlights the ubiquity of the bureaucratic official as offering ‘above all, rationality…’ to the urban planning nexus. Low suggests that this nexus leads to an urban development process ‘dominated by formal, functional rationality’ (Low 1991. p. 57) whereby technical means designed to meet ultimate ends become transformed into ends-in-themselves.

Murray has argued that ‘… the planning and designing of space by one group for use by another, will always reflect the dynamics between the two and will be an expression of the aims of the dominant groups’ (Murray 2004. p. 194. Also Castells 1972). Sight is lost of ultimate values (Horkheimer 1947, Marcuse 1964) and the efficient arrival at an officially designated template of cultural development is held to be central. The expert systems thinking within engineered cultural policy and the rule-boundness of cultural bureaucracies can all too often exhibit these features.

In contrast to the engineered approach, Illich defines the vernacular as something that people develop, grow, share and control as an inherent part of their everyday social and cultural networks. The vernacular alludes to an open system, where responsibility, knowledge, decision-making and governance are shared. The development of Nottingham’s cultural quarter through a network of informal creative communities and D-I-Y activities has tended to exhibit some of these features. The creative community of Nottingham has grown as an ecology of mutually supportive and interdependent connections. This ‘mutual interdependence’ is for Illich (1973) linked to a more ‘convivial’ form of social and economic interaction, that stands in marked contrast to the formal economy of orthodox and purely organisational relationships and money relations (Shorthose 2004). As such, it often exhibits an alternative sense of solidarity (Marcuse 1969) that develops through a mutual expression of alternative cultural and political values.

The wider cultural significance of the vernacular (and convivial) is perhaps most fully explored within the field of culture and international development (Arizpe 2000, Escobar 1995, Fraser 2000, Knutsson 2000, Mercer 2002, Rahnema 1997, Sen 1999). Here a distinction is made between a vernacular orientation that has a locally focused politics for cultural and economic development on the one hand, and global institutional approaches to ‘development’ on the other. For instance, Arizpe suggests that the latter approach, exemplified by global development agencies concerned with culture and development is essentially a top-down approach, similar in essence to the engineered approach outlined by Illich. Rahnema’s (1997) discussion of the ‘vernacular society’ highlights the ‘organic consistency’ of informal networks of social and cultural bonds in developing nations. For Rahnema these informal bonds form an ‘immune system’ that helps to sustain the particular local community against the global engineering agencies. He shows how productive economic activities and relations in ‘vernacular societies’ are thoroughly embedded in cultural values and meanings, rather than in institutional settings where abstracted, technical notions of efficiency and formal systems of hierarchical management are held to be paramount. The authors above all implicitly or explicitly recognise something like a vernacular approach which is contextual, more micro-oriented and which takes its cue from the specificity of cultural interaction as it is lived. The political implication is clearly
that self-organisation is the key to the success of these vernacular settings and suggests the efficacy of a more organic approach to culture rather than the engineered.

Our Mutual Friends: The Vernacular Cultural Ecology and Organic Thinking
Macro-economic changes are giving rise to increased fluidity and complexity, are impacting upon the nature of production and consumption, and suggest profound changes in work and its relationship to culture. Vernacular approaches that focus upon the economic and cultural D-I-Y, that exhibit a more organic rationality are better able to grasp some of these profound changes. Such a view recognises the centrality of mutuality, trust, gift and other non-standard economic interactions, and so also implies the need for new forms of cultural governance.

For instance, Ormerod (1998) argues that conventional economics operates in too mechanistic a way. He contrasts this with a more organic approach to economics that resonates with the vernacular in that it takes more note of the way people interact and exert a mutual influence upon each other in their everyday lives. He writes ‘Economies and societies are not machines. They are more like living organisms. Individuals do not act in isolation, but affect each other in complex ways’ (Ormeord 1998. P. x). An engineered approach to cultural quarter development is a case in point of this, in that it tends to focus upon the economic processes involved in cultural quarters in isolation from the social and cultural bonds that allow them to function (Morton and Podolny 1998, Caves 2000, Perelman 2000, Throsby 2001).

I have already referred to the D-I-Y creative community in Nottingham as an ecology of mutual inter-dependence. In a wider macro-social and economic context, there is growing evidence that certain aspects of the creative industries economy also operate as an ecology of informal relationships and networks of mutual inter-dependence that transcend any sense of formality or a functional separation of tasks. Many recent commentators have identified the general features of this ‘new cultural economy’ and the importance of mutual networks (Kelly 1999, Leadbetter 1998, Leadbetter and Oakley 1999, Heartfield 2000, Howkin 2001, Florida 2002, Rifkin 2000).

This new cultural economic context is underpinned by new forms of technological creativity and self-managed cultural ‘entrepreneurship’; by portfolio careers where a persons work life is made up of several mutually supportive creative activities; by new processes of creative production and interaction where traditional distinctions between ‘work’ and social life are collapsing; and by broad social, cultural, lifestyle and urban geographic changes that are conducive to the ‘rise of the creative class’ (Florida 2002). Florida maps the contours of this new cultural economy as it is driven forward by these new forms of creative work processes and relations. He highlights the increased mobility and flexibility that comes from a horizontal labour market where work is characterised by a constancy of change and by a multi-layered, multi-faceted series of creative exchanges. The relative collapse of the distinction between work and social life for this ‘creative class’ also contributes to a heightened sense of creativity in work and life (Watters 2004). This research suggests a fundamental change in the nature of social, cultural and urban life as a whole, at least in those cities where the creative industries are prevalent.

An engineered approach, underpinned by a formal rationality cannot fully grasp the fluidity and interactivity that characterises this new cultural economic context. Organic thinking on the other hand is a useful way to begin to grasp this and D-I-Y evolution inherent in the vernacular. For instance, Capra (1982, 1996) has drawn out some of the potential links between biological theory and an understanding of these mutuality aspects within the cultural economy. Maturana and Varela (See Capra 1996) highlight the notion of autopoiesis. This refers to the processes of cellular formation and maintenance. They show how the processes inside the cell stand in a dialectical relationship to the cell boundary. The internal cellular processes can only occur if the cell boundary is in place, but it is these very internal cellular processes which themselves form the cell boundary. The components produce the pattern, the pattern produces the
components. They refer to these processes as ‘dissipative structure’, where a constancy of change enables the persistence of the structure itself. This metaphor helps in understanding aspects of vernacular cultural development where cultural action by creative practitioners and D-I-Y cultural ‘structures’ such as informal networks coincide to sustain each other in a way that formal notions of ‘organisation’ cannot grasp well. Similarly Bateson (See Capra 1996) refers to the notion of ‘open systems’, where change is constant, where equilibrium is an illusion and where there exists a ‘flowing balance’. Again this is a useful metaphor to grasp the constancy of change within the new cultural economic landscape and the vernacular characteristic of the creative ecology. An organic approach is more able to focus on the flux of cultural processes. These biological metaphors also highlight the ‘self-organisation’ found in dissipative structures and open systems. Analogous to this, Florida’s ‘geography of creativity’ (2002) demonstrates very clearly that everyday cultural interactions are the key to successful cultural quarters. For Florida, it is the intangible qualities of cultural self-organisation that enable cultural quarters to develop and be sustained, by attracting and retaining talented creative people and enthusiastic participants. Florida shows how the intangible self-definition of ‘bohemian’, ‘creative’ and ‘gay’ within certain cultural quarters contributes to its success. Florida echoes the notion of ‘dissipative structures’ when he refers to such intangibles as the, eco-system or habitat in which multi-dimensional forms of creativity take root and flourish. By supporting lifestyle and cultural institutions like cutting edge music or vibrant artistic communities, for instance, it helps to attract and stimulate those who create business and technology. It also facilitates cross-fertilisation between and amongst these forms… Taken together, these factors round out the social structure of creativity… (Florida 2002. p. 55).

Ormerod echoes this when he suggests,

_Thinking of the economy or society (cultures) as complex, living systems rather than a machine has important implications for the conduct of public policy… The attention paid to short-term forecasting and the delusion of control which it offers, diverts resources and debate away from more important matters. Governments do have a powerful influence, for good or ill, on the overall structural framework in which the economy (culture) operates. It is this which should be the focus of discussion rather than the frenzy of intervention which passes for policy most of the time._ (Ormerod 1998. P. 96)

So developing a sense of the vernacular, and an organic metaphor to aid its understanding, holds a great deal of efficacy. This is not to say that the vernacular approach to cultural development is an inherently superior approach to cultural quarter development. The engineered approach has much to commend it (Landry 2000). Its strengths lay in its ability to develop clear and precise plans for the public support of culture and cultural development that improves urban quality of life and promotes social inclusion and cultural diversity. It is better able to develop a clear strategy for the use, development and management of cultural resources, and to arrive at rational decisions about such factors. In the case of Leicester’s cultural quarter development, this is obviously the case. Clear and well-developed policies to deliver cultural development responding to identified needs have been the drivers behind their approach. To respond to such identified need, it makes sense to develop a functional separation of clearly defined areas of expertise and responsibility. The cultural environment within which the cultural policy-makers of Leicester are working, given its relative lack of a D-I-Y creative ecology, means that it is efficacious to concentrate developments upon the more established and institutional sectors of the local urban creative mix for cultural quarter development. An engineered approach can focus attention upon overall development and is better able to bring concerted effort across a range of sectors and organisations that the more piecemeal approach of the vernacular may find difficult and time consuming. Not least of the
advantages of the engineered approach is its ability to attract public investment funds and assess delivery according to a clear range of cultural and economic outcomes. As Weber (1978) argues, a formal rationality that underpins such an engineered approach is advantageous in that it is ‘capable of being expressed in numerical terms’ and is therefore ‘unambiguous’. Formal rationality allows for a value-free expression, and as it is pursued in isolation from any particular (political or cultural) value it can have technical advantages.

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On the other hand, a salient feature of the vernacular is its ability to focus upon ‘ultimate ends’ of culture, cultural life and interaction, rather than ‘universal means’. This echoes a substantive rationality defined as a course of action that is taken according to ‘a given set of ultimate values’ (Horkheimer 1947, Weber 1978). In particular, with something such as culture that is so intimately connected to the politics of how we should live, ultimate values need to be prioritised over purely technical issues of efficiency. A case in point is the vernacular approach that has the political value of de-institutionalising cultural dialogue and interaction. It implies that the ‘expert systems’ at the heart of an engineered approach shed cultural power as the ‘limited field of rights, obligations and methods’ inherent within the formal rationality of the bureaucratic model (Weber 1978). The vernacular approach implies the inclusion of a wider range of ‘expertise, knowledge and experience’ from all aspects of the creative ecology.

In discussing the engineered approach, Illich refers to the de-skilling impact that ‘disabling professions’ can have when notions of expertise, knowledge and experience are a priori delimited to the institutional and the managerial. We can identify this ‘disabling’ within the field of culture. Without the vernacular as a necessary corrective, an engineered approach can relegate culture to a passive cultural consumerism of participation in institutional cultural events and experiences. An approach that values the vernacular enables a focus upon the ‘total situation’ (Weber 1978) of the cultural nexus in question as a far wider range of culturally active forms of interaction. An engineered approach tends to encourage cultural participation and consumption as something extrinsic to ones own life, whilst a vernacular approach tends to also include that which is intrinsic to ones own life and capacity for cultural autonomy and creative expression. Creative practitioners in the new cultural economy, who have formally set up a private company and operate in the commercial world, occupy an unusual position. There is often a non-profit maximising strategy, a focus of quality of life issues, and a decidedly non-commercial mixture of paid work and artistic inspiration within their portfolio career. Given this intrinsic quality, vernacular cultural participation is more intimately connected to an increase in cultural vibrancy, a sense of cultural ownership and authorship, and better quality of urban life. It offers the possibility of a form of cultural economic production and growth that is much more intimately connected to ‘wellbeing’ (Hamilton 2003) and hints at the real possibility of de-alienated work and autonomous creative expression (Fromm 1966, Gorz 1999).

Clearly this implies the possibility of political tensions and a conflict of interest between the institutional world and the vernacular. One would hope that cultural institutions, who are used to offering room for consultation with stakeholders from within the locale would be able to widen the constituency of consultation such that the vernacular is more recognised, so contributing to a wider sense of local cultural democracy. The informality of D-I-Y networks within the local cultural ecology makes its inclusion into the formal institutional world difficult because it is not an formal ‘organisation’ and is often disparate, non-uniform and non-professionalised. However, it is often the vital part of the local cultural landscape. Given this tension, new political challenges are faced, by the informal networks themselves in building new working models to present their interests and express their common political voice, and for the institutional world in understanding and making appropriate responses.

The vernacular implies an underlying logic of ‘intermediateness’ and ‘appropriateness’ that
steers a path between either-or solutions. Because vernacular culture grows out of the everyday lives of active participants, it implies a continual re-definition of cultural production based upon new forms of creative interaction and collaboration. Because of this, it tends to focus upon what people can do for themselves through culture as on-going process, rather than understanding cultural quarter development as the arrival at institutionally pre-determined stages of cultural development inherent within the engineering approach. The formal nexus of the engineered approach exhibits ‘one dimensional thought’ (Marcuse 1964) characterised by a self-limiting of knowledge and thought to pre-established institutional boundaries, whereas the vernacular sees cultural success as laying in an on-going journey that people take in their everyday lives. The recognition of this one dimensionality signals a politics of cultural knowledge, the very definition of culture and who ‘owns’ its construction that parallels the critique of the ‘disabling’ role cultural professionals to which Illich refers. The inclusion of the vernacular within the politics of cultural quarter development is a way of avoiding such one dimensional tendencies in that it gives voice to other cultural dimensions and a richer, more textured and diverse version of cultural production.

For instance, Murray warns of the danger of allowing cultural spaces such as cultural quarters to be a reflection of the interests that created them. A strong vernacular helps to re-orient any such power imbalances and enables a wider range of interests from the cultural ecology to author their own cultural quarter. If Nottingham has had any success in developing its cultural quarter over the past 15 years or so, it has been precisely this. The D-I-Y and vernacular aspects of the cultural ecology have indeed authored and developed a sense of ownership of cultural spaces.

Orthodox cultural policy makers within the public sector routinely offer a wide range of consultations and communications with the wider community as part of their governance of cultural development. However, a vernacular approach to cultural quarter governance implies a more radically expanded notion of political dialogue about what constitutes culture and cultural development, and who should define it. It suggests that cultural omniscience is no longer imputed to cultural institutions. It shows that key knowledge about the social, political and technological aspects of cultural quarter development is located throughout the informal cultural ecology. The implications of this are summed up by Hall and Pfeiffer (2000) who suggest a cultural governance that echoes a substantive rationality and the ‘dissipative structures’ of organic thinking. Hall and Pfeiffer argue that

Good governance is much more than simply a rule book for regulating the behaviour of government. It is a co-operative effort for sustainable development... (and) creative answers to local needs, using local resources, creating organisations and institutions which co-ordinate a multitude of efforts integrating community organisations, private companies and government action. (Hall and Pfeiffer 2000. p. 170).

Such governance challenges the political foci of the engineered approach upon the hierarchical separation of functional responsibilities and the formalism of bureaucratic mechanisms for urban cultural development. It is guided by attempts to give voice to the informal aspects of everyday cultural inter-relationships rather than being guided by a technical development agenda. The ‘flowing balance’ implicit within this governance is a good example of the wider orientation within a vernacular approach. Such a vernacular approach recognises the ‘... need (for) integrative institutions and decentralised participation. It has to survive with a permanent tension that will always occur between stable organisations and spontaneous activities’ (Hall and Pfeiffer 2000. p. 171). For example, Bianchini and Ghilardi (2004) echo this broadened and more radically inclusive approach to cultural governance within the urban setting. They make a distinction between ‘traditional cultural policy’, and what they refer to as ‘cultural planning’. They describe cultural planning as an approach that ‘... adopts as its basis a broad definition
of ‘cultural resources’, which has significant resonance with Gorz’s (1987, 1989, 1999) focus
upon resources such as free time, for the development of alternative relationships between work
and life central to new forms of creative expression and the humanisation of life and culture.
This echoes the vernacular in that the ‘cultural resources’ to which they refer include thoroughly
informal, unofficial and non-institutional aspect of cultural life. It includes the ‘cultures of youth,
ethic minorities, communities of interest and ‘neo-tribes… local and external perceptions of a
place, as expressed in jokes, songs, literature, myths… (and) the diversity and quality of leisure,
cultural, drinking, eating and entertainment facilities’ (Bianchini and Ghilardi 2004. p. 245).
Clearly the cultures to which Bianchini and Ghilardi refer include and echo some of the more
informal aspects of everyday cultural life alluded to above and related very much to expanded
notions of cultural life and governance.

Conclusion
There may be situations where engineered and vernacular approaches can co-exist, and
the argument presented here in no way wishes to imply that one approach is somehow
universally ‘better’ than the other. Choice about policy approach can and should be made
on the basis of its appropriateness for the cultural environment, specific development tasks,
constituency composition and particular history of the cultural nexus. If the development of a
quarter largely around infrastructure growth and official, institution-led capacity building
is the felt cultural need, then a more engineered approach is likely to be the most appropriate. If
a rich de facto cultural quarter exists with a long history of D-I-Y activity, then a more vernacular
and organic approach characterised by open-ended governance and a more inclusive and de-
institutional agenda is likely to be appropriate. One can envisage a situation where different
aspects of this distinction pertain, and as such different aspects of the engineered and
vernacular approaches may co-exist to meet specific cultural quarter development issues.
The substantive rationality at the heart of this argument would suggest precisely this, that the
approach to cultural quarter development be guided by the culture itself.
The strategic role of public institutions and expenditure in facilitating inclusive and sensitive
cultural development will always be a vital resource for the cultural well-being of a city.
However, the tactics used to carry out such strategic ends do not have to come from the formal
rationality of the engineered approach that is the orthodoxy within cultural policy institutions. I
have presented the cases of Leicester and Nottingham as examples of two distinct approaches
and situated them at each end of a dualism of the engineered and the vernacular. Like all
dualism, this is somewhat artificial and is only useful in that it helps to construct a clear
argument. The reality is no doubt much more complex in Leicester and Nottingham, with
components of both approaches being appropriate for different aspects of the local cultural
nexus. There may be an embryonic recognition within each policy regime of other possible
approaches. Leicester’s policy-makers have recognised their lack of a vibrant D-I-Y cultural
ecology and have declared to wish to help one grow. The city wide cultural policy remit in
Nottingham is still largely characterised by an engineering approach, despite the growing
recognition of the cultural importance of the D-I-Y cultural ecology. In terms of actual productive
spaces, orthodox commercial capitalist development in the retail and residential sectors have
largely forced the D-I-Y aspects of creative production out Nottingham’s cultural quarter, with it
seems the support of local government in the city

The intention of this article is not to highlight the vernacular approach in contrast to the
engineered simply to offer another universalised approach to cultural quarter development. The
central political implication for cultural quarter development stemming from the demarcation
of engineered and vernacular approaches is to enable a more reflexive assessment of the
efficacy of the underlying rationale for, and therefore politics of, cultural quarter development
that meets the particular cultural conditions within which it is applied. Not the least of these
cultural conditions is the active role that a wider range of constituents within the cultural ecology can play. Cultural quarter development and urban quality of life will be enhanced, made more diverse, radically democratic and therefore more sustainable if those with the embodied knowledge, experience, creative energy and skill from outside the official cultural institutions are given a greater scope to express their cultural political values. It is after all these creative people that often give city cultures their vibrancy and distinctiveness. A vernacular approach that challenges the often 'one dimensional' orthodoxy of the engineered approach is an important addition to enabling this recognition. It suggests a more radically open and inclusive cultural governance, enabling cultural quarters and their development to be informed by the everyday lives of the people who inhabit them so as to foster a much more developed sense of cultural ownership and authorship on their part.

References


