



How open is Bristol?

Intercultural city study

A Comedia study in partnership with the Bristol cultural development partnership

June 2006

Intercultural City Study – Making Most of Diversity

Bristol Study - How open is Bristol?

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Executive summary

How we are able to live together is the key issue of the 21st century.

In recognition of this the Intercultural City Study, initiated by Comedia and supported by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, has been a 15-month international investigation exploring how we can harness the creativity and potential of our diverse communities and build stronger connections within and between our communities.

A number of cities have explored different aspects of this issue. The Bristol study asked *Is Bristol an open city?* Interviews with more than 45 current residents of Bristol – and some former residents – explored this question with the view to better understanding the city and its status as an *intercultural* city. Around 20 of these were in leadership positions in the city.

The study was commissioned by the Bristol Cultural Development Partnership as part of a broader Intercultural City Study undertaken by Comedia with the support of the Joseph Rowntree Foundation. It has been supported by Arts and Business, the Arts Council of England South West and Bristol City Council. The Bristol study provides the basis for work to develop *indicators of openness* for cities to assess how well they welcome, connect and value their diverse communities. It highlights Bristol's strengths and weaknesses as an intercultural city and recommends how Bristol may become an open, diverse and cosmopolitan place.

For the purposes of this study 'openness' was defined as how the city attracted people to it; how easy people felt it was to make connections in the city; how diversity was experienced in every day life and in work; and how different people came together in the city. Open cities recognise and respond to opportunities. They are also likely to respect and value the diversity of their community as an asset in its own right. Our view is that the openness of individuals, companies and institutions is a central ingredient for cities to be successful. A city can be open when the main institutions and the prevailing culture allow people to think, plan and act with imagination, courage and risk.

An initial assumption was that as a port city, Bristol would be inclined to be open.

Our study found this was not necessarily so. The Bristol study found a high degree of overlap in the opinions expressed by respondents, both positive and negative; the same or similar themes were expressed in nearly all interviews. The study aimed to draw on the knowledge and experiences of a diverse group of Bristol residents or of those who have lived in Bristol recently.

The picture which emerges is interesting and complex:

- Bristol is perceived by most people to be **an attractive city with many strengths, an interesting and a positive place to live**. People are generally very happy with their lives in Bristol. However, many respondents expressed severe concerns about aspects of the city and all felt frustrated by it in some way

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- It seems to be a place which **works well at a local and neighbourhood level** – adept and creative with small projects and in small organisations and community groups. But it struggles to have big ambitions and to have a big-picture 'Bristol wide' strategy for the future
- There are elements of 'openness' and 'closedness' in Bristol but the **elements of openness are rarely in alignment**. The city's history oscillates with an open/closed cycle with a greater tendency to being closed. The positive and negative energies in the city too often cancel each other out so that one plus one equals nought rather than two. This is expressed by institutions in Bristol – at one point one will be open but others will be closed at that moment– they are rarely in alignment.
- **Port cities would normally be thought of as open places**. They act as gateways, they need to invite people in and look outward to the world. But perhaps this quality is misunderstood. Liverpool is arguably more open and united than Bristol – despite a history of sectarianism and a tendency to political extremes and some deeply ingrained cultural divides. Liverpool and Glasgow may be harder to reach and to connect to but they have an intrinsic 'gutsiness', where you need to earn respect – this is itself attractive. Bristol has appeared to be a softer city and more welcoming but perhaps it is also more closed.
- **Bristol has elements of an invaded city**. An 'overlay' of confident, middle class 'outsiders' who move to Bristol by choice who have little in common with the larger local working class population already here. 'Establishment' Bristol is protective of its city and of its role within it. From the point of view of people moving to Bristol the city may not be easy to connect with. For born and bred Bristolians the city may feel invaded in some ways. Many people report it is possible to live in **different worlds that rarely intersect** – each 'world's' experience of Bristol being very different.
- It is a **polarised community** – people are divided by wealth, culture and access to opportunity. Here some of the poorest communities in the UK are right next to some of the wealthiest. There are major points of disconnection between people epitomised by the poor transport networks and the poor quality of state schools.
- It is not a city which has yet created many places for people to mix and connect across boundaries. **Diverse communities exist but they do not seem to strongly interact**. There is a sense of segregation between cultures and communities. The most successful places for people to mix are through events – particularly the Ashton Court Community Festival.
- The urban environment reflects the **lack of ambition for the city and a series of missed opportunities**. There are no recent architectural landmarks, no major concert venue – compared to other UK cities which have managed to change the feel of their city through major architectural developments.
- It is not seen as a city which embraces opportunities. **There are strong feelings about the role of institutions** – particularly a feeling that the local

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- authority is not open and is not ambitious for Bristol. Institutions are important gatekeepers in either 'opening up' or 'closing down' the city. There are also views that **organisations don't change Bristol – that any change only happens through the determined efforts of individuals**. There is a sense that while Bristol is a nice place to live, a good local authority could make it a sensational place to live
- There is also a feeling that **'establishment' forces in Bristol are unduly influential** and have the power to prevent action using covert means. A number of people reported witnessing the way people paid deference to the 'great and the good' in Bristol and how their points of view could influence decisions behind the scenes.
 - The long agenda of **changing the culture of the Council** as an open collaborative organisation will not go away. The Council needs to be seen as exercising leadership and forging a new identity for the city based on capturing opportunities and connecting the community.
 - There needs to be **some appropriate reconciliation of the city with its role in the slave trade**. There are strong feelings among many people interviewed that the city has not yet come to terms with its past as a trading city where the wealth was gained through the slave trade. This has not been acknowledged in the city in a serious way. Many people feel that the city will struggle to go forward until this happens.
 - In general terms **it is generally regarded as not open**. It was felt to be welcoming and tolerant and a place which attracted open minded people but somehow that did not translate into making the place open. The lack of interculturalism, class and wealth divides, the closed attitudes of many in authority and the lack of vision at the top all mean that the overriding view is that Bristol is more closed than many other UK cities

In studies such as these there is a tendency for people to emphasise the negative instead of the positive. So to counter that it is important to reinforce that most people interviewed were very positive about Bristol as a place to live. However almost all people felt disturbed by aspects of life in Bristol. The aim of this report is to try to provide a balanced account of Bristol as an open city.

Recommendations

The idea behind this study was to consider if Bristol could provide a model for other cities in Britain as to how they could be open. Yet it is clear that Bristol still needs to consider, for itself, how it could promote a more open approach.

It appears that there is a crisis of aspiration and of leadership in Bristol. Things are comfortable here. The city appears to be doing well. Yet things are not what they seem.

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Some people are doing well in Bristol but many people are not. Imagine being a child in Bristol who does not have the luxury of a private education. What will this mean for your future? Who will look after you and help you to realise your potential?

The problems in Bristol seem to come back to a lack of big picture thinking and of leadership. There are lots of groups for collaboration but that does not seem to be enough.

The challenges we all face in this era require a different type of leadership. It needs to be able to encompass the small and the big: To seek opportunities, to manage the identity and brand of a city and make it work and to develop civic creativity. Civic creativity is imaginative problem-solving applied to public good objectives. It involves the public being more open and entrepreneurial within accountability principles and the private sector being more aware of its responsibilities to the collective whole.

Things work well in Bristol in villages and in pockets. But the city needs something which will develop its potential in order for the city to become what it could be – one of the best cities in Europe for enterprise and creativity. It does not seem to aspire to much yet it could and should be a major player in the UK and Europe.

It is therefore recommended that Bristol:

- Consider this report and its implications and have an opportunity to respond and debate the issues, through a public process;
- Organize a high profile one day event with the involvement of the Council, University of Bristol, the business community and other key institutions to consider how Bristol can realise its potential;
- Determine as a conclusion of the event a new form of collaboration and to work toward the reinvigorated vision for Bristol.
- Record as a major commitment the story of Bristol and circulate it and discuss it widely for the benefit of the community. As part of this some way of dealing with the myths surrounding the slave trade in a way which is appropriate needs to be developed. This may involve developing events or other symbolic actions which will help the city come to terms with this issue and help it to move forward. This will be both a healing process and release energy.
- That the city agree that high quality education is an essential element of any vision for its future and that any second class state education system will not be tolerated in the city. This should become a major reason for joint action between leaders in the city. It may indeed consider creating an education commission.
- Consider how events could support better linking and connections within its local community and make that an ambition of any publicly supported events.
- Think through the city's collective leadership capacity and institute a high level training leadership programme.

The Context - The Intercultural City

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In 2005 Comedia initiated the Intercultural City Study with the support and sponsorship of the Joseph Rowntree Foundation. The study challenges cities to rethink their policies on cultural diversity – to look at how cities can harness the creativity and dynamism of their diverse communities.

The Intercultural City: Making the Most of Diversity will be published in mid 2006. It is the product of a 15-month investigation by a team of contributors, which has drawn on evidence from three continents. It brings together results of studies from a range of cities and aims to make a case for an intercultural approach, examines what an intercultural city may be, and considers how cities can become intercultural.

It starts to develop indicators for interculturalism in areas such as openness, connection, networking and employment.

Comedia released two publications in 2004 – *The Intercultural Reader* (Wood, Phil (Ed), 2004) which brings together a range of articles about diversity and cities and *Planning the Intercultural City* (Bloomfield and Bianchini, 2004) which establishes the case for an intercultural approach and includes a number of best practice examples. It has recently published the book *More than Just a Bridge; Planning and Designing Culturally* (Brecknock, 2006).

An intercultural city is one which aims to support connections, understanding, dialogue and exchange between people of different cultural backgrounds. It recognizes that cities are becoming ever more complex, people can have many identities and only one of these may be their cultural identity. It is this rich mix in cities which make them dynamic, interesting and creative. We need to understand and respond to this real sense of a city as a rich 'melting pot' of people with multiple identities.

We need to make sure our aim in cities is to build a sense of connectedness rather than separation.

Our view is that in the future – for cities to succeed – they will need to be intercultural. There are two good reasons for this. The first is that cities need to harness and connect the talents of their people in ways which **build identity from diversity**. Creativity and innovation will be critical to the future prosperity and quality of life of cities and this will rely on cities supporting interesting and unexpected connections between people and places. The second reason is that cities that don't build these connections will find it increasingly difficult to negotiate with and fund an increasing range of different culturally based organisations. The cities that try to continue with this approach are more likely to be building a fractious and divided community which focuses on **'difference from' rather than 'connected to'**.

A number of cities agreed to offer their stories and experiences for the project and act as case studies. The study included cities in the UK, Europe, Australia and New Zealand. Each city took a different aspect of 'interculturalism'.

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The Intercultural City is Open

For the city to become intercultural and socially creative openness to ideas and initiatives and interactivity with civil society need to become embedded in policy-making. (Bloomfield and Bianchini, 2004,106)

Openness is a pre condition for interculturalism to develop. By openness we mean the degree to which differences and diversities within and between groups and individuals are acknowledged; how exchanges between people and groups are fostered and supported; how leaders and institutions allow for different perspectives and how often people cross borders – either those created in their physical environment or those of class, race, interest, age, gender and so on.

The opposite to an open place is one where people keep to their place, certain forces rule the city and outsiders – particularly those who look different, speak differently or have different values – are not welcome.

As openness can be intangible we need to look for clues in the urban environment. What distinguishes neighbourhoods – are they diverse or generally monocultural? Who do people socialize with – people just like themselves or people with similar interests but of different backgrounds? Are there public places where people come together in harmonious ways or is there a lack of places for mixing, meeting and celebrating? Who runs institutions and how do people join or contribute to institutions? Do outsiders feel that the city is a club to which they are not offered membership?

What emerges is a unique set of perspectives on Bristol and how people feel the experience of the city shapes their lives. The stories from the past provide clues to the Bristol of the present. These experiences also contain suggestions for how to assist to 'open up' Bristol – for it to realise its potential as an important contemporary city. Bristol has enormous potential to shape its own destiny and that of the United Kingdom and beyond. There is much to celebrate in Bristol and also many opportunities yet to be realized.

The Bristol Study

Bristol – through the Bristol Cultural Development Partnership – was the first UK city to agree to participate. The Bristol study asked the question: *How open is Bristol?* That such a study was supported in Bristol – and the open response of many people who agreed to talk about their experiences of Bristol – may in itself be a sign of openness.

The aim is to highlight Bristol's strengths and weaknesses as an intercultural city and to consider how Bristol can become an open, diverse and cosmopolitan place. Bristol can provide a model for other cities by aiming to become a place where people build connections and where the value of diversity is harnessed.

The Bristol Study was conducted primarily through a series of interviews and historical research to begin to understand perceptions of Bristol as an 'open' place – now, in the past, and into the future.

The aim is to provoke discussion and debate – this can itself start to let air in to the way people are prepared to talk about Bristol, and to start to make connections in new ways with each other.

This report reflects the views of the people who agreed to offer their opinions and thoughts on their experience of Bristol.

This study represents considered opinions of people with experience of Bristol from the business, government, cultural and community sectors. Interviewees are aged from their mid 20's to late 60's. These people were diverse in terms of cultural background, age, interests, gender, and work. A list of people who agreed to be interviewed for the study is attached – they were not representing their organisations but agreed to offer their opinions as individuals. As they have not had the opportunity to review this document responsibility for representing and consolidating a range of views must rest with the authors.

Each person was asked a series of questions:

- Why were they living in Bristol?
- What had attracted them to the city?
- If they had moved to Bristol – their perceptions of Bristol before they arrived and after they had lived in the city
- How they would describe the city?
- What were its strengths and weaknesses?
- Was it easy to make connections in Bristol?
- How did people mix and come together within the city?
- What roles did institutions play?
- What spaces worked for intercultural mixing?
- Was it possible to achieve your ambitions in Bristol?
- Did they see Bristol as an open or closed city?

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Bristol Study - How open is Bristol?

Part of the study also looked at the history of Bristol to understand the people that shaped its past and to see how that may have contributed to shaping the character of Bristol today.

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Does openness matter for the future of Bristol?

There will be pressure for openness from all sides especially if Bristol wants to strategically position itself nationally and internationally, to be more successful in the new growth industries and provide a leadership role for the broader south west region.

Of significant relevance for the future is that many people are being left behind by Bristol's prosperity and are the victims of the poor infrastructure, education and fragmentation of the city. Opportunities to connect the community to opportunities and to itself need to be grasped – it is crucial to get the insiders or local communities excited about Bristol's future and their own future within it. They need to see themselves as part of the new story of Bristol that seems to appeal so strongly to those who choose to live in Bristol. **The paradox is that many insiders are passionate about their city but not ambitious for it.**

Equally, Bristol is wasting opportunities – not just with its local population but also with its place in the world. It could be creating an identity within the UK and Europe and beyond as a centre of creativity and innovation with a high quality of life. **At the moment Bristol appears to lack an identity beyond the UK** – which with ever increasing competition between cities represents an important gap.

The challenge for attractive cities with a high quality of life for some – such as Bristol – is how it creates sufficient momentum for change. Many people asked for recommendations which could take the city forward. If Bristol wanted to develop itself as an open city what could it do?

Some institutions are trying to influence the future of Bristol – to support collaboration and to drive change in the city. One of these **seems to be Business West** which has for over a decade provided a model of leadership and collaboration with a long term view for the city and the region as a whole.

It appears that **Bristol lacks strong citywide, cross sectoral networks** capable of encompassing city ambitions and either taking action or communicating ambitions to the local authority. The local authority does not appear to be playing a role of leading on a strategic agenda for the identity and future of Bristol. If this is not being expressed through the Local Authority is there any other organisation which could provide a strong point of leadership and coordination?

Many people called for a person capable of leading – an urban catalyst – who could play a role of leadership through collaboration.

Bristol's past¹

“I know of no city so mercantile that is so literary” (Robert Southey 1774 -1843)

¹ This short section draws on an unpublished paper on Bristol's Past prepared by Mel Kelly

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Is it possible to draw any themes from the more than 1000 years of Bristol's history in relation to openness and cultural diversity?

Madge Dresser and Peter Fleming from the University of the West of England are writing a History of Ethnic Minorities in Bristol 1000-2001. A website for the project has already been launched and a book *Identity and the City* will be published in about 2 years. This will be a richly detailed account of the lives of ethnic minorities in Bristol over 10 centuries. This ambitious task will add much to the knowledge available about the story of Bristol.

The history of Bristol is not well known generally to people in the city. And yet it is one of invention, exploration, engineering, manufacturing, creativity and social leadership.

Many of the themes which are explored in this report are linked to the history of Bristol. **It has always been a city of immigration.** Yet there have been long periods where the city has grown slowly or declined in population. The greatest growth was during the industrial revolution but nowhere near as much as northern cities such as Liverpool, Manchester and Birmingham. Bristol declined in relative importance in the UK in that period and by the beginning of the 19th century was Britain's sixth largest city and eight largest port (for a time in the late seventeenth century the city was second only to London in terms of its economic importance).

There is a long history of cultural diversity in the city. People were drawn to Bristol from France, from Ireland and Wales in its early history. It also drew people from across England – many of the families in Bristol moved here only a few generations ago even though they see themselves as born and bred here. The Jewish population – expelled from England in the 13th century – were allowed back in the 17th century: many settled around Bristol and may have created the glass industry. In the 19th century the city also received people from Ireland, as well as Jewish people and Germans, Indians and Chinese. Post World War migration saw more Caribbean, Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi people moving to Bristol.

There was a period of debate in the 19th century about how the city should compete with the north – how much should be invested in developing the harbour facilities and where they should be. There were debates which would be familiar to many people in Bristol today about how ambitious the city should be, what investment should be made and the role of local government in leadership.

Bristol has been a place where unconventional and talented people were able to achieve greatness – such as **Cabot and Brunel**. It was prepared to take risks and back people from outside the city. Its past appears to be marked by bursts of openness followed by a closing down and protection of local interests. Bristol welcomed and supported innovators such as Brunel and inventive manufacturers – such as Fry's – flourished in and around the city, much as the technology and media related industries flourish today. And like today, the city was not a place for the large manufacturing plants that developed in places like Manchester. Manufacturing in Bristol was important but smaller in scale and diverse.

Brunel's major achievements were centred in and around Bristol – such as the Great Western Railway, the Clifton Suspension Bridge and the SS Great Western and SS

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Great Britain. But – perhaps as an outsider – he was not included in the prestigious painting of 39 people entitled *Some who have made Bristol famous* which was presented to the Bristol City Art gallery in 1930.

The city supported exploration and voyages of discovery – such as Cabot – but also profited from the slave trade. Slaves were rarely brought to Bristol but some merchants made their fortunes through or partly through this trade. This has cast a pall over Bristol in a way that it is still coming to terms with. The issue of openness needs to provide an opportunity to talk more openly about this issue and for a form of **reconciliation** to be reached within the community so that it can be acknowledged and so that – in a way – the city can move on. **The boil needs to be lanced.**

The **distinct identities of neighbourhoods** has always been a feature of life in Bristol – including a long history of a divide between north and south of the river.

Bristol has been accused of parochialism in its past and historically was thought to be resistant to change and suspicious of outsiders. Yet normally you would expect a port city to be open – aware of the benefits of outside influences and open to the opportunities that might flow from the unexpected. This is a contradictory element of the Bristol culture. A place which wants and needs outsiders to innovate and can support them doing that but still wants to maintain a separateness and distance from them.

Bristol relied on people from outside to drive its development. People such as Conrad Finzel who arrived in 1836 from Prussia and revolutionised mass production through his steam-powered sugar refinery – eventually becoming one of the largest employers in England. The Wills tobacco family had their origins in Salisbury. John Harvey came from Cornwall with his family and worked for a family company which ultimately became John Harvey and Sons the makers of Bristol Cream.

There was nevertheless an **uneasy relationship with outsiders** who never felt truly a part of the city. Local commercial interests were protected by strong networks and guilds – which were able to offer favours and acted as gatekeepers. It responded to major economic trends – but still saw its influence and importance within England fall with the industrial revolution

The proximity to London was a benefit and a problem for the Bristol identity – **London overshadowed Bristol:** it was too big to compete with and there was no equivalent size city with which Bristol could measure itself against in its region.

The bursts of openness seem to coincide with periods of innovation. The eras of protection lead in to periods of economic decline.

Bristol local government was often blamed for not embracing opportunities and for lacking vision. The Chamber of Commerce was formed in 1823 because of a perception over Corporation inertia over stagnating trade conditions and together with the Merchant Venturers was successful in lobbying for Bristol to become a Free Port in 1848. This inertia was particularly evident during the mid 19th century when Bristol fell behind its competitors, in part because of the difficult access to dock facilities, and manufacturing and ship building ventures moved north. After some

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period of controversy eventually the Corporation bought the Avonmouth and Portishead facilities to manage alongside the city docks.

While it has always been a strongly Anglican city Bristol has had a proud history as a city which **embraced the unconventional**. In religion it was the home of the Quakers and Methodists. Protestantism is still considered to be the norm in Bristol despite other cultures and faiths. Even so the elements of non conformity such as Methodism were brought to Bristol by people from outside the city – like John and Charles Wesley and George Whitefield. Bristol, however, was a city which could encompass and include non conformist churches – possibly because of its strongly individualistic character.

Families such as the Wills family and the Fry family each exemplified the values of their non conformist religious affiliations (Congregationalist and Quaker respectively). Each family saw a responsibility to contribute to the city and to its people in a way that would now be seen as paternalistic. However they were part of a tradition which emphasized responsibility for others and responsibility for the well being of future generations. Following the Second World War during which the city had been severely bombed, the Fry family commissioned a book to consider the future development of Bristol. It presented the story of Bristol from its earliest history and considered how good urban planning and development might create a positive future for the city.

On the other hand in the 20th century civic life – through the local authority – was dominated by the Labour Party until the late 90's. Bristol has two strands of both conservative influence through the role of important families and the Merchants and Labour and union leadership of the local authority. **How has this influenced the shaping of civic life and the character of the city?**

It was a city which had many women in support of women's suffrage in the 19th century. Tony Benn renounced his peerage in 1963 to take his seat as a Labour member in the House of Commons. In the same year Paul Stephenson led a boycott of Bristol's buses and the Bristol Omnibus Company was persuaded to hire black drivers and conductors. This influenced the creation of Britain's first Race Relations Act in 1965.

Does Bristol's long history indicate it is an open or closed city? Bristol has a very interesting history and story to tell but people say few people in Bristol are really aware of its history in any meaningful way. Bristol is a city of contradictions with people who were entrepreneurial at the leading edge of their time in social reform, business, science, and religion – but still resisted change and outside influence. Were the strongest influences those of the Anglican Church and the equally conservative non conformist religions of Methodism and Quakerism? Were the influences those of the Merchant Venturer class and of paternalistic benevolence? Or was civic life more a result of the still possibly conservative influence of Labour councils following the Second World War? From where did the well known 'Bristol character' develop – that which was perceived to be resistant to change? Was that a class issue? And how has its role in the slave trade shaped the city to today?

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Bristol today

Levels of openness

An attractive city

Bristol is a city which attracts people to it – it is one of the few cities in the UK which is growing - both in population and employment. It is also a young city as nearly 10% of the population are students. It is not a highly culturally diverse city with only around 8% of the population from Black and Minority Ethnic backgrounds (compared to say London with nearly 30% BME population).

The people who have chosen to live in Bristol were attracted by a number of qualities – in particular by the **quality of the physical environment**. Some of the reported reasons included:

- The sense of green space – the views, surrounding countryside, located within a beautiful region – good climate, a lovely city.
- An easy city to live in, to walk around – a diverse, interesting and vibrant city without the hassles of London.
- A university city with students and young people adding to vibrancy and diversity of the city – the universities are of a high standard.
- A culturally and creatively diverse city.
- The wide range of offering in terms of leisure, the arts, dining, entertainment and night life.
- The interesting history.
- A laid back city, tolerant and welcoming – a mini London without the hassle.
- The water and developments on the waterfront have added to the quality of the city.
- The location and easy external connections through road, rail and air links – it's easy to get out of, to be spontaneous unlike in London and some other UK cities.
- A sense of optimism.
- A rich voluntary and community tradition.
- Full of talent, incomers play a dynamic role – attracts able and talented people.
- Economic strength has given it incredible advantages – fantastically lucky city.
- Tight and supportive neighbourhoods.
- Active media industry, sciences and engineering.
- Arts city, creative, curious, exploring place.
- Friendly to visitors.
- A place which is proud of itself.

Some of the comments about Bristol included:

The essence of the place is music, sunshine, being laid back, the presence of the two universities affects the atmosphere – bright students, open minded from about 100 countries so the city becomes part of an international community – fits in with this laid back atmosphere.

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A very beguiling city – I and other people who have gone to work there have found it very open and friendly at one level but rather less open than first apparent at another.

It's vibrant, creative and young – it feels like a young city and wealthy.

I chose to move here – I liked the shape of the city, the hills, you could see green fields and I liked the docks – the Georgian streetscapes – St Paul's inner city area was exciting – it was just before the riots and it all seemed lively – it felt like the right place.

I would describe Bristol as an agnostic city – the great thing is that it doesn't matter that you're not from Bristol to get on in Bristol – it is welcoming to outsiders, it doesn't question your credentials.

But barriers emerge

For people who have been attracted by the positive qualities of the city and make their home here their relationship with the city becomes more complex. They still see Bristol as a positive place to be, but they start to come up against a variety of barriers.

This is true for people who are white middle class as much as for people from BME backgrounds.

It's a city which is less than the sum of its parts.

It's not a city that makes it easy for newcomers, especially if you are from an ethnic minority....The attitude is "you're welcome, you can come up to the gates but you can't come through"... There is a high degree of 'closedness'.

For a long time I had been wishing that I had chosen somewhere else to live. The experience of living in St Paul's has clouded my opinion significantly.

When we first came to Bristol we lived in Warmley and they kept asking when are you going home? They thought I would go home – had a different outlook on life – it didn't feel neighbourly.

It is a welcoming place, people have been welcoming and there have been no hassles. It's generally very peaceful here but there are places I wouldn't go – St Paul's, St Agnes, Barton Hill.

The words I would use to describe Bristol – new, exciting, confused – like a teenager it responds to everything – very black and white. Compared to London which has found a way to bring cultures together – Bristol hasn't and doesn't know where to begin.

Words used to describe Bristol	
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Positive	Negative
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Bristol Study - How open is Bristol?

Accessible	Complacent
Beautiful	Cynical
Comfortable	Insular
Cosmopolitan	Fragmented
Bohemian	Indecisive
Welcoming	Slow
Young	Conventional
Optimistic	White
Proud	Vision-less
Innovative	Unimaginative
Easy	Parochial
Creative	Apartheid
Vibrant	
Laid back	
Exciting	

A fragmented city

Bristol is a divided city. It has always been. The river divides the city into north and south and even in medieval times it appears that the south and north had distinct identities. The city's topography provides vistas and height for some.

It is a divided city – some things like the M32 divide the city without sympathy - schools divide the city – culture, identity and economic issues prevail – some of the wealthiest and poorest communities in the UK slap bang next to each other.

As a non driving resident getting around is quite hard – Brislington is impossible to get in and out – it's not easy to get from one edge to the other – the river is quite a physical barrier – the bridges are really important and proposals for new bridges always stir up strong feelings.

The topography is part of it. A cliff top combined with fast booms of wealth encourages segregation, all painted onto a sort of segregated landscape.

Jeremy Isaacs, Chairman of the judging panel for the 2008 Capital of Culture award, praised Bristol highly (the city was shortlisted), but felt that the city lost because of these divisions. He felt that the M32, the motorway that enters the city, was 'a physical manifestation of this rift, creating a concrete divide between the St Paul's and Easton communities.' Visiting the city two years after the decision, he said that his views had not changed. 'The city . . . has its divisions and it was not absolutely clear that the whole city was joining in and uniting [in he bid]. People came pouring into the middle of the city to get together but it did not mean the other parts of the city got the attention that they needed.'

The city is also divided by governance with the responsibility for greater Bristol divided between four councils – Bristol, Bath and North East Somerset, North Somerset and South Gloucestershire.

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While 8% of the community is from BME communities it seems a very white city. 80% of BME's live in defined inner city areas and the poor white working class is clustered in isolated estates on the periphery of the city, such as Knowle West, Hartcliffe and Southmead. Bristol can appear homogenous and not intercultural. Diverse communities co-exist but do not strongly interact.

Is Bristol a place which values and draws benefit from a diverse community? This seems to be a complex issue in Bristol. Some people think there is reasonable mixing and connections between people from different cultural backgrounds and some don't. People seem to identify the areas of Bristol with high BME populations (St Paul's, Montpelier, Easton) as the ones which are the most successful in terms of diversity but other people seem to think these are 'no go areas'.

This may be that when asked people tend to report that places they think are visibly not white they assume these must, therefore, be more successful places for intercultural mixing. Or it may be the non white areas offer more diverse choices in terms of urban environment, restaurants and so on. On the other hand people report a more bohemian feel to places such as Montpelier which if it also attracts artists and students may offer the sort of cosmopolitan experience many people are seeking from inner city living.

Yet some people seem fearful of visiting certain parts of the city – particularly at certain times of the day or night. Some people even avoid the city centre on Saturday nights because of the binge drinking culture which can lead to violence.

The principal drivers for intercultural mixing appear to be education, the workplace and sports. In all three areas Bristol is either a largely white environment or a segregated one. Schools seem to be white or BME, ethnic minorities are not well represented in the work place and more sports are largely white ("you hardly see a black face at Bristol city football matches").

The way that Bristol is divided – in terms of where people live – seems to result in people being able to self-select the types of people they see everyday and their sense of the city being either diverse or white. 'Insiders' act as gatekeepers to 'outsiders'.

The sense is that a number of not overt but subtle forces are at play:

It is not really open – not at all in terms of cultural diversity – my work in the public sector has been really difficult.

It is quite polarized – real estate agents will tell you don't live in areas with a Saint in the name – it is still fairly narrow minded despite being a large financial centre.

It isn't visibly culturally mixed – compared to London – there are strong geographical ethnic communities – this may be breaking down as new migrants come in – strong pockets in the city like Easton and St Paul's – Chinese community like to be dispersed across the city.

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Bristol has enormous variety physically – it is not a very cohesive city – an appearance of being a wealthy city superficially – it hides a lot of deprivation.

Kingsdown you have got a slightly odd ball quirky group of people – less a racial mix but certainly age and economic mix – north and south Bristol feels like different worlds – Hartcliff is a lesson in how not to design a residential area – transport infrastructure is a real problem – not a lot of mixing across areas.

Existing communities find it hard to accommodate new communities. Lots of cultural venues are finding it hard to attract people from diverse communities.

There appears to be little interaction between the different areas of Bristol, it seems to be made up of a complex network of villages that have little to do with each other.

On the other hand life within the villages can be very 'knitted together' and it seems to be a place where if you have a special interest you will find a club or a group of like-minded people. These clubs and interest groups seem to be places where newcomers can start to build up a network of friends and a social life. These clubs may not be easy to find – you may need to search them out but once you have found them they are generally welcoming and open.

It is easy to make connections in Bristol – like a group of villages in terms of cultural identity – if you were Polish you would be welcome in that community – there is a community for arty people and they are welcoming.

Mixing depends on where you live – it's a divided city – very obvious who lives where – it's perfectly possible to live in Clifton and never realise any different – the city permits you to live in a box.

Once you join a circle you are in – the onus is on you to find it.

These clubs may not, however, connect with each other or come together to create any sort of critical mass. There seems a lack of city wide networks.

People that come from outside can connect to each other but many people report that it is hard to connect to the local Bristolian community – people born and bred in Bristol who are seen as closed and wary of outsiders.

Is this partly because these people are most affected by the numbers of people who move in to Bristol? Some of the people that suffer the greatest impact from the various points of disconnection in the city are the white working class who live on the outskirts of the city and suffer the effects of the poor education and transport system, and the expensive housing. Many children in these areas have never been to the city centre. On the other hand is it true that '.....St Paul's is the worst ghetto in the UK' as one person claimed? **Are there shared experiences for people who grow up on the outskirts of Bristol and those that grow up in St Paul's?**

It is interesting that very few of the people interviewed identified themselves as Bristolian. Even people born in Bristol believe that being Bristolian meant having a particular accent. Those who had moved to Bristol they may not identify themselves

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as Bristolian but thought their children might. There was also a sense that being a Bristolian was associated with an attitude which was stubborn and resistant to change.

For people born and bred in Bristol it may feel like **an invaded city**. There is a sense that the large incomer population creates a feeling of rootlessness and lack of ownership in the city. Many people come to Bristol to either study or work and many of these people are middle class, confident and ambitious. These people may be more disconnected to the white working class suburban Bristol population than to the more ethnically diverse central city population. While there is a large number of people who choose to stay in Bristol there must also be a large transient population – even though the period in Bristol for these people may be many years. It is understandable that people born and bred in Bristol could feel disconnected and ambivalent about the people who have moved there.

Institutions can reinforce this lack of connection – some seem to be closed and unwelcoming. Unseen forces control the city. Institutions appear to wax and wane in terms of being open and closed.

Intelligentsia cluster in small groups but may not interconnect – people live parallel lives – you can live in Bristol and not engage with what it offers culturally – people can base themselves outside the city and only use it as a cultural centre but may not connect to day to day things in Bristol.

Missed opportunities

Is Bristol a place with ambition? Is it a place where people can achieve their ambitions?

As a city Bristol appears to be a place of missed opportunities. This may be because the city lacks ambition for itself. It has seen cities such as Liverpool, its historical rival, begin to transform itself after a period of major decline. Liverpool mounted a strong campaign to be the European Capital of Culture in 2008. While Bristol competed and was shortlisted many people thought the attitude of the city to the bid was half hearted.

There had been plans to create a major performing arts centre in Bristol but while funds were initially allocated these were withdrawn as a result – it was alleged – of the perceived general indifference to the project in the city. This is not true: the project itself had seen very little opposition, even though it was a very modern piece of architecture. The problem was that the Arts Council lottery was running out of funding. What was surprising that – apart from a few involved in the project – there was no wish to fight against the decision. Indeed, the partnership fell apart rapidly once the decision not to give the money was made.

The British Empire and Commonwealth Museum application to the Heritage Lottery Fund for support for an exhibition to commemorate 200 years since the abolition of the slave trade and was unsuccessful. It is understood that the reason for this was that the Heritage Lottery Fund questioned the commitment of the City Council to the 2007 year, and had concern about the financial viability of the museum. This application is now being resubmitted. In contrast to the Harbourside Centre –the people bidding have persisted and are determined to be successful.

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At the moment a group of people in Bristol are competing for the Digital Challenge which if successful would see over £7 million invested in ICT in Bristol and report strong commitment from the City Council for this project. This is a good example of where the bid is being led effectively by the City Council with others. It is also noticeable that the decision was made early to bid by the council whereas it took months to get the city to bid for 2008

When Bristol does succeed it does not celebrate its successes. Some examples include its position as a location for leading research and technology for companies such as Hewlett Packard and Airbus. Bristol is a leader in robot research – equal to MIT. Numerous small creative digital, IT and media companies are succeeding and punching above their weight in Bristol. Everyone can point to the success of Aardman and the animation sector. Many people we spoke to were working in the creative industries sector – or had done. There is an interesting mix of people working in companies which are both innovative and determined to contribute to creating a better place for local people and in achieving social goals. Many people work both as artists by night and business people by day. There is an extraordinary sense of creative spirit in the city.

It seems that the creative sector is open – particularly at the level of small organisations and business with a pre disposition to collaborate. Some people report this is less evident with the larger companies. But the build up of creative industries is having an impact on the feel of the city. Bristol does feel more creative and cosmopolitan. And of the people interviewed many were individually creative – as musicians or artists or writers – as well as working more conventionally in various sectors. This must be an important source of creative spirit for the future of Bristol which could be drawn upon and further supported.

But what is the vision for Bristol? Many people interviewed thought there is no clear vision – and questioned whether the city could have an ambitious vision for its future.

*There is no big picture thinking in Bristol – everyone is looking over their shoulder – **some individuals have vision – very few are Bristolian.***

Bristol's skill may be in the 'handcrafted' sectors – attention to detail, creativity, eccentricity and passion unite within individuals pursuing odd hobbies to people establishing small enterprises. It used to be cigarettes and ships and now it's aircraft wings and animation.

Some people speculated as to the reason for the lack of ambition and a strong vision for the city. Some people felt that the city has always been overshadowed by London and as it could not effectively compete with London this sapped it of ambition. Others thought that the lack of a similar sized city in the region to compete with was a disadvantage for Bristol – that within its region it is the only important city and so had no other place against which to measure itself.

There is a **constant theme of missed opportunities** – the waterfront development was an area where there is particular anger. The docks area has been rejuvenated and developed and people prefer it to pre development. But they also feel strongly

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that it has not been done well, that land was given away or sold cheaply to vested commercial interests rather than developed as a true public realm.

Examples include the Lloyds Bank building which is felt to be at a prime position and ideal for public use; the lack of social housing in the waterfront areas; that Bristol has no major concert venue; that there are no architectural landmarks created here. Constant comparisons are Gateshead, Liverpool and Newcastle all of which are felt to have exploited their waterfronts far more for public good and radically changed the feel of their cities as a result.

While many people thought the city was very attractive there was some disappointment with recent urban realm improvements – such as the design of The Centre. This had been a controversial development with opinion polarized in the city. Some people thought the design that eventually was successful was created to prevent skateboarders colonizing the space rather than to make the place welcoming.

The lack of ambition is also reflected in the poor quality of the public transport service in Bristol which is seen as a barrier to better connections for people across the city.

Individuals have ambitions

On the whole people believe that you can achieve your ambitions in Bristol. They point to the range of successful companies in Bristol already. Some people thought that if you wanted to establish yourself on the world stage in your field you would need to leave. But examples of Aardman and even the smaller design and technology companies seemed to confirm that many people in Bristol are already working internationally with an international reputation.

That is not to say that there are not some frustrations in carving out a future in Bristol. But those frustrations seem to come from people needing support from other institutions to achieve their ambition – such as artists or people working in the community area.

There was pretty universal agreement that you can be world class in Bristol and that there are and have been many world class people and businesses here. However, there is reservation that to do so you have to do more for yourself perhaps than elsewhere because there was little support infrastructure either public or private.

It also depends on your field. Some areas will require moving to London – although you could also easily live in Bristol and work in London because of the good external transport links.

There was also some concern that the lack of critical mass in the various sectors meant that job-moving could be difficult without moving away and that visionary business might have trouble recruiting from within Bristol.

It would be hard, however, to think that Bristol could be developing people to achieve their ambitions if the local education offering is poor. This is perceived by almost everyone as one of the most important issues which Bristol needs to address

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and will be discussed further below. The point is that Bristol needs to get world class in education – and perhaps in some sports such as football – before it can truly be world class.

Intercultural spaces

What are the places in Bristol which people feel work on an intercultural basis – where people of different ages and cultures come together in an easy, relaxed atmosphere or for celebration?

Bristol is a collection of villages which may be side by side but which maintain strong individual identities. The centre of the city was bombed in the Second World War and this apparently tore out the heart of the city. The subsequent redevelopment of Bristol did not appear to restore this heart and it is something people feel is missing. When asked to think about places which work 'interculturally' there were a variety of opinions:

Where it works

A good street is St Mark's where there are different shops, restaurants, a working class feel – people are proud of it and it is mixed and interesting.

Pubs of Montpelier are bohemian – you get a true mix there of black and white, landlords and tenants.

There aren't spaces and places [for intercultural mixing] above a neighbourhood level – there are no uniting places in the city.

Docks, Watershed and Arnolfini are a big success.

College Green – we surveyed the people that used it and they came from all over the city.

Easton – lots of different people live there – there doesn't seem to be high tension- there is a high connection between poor areas and mixed areas.

Harbourside and Docks provide a fulcrum for lots of groups – still lots of things to be done – Bristol doesn't have a centre – no heart – it is still searching.

Broadmead – city is about to have a new centre next to it but I think it's adequate as it is – it is quite mixed lots of people go there.

Watershed – has a mission to join up the city and it does that mostly by forming partnerships with ethnic organisations. Equally black and Asian organisations put up barriers to white people, for example Kuumba – to be open we need to find a way to bridge these barriers.

The Library – attracts peoples from diverse communities because it is a safe, neutral environment.

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Where it doesn't work

Hartcliffe and Knowle in South Bristol – black people get stared at.

City centre – it's a piss up in the city too scary and horrible.

South of the city – if you go to the pubs they look at you (Asian) as if you have two heads.

The most contentious public space is the centre promenade where the fountains are- symbolic of the divided nature of the city – some people wanted it to represent a modern city – others wanted flower beds and tulips and trees, a place to feed the birds.

Events

Many people felt that events were more successful in supporting intercultural mixing than urban spaces. The Ashton Court Festival seems to be one which everybody believes works really well. However, as it is no longer free to attend the Festival it is less so.

Other events mentioned included:

- St Paul's Carnival
- The Harbour Festival
- The Balloon festival
- St Mark's Road Street party in Easton

Events bring people together like the Ashton Court Festival in Clifton – lots of people go to that – St Paul's Carnival get people from various parts of the city – events are more successful for intercultural mixing than places

It was felt by several respondents that the principal drivers for intercultural mixing are education, the workplace and sports. In all three Bristol is offering either a largely white environment or a segregated one. Schools are segregated, ethnic minorities are not well represented in the workplace, and most sports are largely white.

Bristol really is in a muddle. And if you're unsure then you stay with your own. What mixing does happen is in spite of the geography and so on, people want to integrate but it's difficult and the heart and soul of the buildings do not encourage it.

A number of people interviewed had established groups to provide points of connection for people around issues of interest – music, writing etc. Bristol is a city of clubs and interest groups.

Institutions and leadership

An open city acknowledges its successes and failures and creates an atmosphere where these issues can be brought into the light and debated. Every city faces

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challenges peculiar to its circumstances. The difference between cities which are successful and those that are not is how the city recognizes its problems and how it goes about solving them.

In order for a city to solve its problems it needs to have various types of capabilities – organisational, governance, leadership, communication, vision setting, allocating resources, determining an agenda for change, measuring progress.

Bristol appears to have difficulty acknowledging its successes and problems. It does not 'blow its own trumpet' in areas where it does things well. But there is an even a stronger feeling that Bristol is not facing its challenges, has had difficulty doing so for some time and prefers to avoid addressing problems at all if it can.

Institutions play a very important part in setting the tone of a city and in brokering power and relationships. Strong institutions will have significant influence and people will look to them for leadership. There is an expectation that leadership will be provided – obviously by the Council but also by key peak organisations. This is as true in Bristol as anywhere and people are looking for clues in the behaviour of the important institutions about what is possible in Bristol, what the ambitions are and if there is likely to be organisational capacity to deliver outcomes.

Many people think the most significant institution in Bristol – the local authority – is a source of disappointment. The concern is the lack of visible leadership for Bristol, a perception of missed opportunities, of blocking when it should be advocating and of lacking ambition for the city.

This lack of leadership and vision has made Bristol a place of missed opportunities; that one sees other cities charging ahead with excellent regeneration schemes while Bristol's is half hearted. This makes people feel that Bristol is not any good at anything. People end up feeling helpless.

These issues are always more complex but it is useful to canvass some of the issues raised.

Firstly, there was recognition that the Council had suffered from being 'carved up' in the past and that this had undermined its confidence and capacity to provide leadership.

Secondly, many people felt that the Council obstructed when it should lead, through its suspicion and scepticism it had lost opportunities and that the city was not able to achieve big projects or dreams as a result

Thirdly, in areas where the Council should be leading it did not and so other organisations were forced to assume leadership. For some areas such as the City of Culture bid it would be impossible to win such a bid without strong Council leadership and championing of Bristol

Fourthly, there was a feeling that many people in the Council were hard to work with and that this distinguished Bristol as a Council more than other councils in the region.

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Some selected quotes to illustrate these points:

The Council never feels fully confident that it can represent the city – it didn't recover from having the powers taken away from it – it lost out for 20 years and that created a defensive relationship 'the world does us down' lack of confidence and pizzazz – it has a lack of confidence in its leadership role in spite of the importance of its position – politically it finds it hard to lead

Council is hamstringed by the political set up – eg city and county of Bristol is a small chunk of what people think of as Bristol – it was politically maimed by the government at the time.

I don't find it an easy local authority to connect with because it is so bureaucratic – you go around in circles, officers are defensive and the Councillors are difficult to work with.

The Council exercises the power to block.

The Heritage Lottery Bid should have been led by the Council – the City of Culture bid was led by Bristol Cultural partnership – the Council tends to back off – in other cities the Council is the civic voice but not in Bristol.

Problem is mainly with the Council which is without a clear path forward, has obstructive officers and not very inventive members. There is a lack of direction.

The Council is always too busy, too broke or too scared of the media to take initiatives.

Some people don't think it is just an issue for the Council. Civic Bristol tends to be proud of its history and tradition but this makes it backward looking and tends to result in a lack of positivity and aggression concerning the future

The Council is a problem. It has no flair or ambition. It doesn't let stuff flourish. It is definitely closed. And it hasn't changed in the 10 years I have been here.

There's a lack of connection in the way the Council works, this is very important, they have no vision so therefore they cannot share a vision with the populations.

At the civic level it is a deplorably managed city....It has the bumbling character of a provincial town.

Of the 70 councillors in Bristol – 68 white, one black (representing a primarily black ward), one Asian (representing a primarily Asian ward) and the BME population is 8.2%. The Local Strategic Partnership may be one of the largest in the country at 70 members. But this hampers decision making and may be an example of 'the LSP posturing at democracy, giving responsibility but no power'.

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There were other points of view. Some people pointed to the good work the Council had done in establishing and supporting partnerships. Some people felt that the Council was an easy organisation to blame and it was not wholly responsible for the problems in Bristol. But some people report that things are improving

The Council is now streets ahead of where it was in the early 90's – mainly through understanding how important partnerships are.

Bristol is a very nice place to live – it would be a sensational place to live if it had an even half decent local authority

Other important institutions

While the Council provoked the most responses a number of other institutions are seen as extremely important and influential in Bristol.

The Bristol Evening Post and BBC Radio Bristol were regarded by respondents as small minded, somewhat reactionary and unable to inspire. At the same time, it is acknowledged that there has been a change in recent years, with the championing of the capital of culture bid, the support for the follow-up programme (especially Brunel 200) and the prominence given to debates such as the naming of the shopping centre and whether Bristol should apologise for its role in the slave trade.

Old money families in Bristol (as represented by the Merchant Venturers) are seen as very influential, responsible for good works and for supporting through a number of trusts, various activities and causes in the city. On the other hand as 'the great and the good' they are seen to play a strong role behind the scenes – influencing people in power, championing as well as preventing things happening. Whatever the reality many people seem to associate the Merchant Venturers with the slave trade – and feel that there is an onus on them to acknowledge and address this issue before Bristol can move forward. People believe that deference is paid to this group by those in political power and they wield a lot of influence behind the scenes.

Business West – a result of a merger between Business Link West and the Bristol Chamber of Commerce and Initiative – is seen as an organisation that has opened up in the recent past and is promoting a more open city. It is acknowledged as supporting a stronger sense of partnership in the city. Its style of operation is to work with the Council and support it. It appears to trade its own potential profile and power for its power to influence. It has taken the lead with 32 joint initiatives since 1990, including the Bristol Cultural Development Partnership, the housing the homeless initiative; Destination Bristol; the western partnership for development; and a number of green and sustainability initiatives. The leadership of Business West in the Harbourside Development helped break the logjam of development that had kept this site vacant for decades. It also sees its role as being in the broader region.

The University of Bristol has a prominent place in the city. It is an influential institution. It was considered to have 'turned its back on the city' until very recently when a new Vice Chancellor was appointed and has been working to connect the university more successfully with the city. The University of West England – as an ex polytechnic – had less of a problem maintaining its status and has taken a more collaborative approach.

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The surrounding Boroughs, which are essentially a part of Bristol, are so concerned with maintaining their identity that the open exploration of possibilities and importantly the implementation is curtailed. The debates and debacle about the new tram exemplify this starkly. But although there is often tension over high profile political issues the surrounding boroughs are still keen to share Bristol's economic and cultural successes.

The Bristol Cultural Development Partnership is a model in Bristol and elsewhere because it is an opportunity seeker and builds relationships. It has been recognised as a UK leader in its field for its mode of operation and was well ahead of the game and as an organisational form has been copied elsewhere.

The interplay of powerful institutional actors in Bristol can mean that positive energy and power can be eliminated by negative energy and power – meaning that they can cancel each other out. This can reinforce Bristol as a collection of villages rather than reinforcing the power of interconnectivity and openness.

In other ways, because Bristol is robust economically and has not had to face serious decline like other UK cities there can be an air of negative complacency – combined with a touch of self satisfaction or lack of bothering. So the crisis in Bristol – even though there was one in the 1980's – has not been too severe or threatening.

Bristol could see itself as the San Francisco or Melbourne or Seattle in the UK – it has a high level of potential. The consistent theme is that Bristol punches below the weight of its potential.

Slave Trade and acknowledging the past

Many people believe that Bristol's role in the slave trade has not been acknowledged in a way which allows the city to move on. There have been attempts to acknowledge the slave trade in various ways including the naming of the Pero Bridge but each of these is considered half hearted and inadequate.

Bristol has never fully acknowledged that it was founded on the back of the slave trade but I don't think an apology is in our consciousness

It almost appears as though there is a stubbornness about this issue now that makes it even more difficult for any reconciliation with the past. The 'apologies debate' held as part of the Festival of Ideas in May 2006 attracted 400 people with a vote in favour of an apology of over 60 percent (the BBC Radio poll on the same day, which attracted 10,000 votes was over 90 percent against an apology). The trouble is that – as a number of people have said – the lack of a sufficiently high profile acknowledgement – in whatever form that could take – has led people in the community to start to develop their own stories and beliefs about the issue. Many of these may not be accurate but without any credible response they are festering.

And views have also been expressed by members of the black community that too much emphasis on the slave trade has a negative impact for kids growing up in Bristol.

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There is black concern about alienation of black kids through the education system and it is like teaching Jewish kids about their culture through the holocaust over and over again – it is not a lot to aspire to – it's depressing – they want something more celebratory and positive for their kids – there is a lot of trauma about it – some people want to transcend their race and just look at their culture through their religious faith.

It is a disappointment that the bid for funds to the Heritage Lottery Fund to recognize the 200 year commemoration of the abolition of the slave trade was not successful. However it appears that Bristol is determined this will not detract from work to create a series of events around this anniversary.

Who is going to do the acknowledging of the 200 year anniversary – not sure who is going to do it – Museum of the Empire is struggling to find money – Bristol city museum wants to do something – Council is doing something about diversity which is neither fish nor fowl

The naming of the new shopping centre near Broadmead as Merchant's Quarter is a particular provocation to the local community – as the location is so close to St Paul's the home of many people from the black community in Bristol. It appears that this name was selected without understanding of how the name is perceived by many people in Bristol. The fact that it has now been dropped is an indication of the strength of feeling on this issue, but happened to coincide with the Council leader asking for it to be dropped, not – it seems – as a result of the wider opposition.

This negative aspect of Bristol's history tends to swamp the many positive aspects such as abolitionism, Cabot, Brunel, aviation, etc.

Liverpool made a civic apology but you'd never get that in Bristol- but it shouldn't be the Council but the merchants – those that made a profit from it – you need some sort of series of events – to deal with emotions.

Bristol and the slave trade is a complex issue – I sense it is being swept under the carpet – because there is so little said they think they have done it now – but there are lots of myths and people feel like that need to fill the gap – I'm talking about young people now.

There is also much to be proud of in Bristol's history and yet this history is not well known.

Education is critical

One of the most divisive areas in Bristol is education. If Bristol is to progress it is the most important area to address. But this is recognised already with a large level of resources being invested in the education system in Bristol. The problems are long term and very difficult to resolve.

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Is it true that the educational aspirations in south Bristol are the lowest in the UK apart from Glasgow?

Education is a clear reflection of the polarisation of Bristol. Children from poor households are concentrated in under performing schools. Educational outcomes in Bristol state schools are far below national averages. A report in 2003 (later figures probably exist) found that not only were state school results far worse in Bristol than the UK but far more students were educated in the independent sector in Bristol (around 27%). It found that 91% of independent sector students in Bristol attained 5+ grade A*-C GCSE passes in 2001 compared to only 33% in the state sector – well below the national average of 50%.² Boddy (2003) also reports that 16 wards in the city – around half – are ranked in the worst 10% of wards nationally in terms of education.

This is a remarkable concentration of educational deprivation, measured by national standards within the generally prosperous city of Bristol. And the problem extends more generally across many parts of the city. On the other hand, there is marked polarisation evident as well, with three wards in the north-west sector of the city, Cotham, Henleaze and Redland, actually in the best 5% of wards nationally, and Clifton and Westbury-on-Trym not far behind. (Boddy, 2003, p 74).

Education was mentioned by nearly every person who was interviewed.

There has been a lot of experimentation – especially with education – this comes with taking risks which is good – but the key is you just want something sustainable.

Bristol is good for kids but the schools are awful.

There is a greater variety and choice of private schools than state schools – this has acted against openness and diversity – taken out of the education system the parents with the resources to change things in the state system.

Kids don't talk about their love for the city – they have it for their local area but not Bristol.

A creative city?

If attracting talented people was the only measure of openness than Bristol does appear to be an open city.

Bristol does attract a lot of able and talented people and can build good teams up – in a small area they have a great pool of people to draw from

Bristol does seem to be a hub of creativity and to be a place where creative people want to live. In the new creative economy it would be easy to assume that this would guarantee Bristol success.

² (Boddy, 2003 in Boddy, 2003, p 73)

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Bristol Study - How open is Bristol?

Bristol appears to have the attributes that attract talented, creative, slightly alternative people to the city. Bristol can be a haven for middle class, educated, confident people. It appears to guarantee a certain quality of life for people with the wealth and / or confidence to take advantage of it.

There is a strong theme of creativity in the attributes people see as positive in Bristol.

Genuinely creative where new things were found – it was in the fabric of the place.

Vibrant and creative - it feels like a young city and wealthy – it has not really suffered from economic downturn and seems to have been able to ride depressions – it feels like a good place.

Slightly mad people doing slightly off beat schemes– loads of maverick artists, designers all over the place – but it doesn't really have an identity.

The Bristol sound – trip hop – epitomizes the work of Massive Attack, Portishead, Tricky and others – bands with heydays in the 1990's which created a fusion of reggae, rhythm, pop and techno music. It may be an example of interculturalism – white kids from Clifton and black kids from St Paul's. While Bristol does not have the same profile as a music city as it did in the 1990's there is still a vibrant music scene in Bristol. But others believe that the scene surrounding the Bristol sound and the current music scene is still very white and middle class.

Even though the city has a large creative population, people don't think this is reflected in the way the city works.

There is an inability to see the potential in ideas here – it's not an ideas culture.

It is not open to new ideas – from planting trees and having ferry boats all were opposed by the city and brought about by individual power.

This seems to reinforce the sense of Bristol as a place in which individuals can succeed and can be creative but this does not translate into civic life in any fundamental way. Where organisations and groups are creative they are relatively small and lack critical mass to have any important impact in the city.

Conclusions:

Is Bristol an open city?

On one level it is open on another it is not – it is open in the nature of the people – how they welcome you – I've only ever had one racist comment and

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nothing since – but it is not open because of the gaps between people who move here and there here already – people here feel marginalized

If the measure of the openness of Bristol is whether it attracts people to it – then Bristol would have to be considered an open city. Bristol attracts people by its 'vibe', its beauty, its green surroundings and work opportunities. But there is an undercurrent which is not as welcoming and connections are harder to make than they originally appeared to be.

Bristol seems on the surface to be a very lucky city – attractive, growing economically, with advantages of location, climate, landscape and with an exceptionally talented population.

But this sense of a lucky city is not experienced by everyone. Bristol is a fragmented and polarised city. Many people on the outskirts of what is a reasonably small city never travel into the centre. Public transport does not help this. Good public transport can be a powerful force of connection for communities and Bristol lacks this way of overcoming its fragmentation. But who has the power to transform public transport? Neighbourhoods are clearly defined and distinct. The good initiatives which are happening all seem under scale for the city – there does not seem to be anything which draws together various initiatives into a whole which can have impact beyond the local.

Normally you might expect port cities to be open – to welcome and accept outside influence and to look to the world for inspiration. Bristol attracts a lot of open minded people who are looking beyond Bristol for their influences and who are interested in broader issues facing the future of their city. But for some reason this collection of open minded individuals does not yet amount to an open minded city.

Some institutions in Bristol do not seem to be aware of the importance of big picture thinking and extending the influence of the city beyond its borders. Other institutions which were formerly more closed – such as the University – appear to be opening up.

Bristol does not yet seem a city equal to the sum of its parts. But as yet the forces for change are not sufficiently strong to change the city. Individuals play important roles in Bristol – some actively champion the bringing together of disparate interests. But this work does not yet appear to have broken through.

Yet while this can seem overly negative from the range of people interviewed for this study it seems as though the seeds for the city into the future are here. The thing which is lacking is organisational capacity or leadership to bring this together, insight to reflect upon the possible and resolve to make it happen. For a place such as Bristol it seems that without a genuine bringing together of various interests and perspectives in the city there will be a long term fragmentation and a growing distance between 'insiders' and 'outsiders' in the city.

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References

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