Just Add Water: (Re)producing Cork Docklands

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Cork city in the south of Ireland has been experiencing rapid urban and economic transformations in recent years. City Council launched a major programme in 2002 to transform Cork's large industrialised docklands into a post-industrial waterfront, through "the development of a new modern mixed use district bringing both employment and residents back into the City Centre, consolidating Cork as 'a European location for enterprise'…" (Cork City Council, 2002 p. 8). Framing arguments in terms of the Production of Space (Lefebvre, 1991), this paper traces the evolution of plans to regenerate Cork docklands. It is argued that Cork Docklands Development Strategy (2002) and the networks of public private partnership that have emerged through development plans for docklands sites, have created a dramatically different version of 'conceived' urban space that will inform the future of the city. The paper argues that strategies around the docks have been instrumental in re-shaping the growth dynamics of the city. However these new images have also come into conflict with local perceptions and symbols of space. In this way docklands sites offer key insights into the politics of the city's urban transition.

Introduction

The research presented here forms part of broader project that explores issues around contemporary urban change in Ireland. Using case studies from Cork and Limerick in the south of Ireland, this work is interested in issues concerning neo-liberalism, globalisation, identity and representation in contemporary urban Ireland. Utilising the Creative City and Creative Class thesis, this work also explores issues around cultural representation that are highlighted through urban strategies that seek to 'sell the city' through art and culture. Following on from the re-imagining of urban space and cultural identity that these types of policies anticipate, the thesis studies some of the conflicts that emerge through the formation and re-formation of identity.

Framing arguments in terms of the Production of Space (Lefebvre, 1991), this paper traces the evolution of plans to regenerate Cork docklands. It is argued that *Cork Docklands Development Strategy* (2002) and the networks of public private partnership that have emerged through development plans for docklands sites, have created a dramatically different version of 'conceived' urban space that will inform the future of the city. However, this vision of the city has also been contested. Using the case-study of Werdna's Water Street development in Cork docklands, the paper also explores how apposing visions of the city are contested through developmental politics.

The production of space in post-industrial urbanism

Urban geographies have often emphasised the Production of Space (Lefebvre, 1991) to explore contemporary transformations in cities (Harvey 1990, Smith 1996, Merrifield 2002, Harvey 2003). Key structural changes in the governance of cities, which favour a neo-liberal approach to development coupled with the expansion of the financial and service

sectors and an explosion in industries of consumption has resulted in a dramatically different urban political landscape (Peck 1995, Tickell and Peck 1996, Goodwin and Painter 1996, Jessop and Ngai-Ling 2000, Anderson 2001, Bartley and Shine 2002, Ward 2003). In addition to this, the collapsing together of economic and cultural infrastructures and the increased emphasis on place marketing has impacted significantly on the urban realm (King 1995, Jessop 1998, Kong 2000, Thrift 2000, Bunnell 2002a 2002b, Florida 2002, Graham 2002, Castree 2004). These developments preclude radically new forms of urban geography.

In this context Lefebvre's spatial triad – conceived, perceived and lived space – is a useful tool by which to pick apart the various layers of the physical and ideological transformations of cities. For Lefebvre, space is produced in three interrelated ways. 'Conceived' space is planned space, the space of planners and architects, the more or less physical or Cartesian space. 'Perceived' space is the ideological or symbolic meanings attached to space. The ways in which 'Conceived' and 'Perceived' space combine then produces 'Lived' space, space as we all experience it through everyday life. In post-industrial urbanism this process has perhaps become more convoluted. As the pervasive marketing of cities and regions becomes ever more rudimentary to urban development strategies, there has been an acceleration of the proliferation of new urban imaginaries. Lefebvre saw how capitalism was embedded as one of the most pervasive forces in shaping and producing space (Merrifield, 2002). Attempts by cities – and in particular de-industrialised cities – to adapt to the post-industrial global economy, offers one of the most transparent examples of how the re-configuration of embedded capital precludes radically different spaces.

In this arena dockland areas have been noted as of particular importance as they often represent key strategic and emblematic landscapes in a shift from industrial to post-industrial function (Harvey 1989, Breen and Rigby 1994, Marshall 2001, O' Callaghan and Linehan 2007). Dockland sites offer a space that segues maritime and industrial heritage into post-industrial office, residential and recreational function, facilitating the illusion of continuity between two disjointed economic epochs (O' Callaghan, 2005). In this way they are frequently used as flagship sites to express the transformation of cities.

Taking the example of Cork city, which has been experiencing rapid urban and economic growth in recent years, this paper explores how waterfront redevelopment was linked with a re-imagining of the city. Situating the research in the context of responses to deindustrialisation and disinvestment, the paper briefly traces the evolution of urban growth machines in Cork and explores how the marketing of particular urban images grew in synchronicity with the demands of the burgeoning property market. The paper argues that strategies around the docks have been instrumental in re-shaping the growth dynamics of the city. However these new images have also come into conflict with local perceptions and symbols of space. In this way docklands sites have become key ways to explore the politics of urban change in the city.

Methodology

The work in this paper is informed by three inter-connected methodologies (discourse analysis, in-depth semi-structured stakeholder interviews and ethnographic analysis). Firstly, adopting a methodology informed by Fairclough (1993) a discourse analysis was undertaken of all relevant policy, strategic, and promotional texts pertaining to Cork. Within these, the ways in which City Council had re-envisioned Cork were explored. In the

context of cities in transformation, a shift in the discourses underpinning the city are often the first indicator of urban, social and economic change. By this logic an exploration of how the discourses of the city were re-oriented from an industrial function to that of a post-industrial knowledge economy was undertaken. This was supported by 16 in-depth interviews – carried out between 2005 and 2007 – with stakeholders involved in various aspects of development in the city. These involved individuals working within City Council, the Planning Authority, property development, media and the creative industries. Interviews supported the view that the discursive re-scripting of the city has led to the cultivation of an informal urban growth machine, constituting networks of public and private interests who seek to regenerate the city in line with these agendas.

Using the strategies for the docklands as a focal point to study the evolution of these new conceived spaces, the outcomes of these processes were traced as they played out between City Council, developers and local communities. This paper has taken one case study, the mixed use development planned for Water Street, to unpack the contestations inherent in the city's transition from industrial to post-industrial. In this context some ethnographic analysis was also undertaken with the community in the Lower Glanmire Road area adjacent to the proposed development. This work involved meeting with representatives from the community and attending a meeting of the Lower Glanmire Road Residents Association where issues relating to the Water Street development were discussed. It was intended that these methodologies should be informed by a reading of Lefebvre's Spatial Triad, in that the analysis is concerned with the ways in which the symbolic and material combine in the creation of new urban spaces.

The evolution of urban growth strategies in Cork

The growing tendency to centralise planning powers, the increased involvement of the private sector in provision of urban services and a decline in the public provision of housing and recreational facilities increasingly shape the Irish urban landscape (McGuirk and Maclaran 2001, Punch 2005). The roots of these transformations lie in the 1986 Urban Renewal Act, which radically reformed Ireland's urban political environment. Most significantly, the Urban Renewal Act established tax incentive schemes designed to encourage investment in residential infrastructures (Department of Revenue, 2005). While in Dublin this marked the beginning of regeneration projects that continue to present (Moore 1998, McDonald 2000, Russell, 2001, Bartley and Shine 2002, Corcoran, 2002, Moore 2002), the level of development experienced in the capital was not replicated in other parts of the country.

In more recent years however, Cork has been experiencing unprecedented levels of growth. The city launched a major programme in 2002 aimed at re-instating the river as a focal point within the urban realm, while a burgeoning number of development sites stand testament to the intensified interest in the city. A new conceived space has emerged from a desire to transform the role of the river and has been cultivated around plans to regenerate the docklands and waterfront.

The heritage of Cork lies in its' history as a port city and in 20th Century the city's docklands became major sites of industrial activity. Cork was hit hard by deindustrialisation during the 1980s, which resulted in large-scale unemployment and major disinvestment in the urban realm (Linehan, 2005). This unemployment, along with the resulting disinvestment in the urban realm and the growth of suburban shopping centres

put a huge strain on the viability of the city centre in terms of sustaining commercial activity.

From the start of the 1990s, however, Cork City Council began to think in more proactive terms about how to get the city performing again. Seminars with titles such as 'Getting Cork Moving' were combined with strategies aimed at diversifying the housing stock and encouraging apartment living in attempts to reinstate the city centre with commercial clout and residential density (O' Callaghan and Linehan, 2007). The success of the Cork Urban Pilot Project – which formed part of the Historic Centre Action Plan initiated in 1989 – in regenerating the historic area around North Main Street (and later in winning the RTPI Planning Award in 1999) boosted confidence in the city in the latter half of the 90s. As Cork was beginning to feel the benefits of netting new forms of foreign investment, seminars at the 29th annual conference of the Johns Hopkins Institute for Studies International Fellows in Urban Studies conference, held in Dublin and Cork in 1999, pointed towards new ways of embedding capital in the city through the privileging of commercial activities in the CBD. As apposed to an emphasis on an industrial production of the space, these seminars encouraged the proliferation of entertainment and culture and the re-appropriation of the urban domain (Johns Hopkins Institute, 2001).

By the turn of the century, the City Council was beginning to think in terms of a whole-scale re-articulation of the urban environment and the pervasive marketing of the city region.   In this context the city turned to the docklands.

Cork docklands development strategy

> The Cork Docklands Development Strategy, commissioned by Cork Corporation, sets out a vision for a new urban quarter in Cork that will revitalise the city through high quality, contemporary design and a vibrant mix of uses. Building on the unique character of Cork and the dramatic setting of the Docklands, the vision for the area identifies the need for a development strategy to compete with other Irish and European waterfronts (Cork City Council 2001, p.2)

Under the leadership of City Manager Joe Gavin, taking guidance from other waterfront cities, City Council developed a strategy to regenerate the docklands. The strategy for the docks emerged out of recommendations made in the *Cork Area Strategic Plan* (CASP) published in 2001, which was a major metropolitan plan, jointly commissioned by Cork City and County Councils that aimed "to provide a framework to enable Cork to become a leading European city region – globally competitive, socially inclusive and culturally enriched" (Cork City Council, 2001, 7). The CASP aimed to create what was termed 'Metropolitan Cork', to which Cork city was to be the economic driver. In this capacity, the docklands were identified as the major growth site within the city.

The *Cork Docklands Development Strategy* (CDDS), published in 2002 was a major document that aimed to exploit Cork's extensive waterfront through redeveloping the city's docklands, an area twice the size of the city centre. Primarily designed to integrate the regenerated docklands with the city, the overriding concern for the City Council was to establish the docklands as the focal point for future investment (see O' Callaghan and Linehan, 2007). The goal was to extend the commercial, residential and recreational axis of the city along the city's waterfront and to make the docklands an economic driver for the region.   Along with the CASP, the CDDS marked the beginnings of focussed entrepreneurial strategies by City Council aimed at transforming Cork into a post-industrial

European city. The CDDS provided an imaginary blueprint for the future of the city. This would in time lead to developments such as Howard Holdings' City Quarter, which provided a mix of office and leisure, while the role of the river was re-interpreted as recreational amenity (Figure 1). Using the transformation of the waterfront as an identifier of the city's more general transformation, the CDDS established Cork as a growing site of the knowledge economy.

> Historically Cork has functioned as Ireland's second city and has been a key driver of the prosperity of the sub-region as well as the wider region. Factors such as the University, the Ports, Airport and availability of labour have all attracted inward investors and the business community…the retailing, leisure and residential sectors have all experienced significant investment…In the light of the foregoing, the role of the City Centre has begun to change with a focus upon shopping, commercial leisure, (including hotel, restaurants and bars) professional, financial and administrative employment sectors (Cork City Council, 2002, p. 25)

Figure 1. Howard Holdings' City Quarter Development on Lapps Quay

Note: Photo by C. O' Callaghan

Subsequent to the publication of the CDDS, City Council has become increasingly focussed on targeted redevelopment in their planning policies and objectives. The creation of Development Briefs – documents containing the aims, objectives and requirements of the planning authority – for individual sites is one example of this. Having proved successful in, amongst other sites, the negotiation of the retail development on Cornmarket Street in the city centre, City Council have incorporated this approach into individual Local Area Plans (LAPs) for the North (2005) and South Docks (2007). This proactive and anticipatory approach from City Council has translated into a more fertile development climate and into the growth of public private partnership in the city.
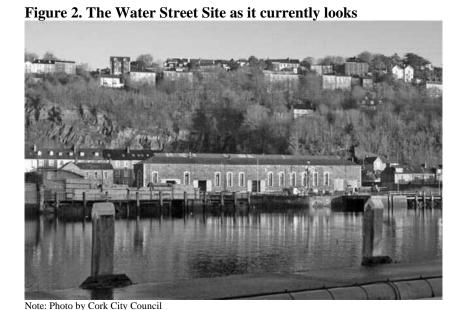
In addition, the development trajectories expressed in the docklands have also been linked to the development of arts and culture in the city. As articulated through Cork's tenure as European Capital of Culture in 2005, culture and developments such as docklands were intertwined and the event created a context whereby these elements could be co-produced (O' Callaghan and Linehan, 2007). A vision of the city has been cultivated through these initiatives, based to a large extent on commerce and urban development. To draw on

Lefebvre, the production of 'conceived' space has morphed with Cork's shift from an industrial to a post-industrial city, as the nature of embedded capitalism is reconfigured. The privileging of economic discourses however runs the risk of producing economic spaces; built for the purposes of capital accumulation rather than to accommodate the needs of citizens (Purcell 2002, Harvey 2003, Purcell 2003).

This re-interpretation and re-development of waterfront sites has enabled new modes of urban governance to be practised and has had profound impacts on the urban political landscape of the city. Using the docklands as the flagship initiative, a neo-liberal approach to urban governance was forged through the partnership between City Council and the private sector. Many critics have noted how the growth of public private partnership and the increased city marketing and branding that is often coupled with this, has led a crisis of social equity, whereby a concentration on negotiating a marketable image can detract from real social problems. (Neill 1993, Hannigan 1998, Bunnell 2002a, 2002b, Albet 2004, Ward 2003). Similarly, Smith's work on gentrification suggests that the interests of the property market and the middle classes in gentrifying space result in dislocation subversion of existing populations (Smith 1996). Regeneration in Ireland has often resulted in large profits for the private sector, with very little redistribution or spin-offs for communities (McGuirk and MacLaran 2001, Russell 2001, MacLaran 2003, Stafford and Payne 2004). Tensions between various visions of the city and various sectors of society have been expressed in the built environment. The limited number of docklands sites to have come on stream is representative of these tensions, as space in the city is reconfigured and re-inscribed. The following section looks at one of these – Werdna's Water Street development – to explore the ways in which contestations are mobilised through the renegotiation of waterfront sites.

Producing Cork docklands: Water Street

While the redevelopment of Cork docklands is in its' early stages, the sites that have gone through the planning stages offer insights into the ways in which space is produced in the city, and demonstrates how the spatial reconfiguration highlight some of the tensions inherent in the city's transition.

Figure 2. The Water Street Site as it currently looks

Note: Photo by Cork City Council

Werdna's proposed mixed use development on Water Street embodies many of the tensions inherent in this transition. The development is to be built on a site comprising the amalgamation of the existing McMahon Timber Merchants and the Port of Cork site (Figure 2). After withdrawing one application, Werdna's second application for planning was subjected to an unusual move by City Council, who split the site in two and granted permission for only one half. The City's main objections centred on the inclusion of a 17 story tower on the site, which they felt would obscure views of the Montenotte Ridge and have adverse effects on access to light for local residents.   Unhappy with this decision Werdna took the case to An Bord Pleanala in May 2005. Zoned in the city's development plan as inner city residential, the Water Street site is situated in one of the only areas in the docklands with an existing residential base.   With many living in the area having reservations about the scale and density of the development, along with the height of the proposed tower block, the Lower Glanmire Road Residents Association (LGRRA) signed their name as a third party applicant in the appeal.

When the case was brought before an oral hearing of An Bord Pleanala in October 2005, the contestations expressed over the future of the space offered some insights into questions of ownership representation and power. These issues demonstrate the ways in which conceived visions of the city clash with locally perceived notions of place.

The major issues of contention for the three parties involved related to the design and height of the development and access to daylight and sunlight for the surrounding residents. The majority of these arguments centred on the 17 storey tower. The City Council wanted a reduction in height to comply with the guidelines laid out in the 2004 development plan and the North Docks Local Area Plan. Although architects Murray O' Laoire framed its' inclusion as a Landmark Building[5], City Council felt that the inclusion of the tower on the site was problematic for a number of reasons; that it would impact negatively on surrounding residents, that it would obscure views of the Montenotte Ridge and that the standard of design wasn't of high enough quality. As the area was not designated as a potential site for a landmark structure and the proposed height was exceeding the recommended height for inner city residential zones, the Planning Authority suggested that the plans gave them no incentive to 'break the rules' in this case. For the developer however, such a reduction in height would mean the loss of approximately 58 units from the complex, resulting in revenue loss. It was also made clear during the oral hearing that the development was being sold in the context of its proximity to the waterfront; with the design of the site aiming to cater for river views to a maximum number of units.   The development then was very much contingent on the City's plans for the docklands. The arguments of the LGRRA centred on issues of displacement. They suggested that the new complex did not fit the surrounding environment, that their own dwellings would look shabby in comparison and that the scale of the development was too large. In general they felt frustrated at what they saw as massive change being imposed on them, without taking into account the needs of the existing population.

A decision on the case was eventually reached in December 2006 after the revision of site plans on a number of occasions, which granted planning permission with a number of

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[5] Landmark Buildings were suggested in the CDDS and subsequently incorporated into the 2004 City Development Plan. It was suggested that 'landmark' structures could be erected in strategic locations that would provide dramatic entrance points to the city. The Elysian Tower by O' Flynn Construction on Eglinton Street provides one example of this. The Water Street site however was not marked for the inclusion of a 'landmark' structure.

conditions. Most significantly the tower height was reduced to 10 storeys and moved closer to the city centre (An Bord Pleanala, 2006). Construction on the site however has still not commenced some seven months after permission was granted and the future of the development is still very much uncertain. As one representative of the Cork Docklands Directorate suggested:

> I think if you read the inspectors report, you'll see that the Planning Authority were vindicated…Whether it will be built now [is unsure]…[but] the height that we set in the [North Docks] Local Area Plan was accepted by the Board [Pleanala] as the correct height for the buildings in the perimeter blocks. They also accepted the local authority's view that it wasn't an acceptable place for an 18 story tower and they cut it back as we saw fit. So they supported us in the two main areas (Mitchell, 2007)

The Water Street site is a space clearly representative of the intersection of different visions for the city. The development is characteristic of an international waterfront aesthetic and of the new model of conceived space inherent in development trajectories mobilised around strategies for the docks. In the case of Water Street, this vision clashed with alternative perceptions of the space built from an older economic epoch. The battle for the space saw attempts by the developer to privilege the principles of new conceived spaces over the needs of existing populations. While the City Council were sympathetic to many of the LGRRA's concerns, their priority was nevertheless to make the development happen. Residents consequently felt alienated from the development politics shaping the city and external to plans that would have a significant impact upon their lives.

Conclusion

Strategies formed around regenerating Cork's docklands, which have been underwritten by the production of new discourses about the city, have been hugely influential in reshaping Cork's urban growth dynamics. Docklands sites have been instrumental in transforming the city, as new identities, economies and cultures are being inscribed through the proliferation of new ideas about the urban. While the local authority have attempted to retain a significant level of control over developments in the docklands – through the formation of steering groups, the production of LAPs etc – the fact that the City owns practically no land in the docks, along with the limited capacity of Irish local authorities to generate independent revenue (see Department of the Environment, 2001), puts serious limits on the level of influence they can exert over the area. The case of Water Street represents the intersection of different interests through the various actors in the decision making process. The fact that construction has not yet begun on the site, however, highlights the precarious nature of these types of decision making channels, and demonstrates that how space in the city is produced is dependent on delicate relationships between political, business, cultural and other interests. Lefebvre's Production of Space offers geographers a useful tool by which to pick apart the various discourses and actors within spatial transformations. From the evidence of sites to go through the planning system in Cork, the production of space within the city is contingent on a number of political and cultural forces, which disturb the smooth transition from one spatial paradigm to another. Massey (2004) suggests that actors within cities produce both global and local space simultaneously. She argues that instead of viewing globalisation as something abstract that is imposed upon localities, rather global space is always produced by actors on a local level. Attempts by actors in Cork to re-imagine the city through plans for the docklands offer clear examples of the production of global space within the city, as these urban imaginaries draw heavily on the international template of post-industrial waterfronts.

As this vision comes into collision with various versions of perceived space, the city is (re)formed through this contestation. Massey also highlights however that not all actors are equal in their capacity to influence the production of space and that hegemonic discourses have the potential to foreclose upon alternative urban imaginaries. The case-study of Water Street draws these issues into focus, as local communities become victims of the pervasive re-scripting of urban space within the city. With the plans for the docks in their early stages, how various actors and groups within the city form networks around these visions will have a major impact on the future of the city, as urban space is renegotiated and reclaimed.

Acknowledgments

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